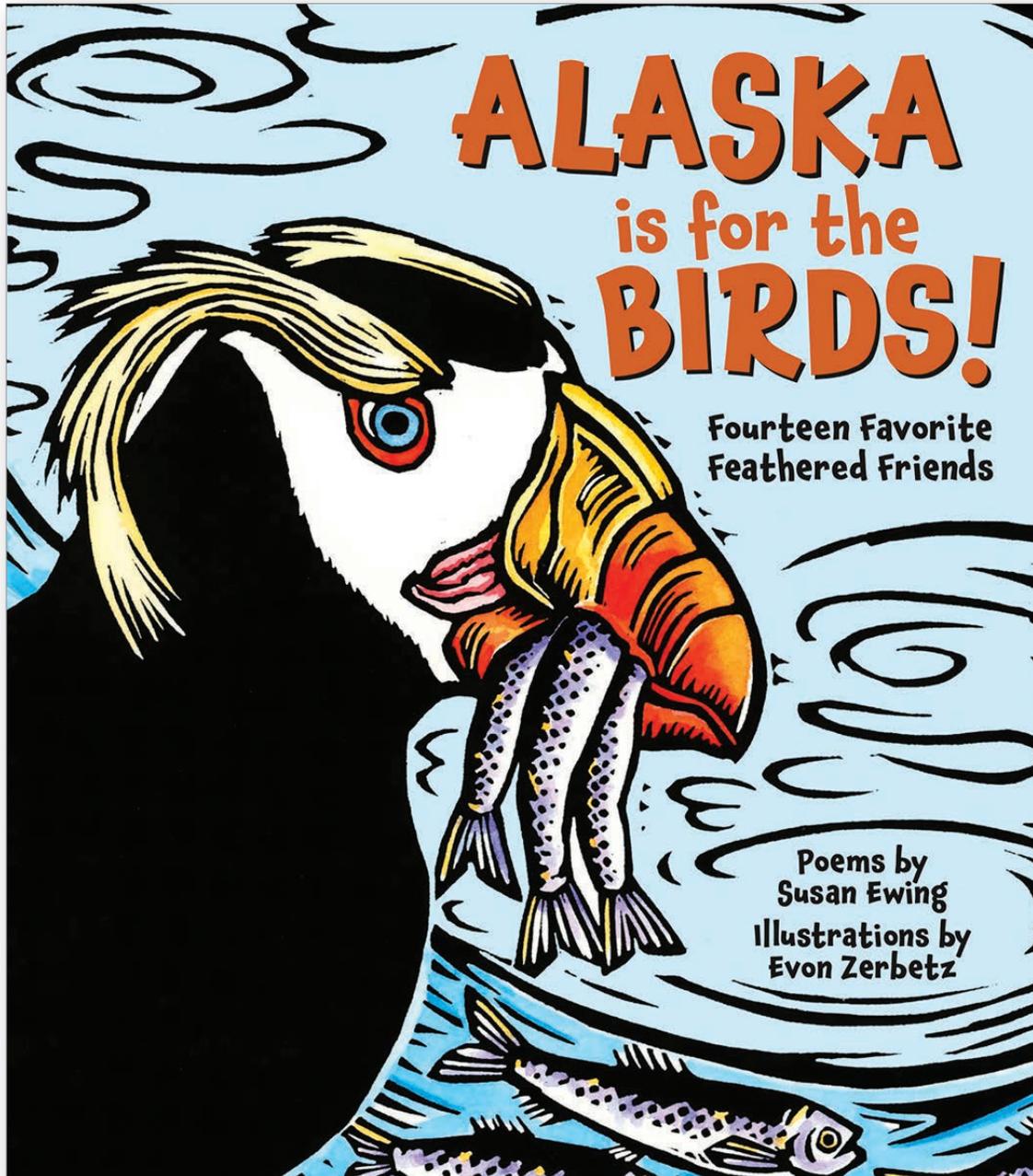


BOOK GUIDE FOR  
*Alaska is for the Birds!*  
*Fourteen Favorite Feathered Friends*

Poems by Susan Ewing  
Illustrations by Evon Zerbetz



Lexile Measure: 970L  
Ages 5–8, Grades K–3

# SUMMARY

Playfully told in quick, witty verses and illustrated with gorgeously colored linocut art, *Alaska is for the Birds!* features 14 feathered friends found across Alaska.

Get a bird's-eye view of Alaska from forest treetops to open sea with Great Horned Owl, Tufted Puffin, Arctic Tern, and more in this playful celebration of northern birds. Written in witty verse and illustrated with gorgeous linocut art, *Alaska is for the Birds!* is a fun and informative treasure.



## Susan Ewing and Evon Zerbetz

Susan and Evon first met when an editor at Alaska Northwest Books invited them to collaborate on what would become *Lucky Hares and Itchy Bears*. They became fast and dear pals in spite of the distance. Evon lives in Ketchikan, Alaska, and Susan, who spent many years in Alaska, now lives in Montana. They collaborated again to create *Ten Rowdy Ravens*.

After Evon and Susan read about declining bird populations, they decided to dust off a manuscript they had started many years earlier to celebrate birds. When they are not working on books they are still in contact every day and trade notes on what they see in nature, especially... birds.

Learn more about Susan's books at [www.susanewing.com](http://www.susanewing.com) and Evon's art and school visits at [www.evonzerbetz.com](http://www.evonzerbetz.com).

## About the Art

Evon Zerbetz carves with knives to create her bold imagery in slabs of linoleum. She is passionate about the marks that are created with a knife and make the artwork for *Alaska for the Birds!* distinct. She has worked in schools from Gustavus to Cold Bay to lead kids in learning how to make linocut prints.



# LANGUAGE ARTS



## Book Scavenger Hunt

- Which bird poems talk about feathers?
- Name the birds that are shown in, near, or over water.
- Find all the pages with fish.
- Which illustrations show a nest?
- Find:
  - The person—what are they doing?
  - A frog
  - A caterpillar
  - Bees
  - A mosquito
  - A skeleton
  - An iceberg—what's sitting on it?
- Which bird looks like it will travel the farthest in its life?
- Which poems show pairs of birds?
- Who has pink legs?

*Answers on page 18*



# LANGUAGE ARTS: *Writing and Communication*

## Nonfiction or Fiction?

Writing that presents factual information is called “nonfiction.” Nonfiction can be written creatively, but writing that comes purely from your imagination is called “fiction.”

### Writing Activity

All the information in the “More About the Birds” section is nonfiction. But some of the poems have imaginary elements.

Read the poems about the Tufted Puffin, Great Horned Owl, Common Raven, and Yellow Warbler. What are the words, ideas, or sentences that feel more imaginary in those four poems?

### Writing Activity

Pick your favorite bird—a bird from the book, or another bird you know. Write a nonfiction paragraph or poem about that bird. Then take the same bird and write a short story or poem that is purely imaginary. If you like, you can write as if you were the bird (the “first-person” point of view).



## A World in Words

A single word can contain a world of meaning. “Pelagic,” for example. To say this word is to invite a big gathering of sea-going birds and animals into your imagination.

### Writing and Drawing Activity

Look at the “Bird Words” list in the back of the book. Which words strike your fancy? Pick a word and use it in a sentence of a new story, and then draw a picture to illustrate that story.

## Share the Love

The more we learn about birds, the more we understand how important they are. Birds pollinate flowers and food crops, disperse seeds, and help control insects. They have inspired inventions like airplanes and zippers, and bring us joy with their colors, songs, and mere presence.

### Writing and Drawing Activity

Write a letter or postcard to a friend, family member, teacher, school newsletter, or newspaper.

Explain why you love birds, and why we should care about birds and bird conservation. If you like, draw a picture to give your letter extra impact.

# BIRDS AND BIRDWATCHING



## Tips for Beginning Birdwatchers

Binoculars and field guides are handy, but the only things you *must* have to be a birder are determination and patience.



### DO SOME RESEARCH

It helps to know what you might actually see when you go out. One good way to do this is to visit [ebird.org](http://ebird.org) and enter your town or county under “Explore Regions.” That will give you a list of birds that have been identified at specific locations and seasons in your area.

**You can:** log on, then visit one of those places and look for birds on the list!



### TUNE IN

Every time you go outside, take a moment to tune in—to look and listen. What is the habitat and season? Do you hear any bird sounds? Maybe birds calling from the trees, a woodpecker drumming, or geese, ravens, or hawks flying by?

**You can:** start a bird journal of what you see and hear across the seasons.



### DON'T JUST WATCH—OBSERVE

You see a bird. Excellent! Now, what do you notice about it? Is it bigger or smaller than a robin? Do you see any colors or markings? Is it perched in a tree or standing on the ground? If it's flying, is it mostly soaring or mostly flapping its wings? Is it by itself or in a flock? These kinds of details provide excellent identification clues.

**You can:** list three observations about the next bird you see.

When birders want to identify a new bird, they compare its size to a common bird—usually sparrow, robin, crow, and goose. This mental tool is often called the “Bird Yardstick.” You can find your own “Bird Yardstick” on page 17!

## Hoo's in Your Neighborhood?



Even if you live in Alaska, not every bird in *Alaska is for the Birds!* will show up in your neighborhood. There are no Tufted Puffins in Fairbanks, and no Rufous Hummingbirds in Barrow. On the other hand, Ravens can show up anywhere, anytime.

If you don't live in Alaska, you still have good chances of seeing some of these birds! Many Alaskan birds migrate south in the winter, and the Lower 48 has its own resident populations of many of the species featured in the book.

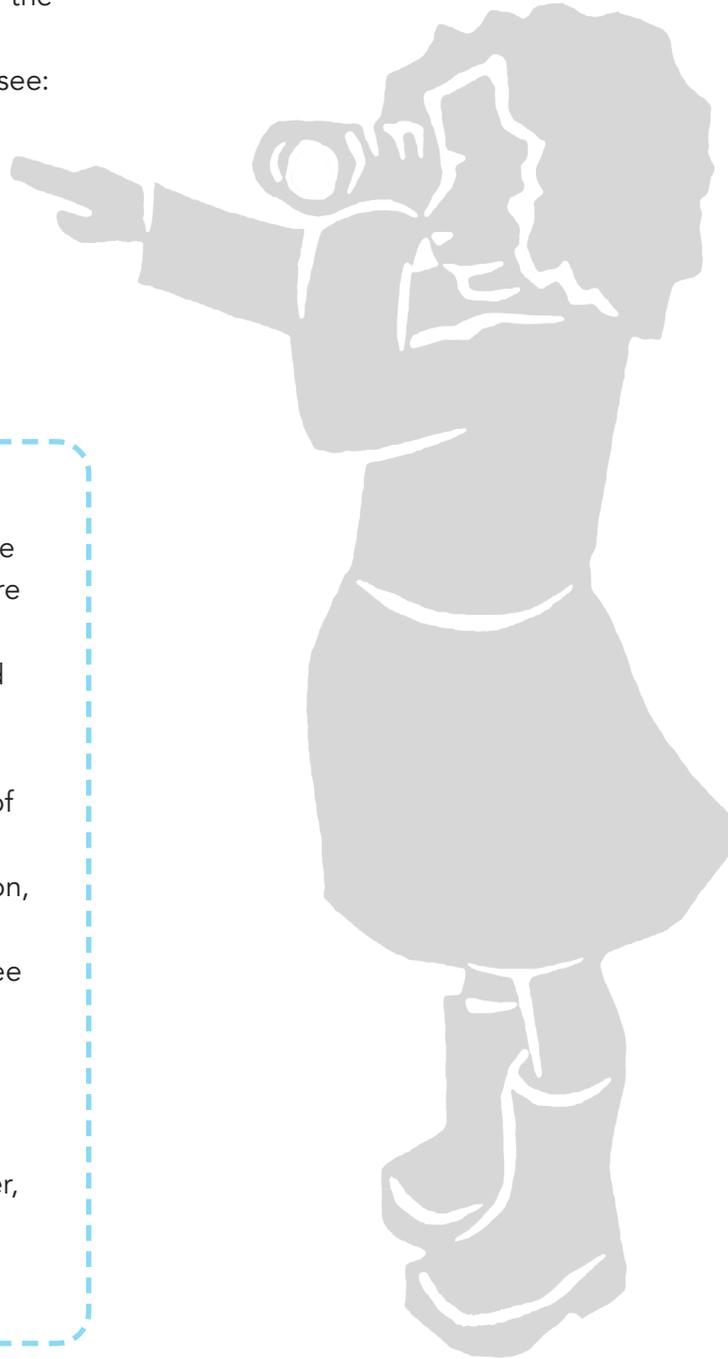
Depending on where you live in the Lower 48, you might see: the Belted Kingfisher, Western Sandpiper, Rufous Hummingbird, Sandhill Crane, Tufted Puffin, Bald Eagle, American Dipper, Great Horned Owl, Great Blue Heron, Common Raven, Yellow Warbler, and Northern Flicker.

### Activity

Make a list of which birds in the book either live in or migrate through your area. Note if they are there year round, or for just part of the year.

To figure that out, you will need a bird field guide or a computer to log onto a free online resource, like [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org). Look for the range map that is included in the description of each bird. Maps have different colors showing where a species is found in the breeding season, during migration, in the winter, or year round. Of all the birds in the book, *hooo* might you see when you go for a walk? What time of year?

**Bonus:** what habitat or habitats would be the most likely place to look for a certain bird? For example: on the beach, in the woods, by a river, or maybe right in your neighborhood.



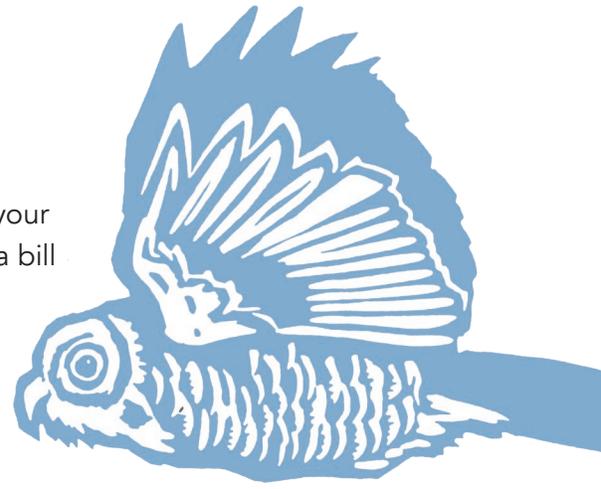
## Bills and Beaks



First question: what do you call it!? Scientists use the word “bill” when referring to those bony mouth parts covered in keratin (the same stuff your fingernails and hair are made of). They use “beak” when talking about a bill that’s hooked or sharply pointed, like on an owl. But you can say both “bill” and “beak” when talking about birds.

Birds don’t have hands, so bills have to do a lot of work! Birds might use them to build nests, catch food, tear into prey, turn over rocks, chisel wood, preen feathers, and other tasks.

You can learn a lot about a bird and its life by looking at its bill. For example, Great Blue Herons and Sandhill Cranes have very similar bills, although the heron uses its bill to take prey in the water, while the crane uses its bill to hunt for food in fields. That long bill helps the crane forage through tall grasses. All the rest of the birds in the book have distinctly different bills.



### Whose Bill Is It?

Match the bird to the description of its bill’s superpowers! *Answers on page 18*

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>A.</b> Willow Ptarmigan   | ___ Long, strong, and chisel-shaped to excavate nest holes.               |
| <b>B.</b> Belted Kingfisher  | ___ Shaped like pruners to snip pussy willows and buds from shrubs.       |
| <b>C.</b> Great Blue Heron   | ___ Sharp and sleek to dive into the water with hardly a splash.          |
| <b>D.</b> Rufous Hummingbird | ___ Long, flexible, and sensitive enough to find food in mud and sand.    |
| <b>E.</b> Sandhill Crane     | ___ Chunky and big to carry a lot of small fish to chicks.                |
| <b>F.</b> American Dipper    | ___ Not a straw, but the perfect shape to dip in flowers for nectar.      |
| <b>G.</b> Arctic Tern        | ___ Big and hooked for tearing into salmon and other meat.                |
| <b>H.</b> Bald Eagle         | ___ Small but sturdy to pry under rocks for larvae in water.              |
| <b>I.</b> Tufted Puffin      | ___ Pointed and slender for long-distance migration.                      |
| <b>J.</b> Great Horned Owl   | ___ Tweezerlike for picking off insects from leaves and branches.         |
| <b>K.</b> Western Sandpiper  | ___ Long and daggerlike for spearing fish and frogs in the water.         |
| <b>L.</b> Common Raven       | ___ Long and sturdy to forage and find grain in fields.                   |
| <b>M.</b> Yellow Warbler     | ___ Short, highly curved, sharply hooked, and nearly hidden by feathers.  |
| <b>N.</b> Northern Flicker   | ___ Stout and multi-purpose, for a bird who will eat just about anything. |

## PLANT SOME BIRD FOOD



Sunflowers attract pollinators such as bees and produce seeds that birds love to eat! As long as you have a sunny spot, you can grow sunflowers. If you don't have a yard or garden, you can grow dwarf sunflowers (which grow from up to 10 inches to 3 feet tall) in containers that you can put on your balcony, porch, or deck.

### You will need:

**SEEDS** Get your seed from your local garden center if possible. If not, you can order seeds online. Remember to get a dwarf variety if you're growing container flowers.

**FLOWER POTS** Use glazed clay or plastic pots with drainage holes. A 6-inch diameter pot is good for one plant, or you can plant three flowers in a 1-gallon pot.

**SOIL** Your potting soil should be light and drain easily. Bagged potting soil with a handful of compost (available from your garden center or hardware store) is ideal.

### Instructions:

1. Fill two-thirds of your pot with soil and moisten it with water (a spray bottle works great for this).
2. Place the seeds on the soil in the pot. If you are sowing multiple plants, space the seeds about 4 inches apart.
3. Cover the seeds with your potting mix (½ to 1 inch of covering is good).
4. Lightly tamp down the soil and water to make sure the seeds are secure in the dirt.
5. Keep the soil moist, but don't overwater. Too much water can rot the seeds. Plants should sprout in one to two weeks.
6. If you're starting your seeds indoors, put the pots on a sunny windowsill as soon as they sprout. (NOTE: if windowsill space is an issue, you can germinate your seeds in smaller pots and transplant the seedlings to a larger container when they are a few inches tall.)
7. Turn the pots 45 degrees every day so seedlings don't bend to the light. It's safe to move your plants outside when the last frost has occurred.
8. Once your plants are 4 to 5 inches tall, water them deeply but not too often. Allow the first inch of soil to dry out between waterings.

## BIRD SEED ORNAMENTS



Making bird seed ornaments is a great way to share your love of birds! Make a set for a gift!

### You will need:

**BIRDSEED** You can buy birdseed mix at grocery stores, hardware stores, or specialty bird shops. Some grocery stores even sell birdseed in bulk. Get a seed mixture that includes a variety of seeds, not just one type of ingredient.

**UNFLAVORED GELATIN** Gelatin is available at grocery stores in the section where you find box puddings.

**COOKIE CUTTERS** If you don't have any cookie cutters, check your local thrift stores. Look for cutters that would allow your birdseed treats to be at least  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thick.

Thin knitting needle, skewer, or sharp stick  
String, yarn, or thread

### Instructions:

1. Mix 1 tablespoon of gelatin with 2 tablespoons of cold water and let sit for one minute.
2. Add  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup of boiling water and stir until the gelatin is completely dissolved.
3. Add 2 cups of your birdseed mix and stir until everything is well combined.
4. Press the mixture very firmly into the cookie cutters (you may want to spray the cookie cutters with a nonstick cooking spray first).
5. Decide the best spot to place your hole for hanging the treat, and carefully poke out a hole with your skewer, knitting needle, or sharp stick.
6. Let the birdseed mixture sit in the cookie cutters for a few hours in a cool place (the refrigerator is ideal).
7. When the birdseed is all set, bring it back to room temperature.
8. Carefully remove the ornaments from the cookie cutters and use the yarn needle or a toothpick to push your string or yarn through the hole.
9. Hang your ornaments on tree branches or wherever else birds might find them.



*Out of the mold, and ready for a ribbon*

# Bird Lovers

# B

# I

# N

# G

# O

Identify one neighborhood bird	Listen for bird sounds on a walk	<b>Name a bird you see in summer</b>	Read a bird poem aloud to a friend	<b>Name three reasons we need birds</b>
<b>Make up a bird song. What does it mean?</b>	Get a bird field guide	<b>Figure out what bird flyway you live in</b>	Make hanging birdseed treats	Write a bird poem
What bird won't you see in your area? Why?	Learn to tell a crow from a raven	<b>Kawww like a raven</b>	Draw a feather	Name a bird you want to see
Dance like a sandhill crane	<b>Name a bird you see in winter</b>	<b>Log onto eBird.org and explore</b>	Start saving for binoculars	Learn how to make a yard bird friendly
Name an extinct bird	<b>List five favorite things about birds</b>	List four different kinds of nests	<b>Draw your favorite bird</b>	Join your local Audubon chapter

## MAKE A BIRD SCULPTURE!



### You will need:

**TEMPLATES** Print pages 15-16 on 8½" by 11" printer paper.

**WATERCOLOR PAPER & SUPPLIES** Use watercolor paper or cardstock. To add color to your bird sculpture, have watercolor paints, brushes, and a cup of clean water ready.

**CONSTRUCTION PAPER** A bird's wings can be many colors, so use any color of construction paper. You can also use recycled maps instead to show the places your bird migrates to!

**SMALL TWIGS** Go out in the backyard and find some twigs that can look like a bird's legs.

Scissors

Black crayon

Tape

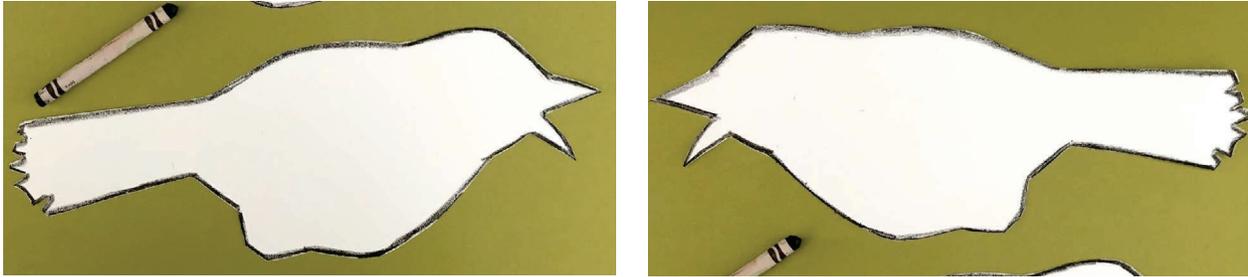
Glue

Hole puncher

String or yarn

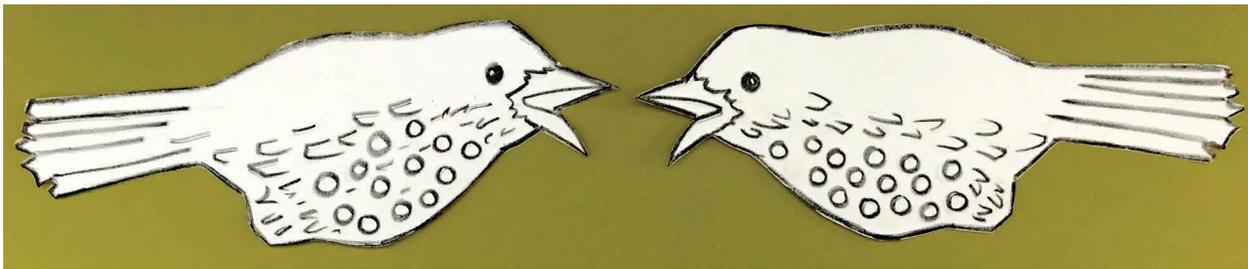
1. Use the scissors to cut out the Bird Template on page 15. If you want to create your own template, then draw a bird on 8½" by 11" paper and cut it out.

2. Trace the template onto watercolor paper or cardstock twice so that you have two bird shapes. Cut out the shapes.

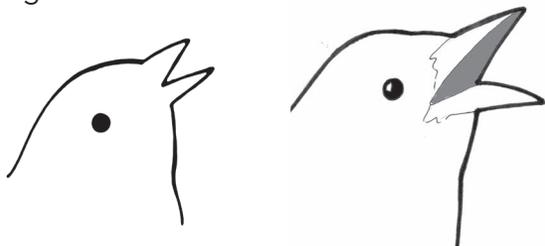


3. Position the cutouts to face each other. This will be the left and right sides of the bird. Outline the cutouts with a black crayon.

4. Use the crayon to draw a pattern on one of the cutouts. Then take your time to draw a mirror image of your pattern on the second cutout. Add eyes and beak details. You can look at a real bird for inspiration or draw from your imagination.



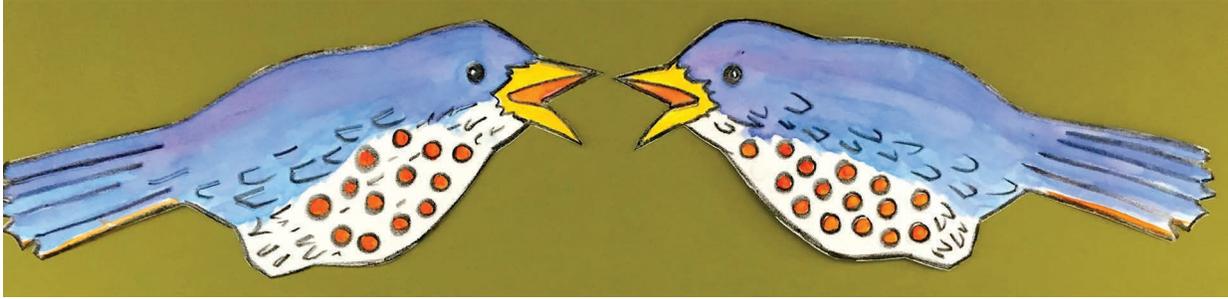
**TIP** Bird beaks don't start on the edge of the head!



Compare the two drawings here. Notice the difference? The hinge of the beak is farther back in the head on the drawing on the right, which is why that drawing looks more accurate.

Practice drawing an open beak that shows a little of the upper inside the beak and this hinge.

5. It's time to add some color! Using watercolor brushes and paints plus a cup of water, paint your cutouts so that they are mirror images of each other.

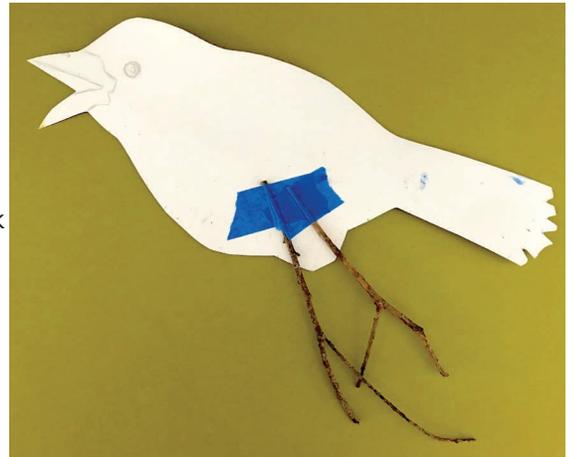


6. After the paint is dry, it's time to make the legs. Flip over one of the cutouts so that the painted side is facing down on the table. Secure two small twigs in place with a piece of tape.

**TIP** Add a drop of clean water to the color pans you will be using, and let sit a few minutes to soften. This will make it easier for you to paint a watercolor wash.

If your watercolor papers buckle or wrinkle from painting, that's okay. After the paint is dry, just press them overnight under a stack of heavy books. You will need to do this if you used cardstock or used a lot of water when painting.

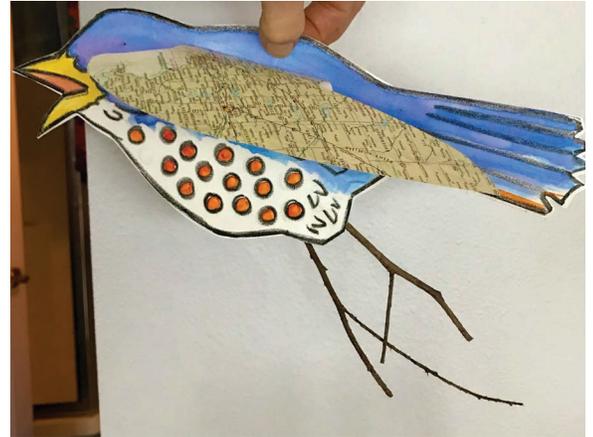
**TIP** Think of the leg position of a bird. Are your bird's legs pointing back in flight, or flat down on the ground to take off or land?



7. Carefully, spread the glue over the unpainted side of the cutout with the tape and twigs attached. Place the other cutout on top so that the unpainted sides are pressed together.

8. Cut out the Wing Template on page 16. Trace the template onto colored construction paper or recycled maps, and cut out the shapes.

9. Place one of the cutout wings onto one side of the bird, making sure there's enough room at the top for a hole punch. (The dotted line on the template suggests the best placement.) Glue only half an inch of the wing onto the bird so that the bottom of the wing can peel away from the body. (You can also gently roll the wing cutout with your fingers first to give it some movement.) Repeat on the other side.



10. Now find the balance point! Hold the back of the bird lightly with your fingers and see where the bird will balance. Make sure it's not too close to the edge. Use a hole puncher to make a hole.

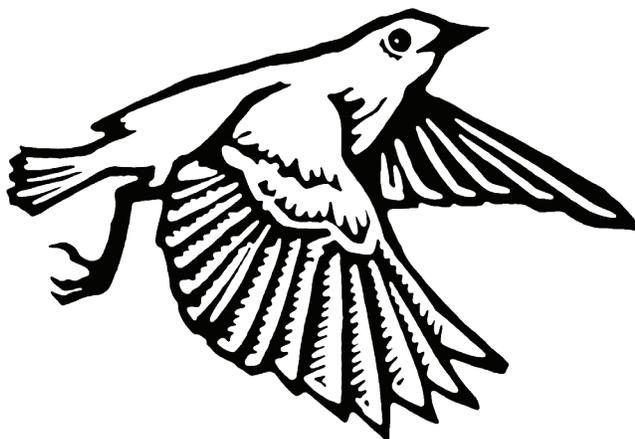
11. Tie string or yarn to the hole and hang the bird somewhere! Enjoy the shadow it makes on the wall.

#### **Creative options:**

**MAKE A MOBILE!** Create several bird sculptures and tie the string to sticks so that it looks like the birds are flying together.

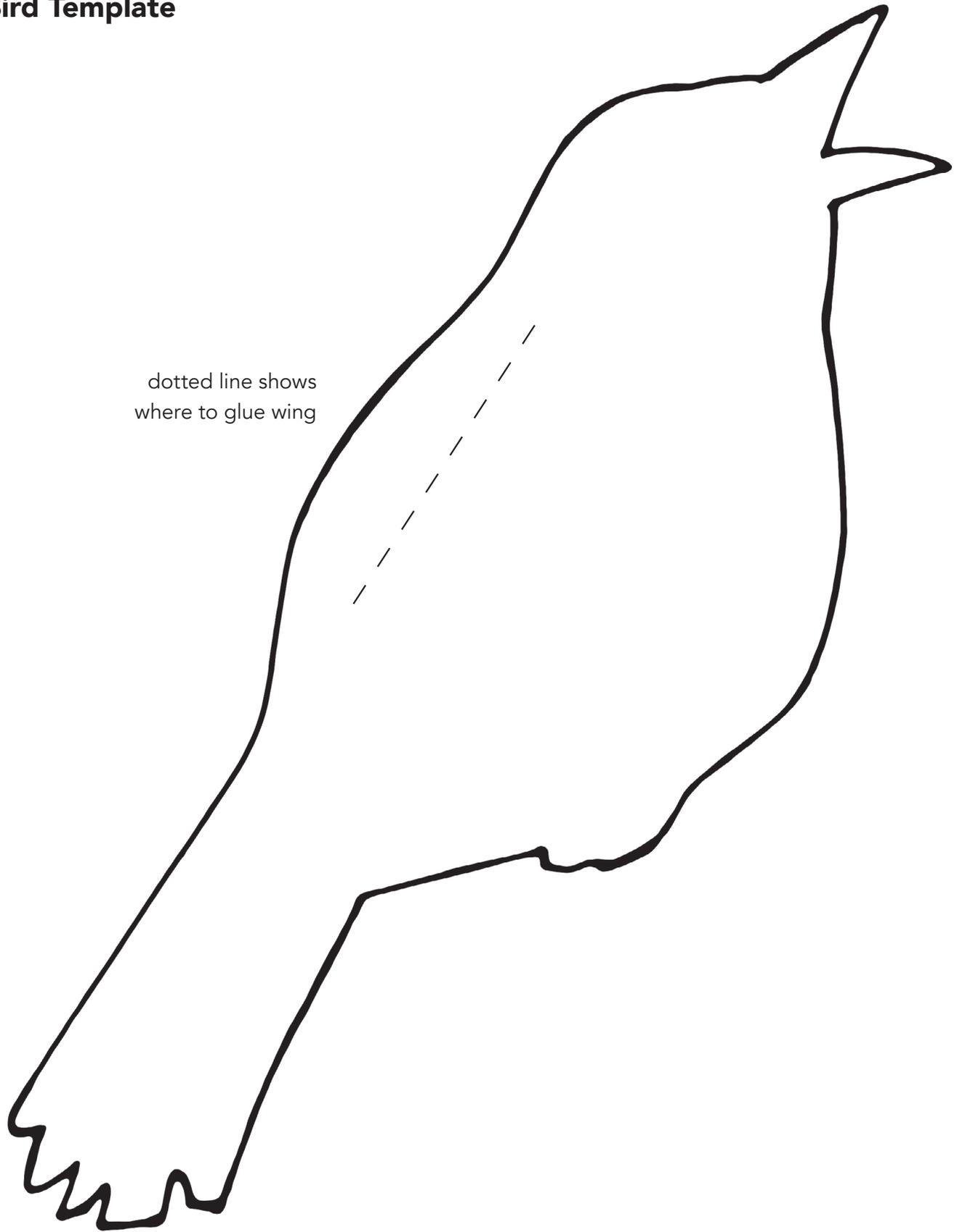
**MAKE BIRD PUPPETS!** Instead of punching a hole and looping string to hang the bird, glue the bird sculpture to a Popsicle stick. You can put on a bird puppet show, or just stick the birds into indoor plant pots for decoration.

**Evon's tip for classrooms:** *Be sure to have students pencil their name on the unpainted side of both bird pieces BFEORE they start painting!*

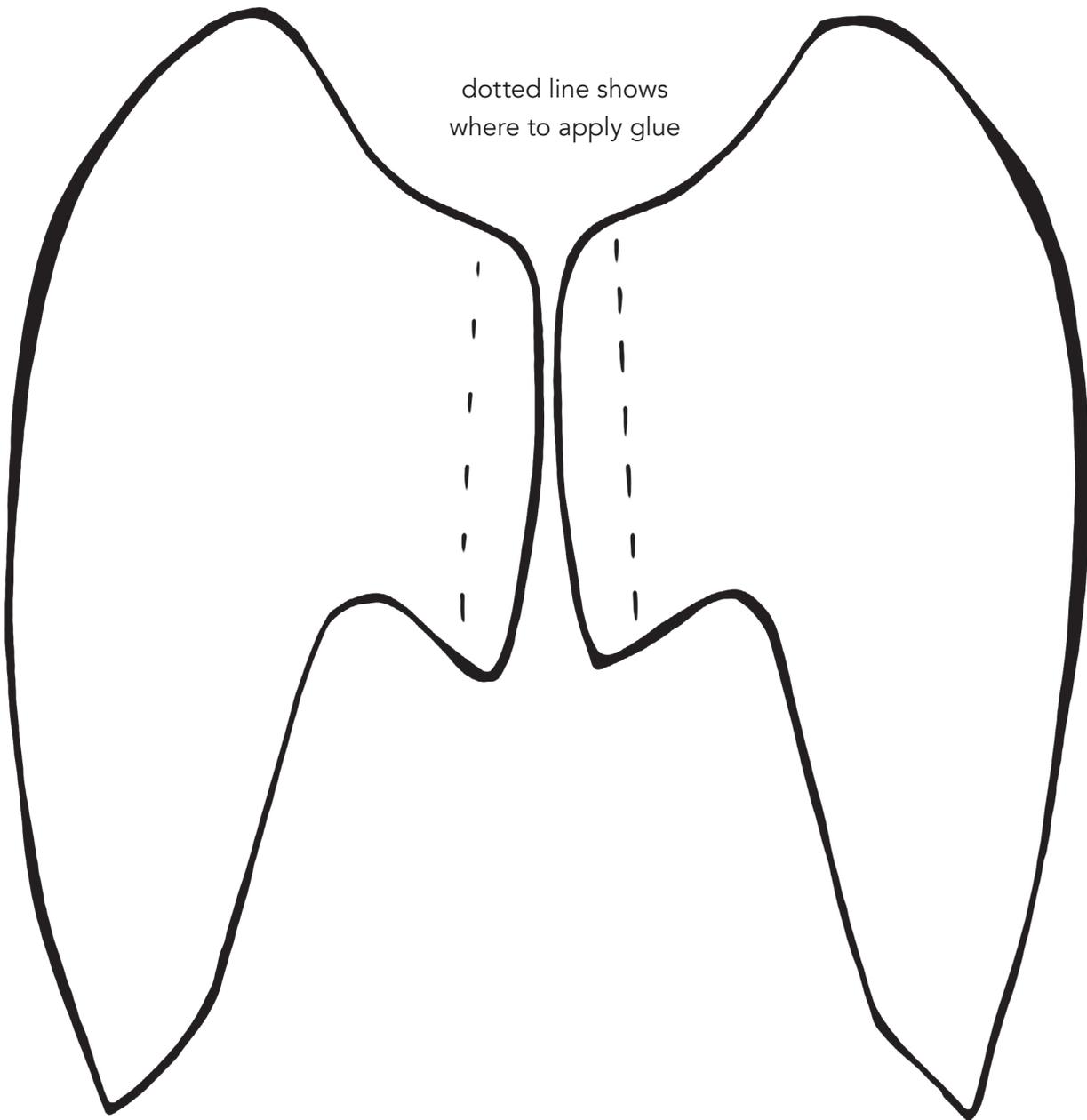


Show us YOUR bird sculpture and tell us where it has been! Tag your photos on Instagram with #AlaskaisfortheBirds.

# Bird Template



## Wing Template



||||| Bird Yardstick |||||

When birders want to identify a new bird, they compare its size to a common bird.  
Like, is it bigger or smaller than a robin?



Sparrow



Robin



Crow



Goose



**Alaska is for the Birds!**  
[www.susanewing.com](http://www.susanewing.com) | [www.evonzerbetz.com](http://www.evonzerbetz.com)  
Alaska Northwest Books

**Answers to Book Scavenger Hunt** from page 3

- Which bird poems talk about feathers?  
*Ptarmigan, Heron*
- Name the birds that are shown in, near, or over water.  
*Kingfisher, Sandpiper, Crane, Puffin, Dipper, Heron, Tern*
- Find all the pages with fish.  
*Kingfisher, Puffin, Eagle, Dipper*
- Which illustrations show a nest?  
*Owl, Flicker (cavity nest)*
- Find:
  - The person—what are they doing? *Flicker, hiking!*
  - A frog. *Heron*
  - A caterpillar. *Warbler*
  - Bees. *Hummingbird*
  - A mosquito. *Warbler*
  - A skeleton. *Raven*
  - An iceberg—what's sitting on it? *Tern, bird*
- Which bird looks like it will travel the farthest in its life?  
*Tern*
- Which poems show pairs of birds?  
*Crane, Owl*
- Who has pink legs?  
*Dipper*

**Answers for Whose Bill Is It?**  
from page 7

- N.
- A.
- B.
- K.
- I.
- D.
- H.
- F.
- G.
- M.
- C.
- E.
- J.
- L.

