

## AMERICA'S BIRD: BALD EAGLE VS. TURKEY

### LESSON PLAN

#### Objectives:

- Students will gain recognition of key U.S. symbols, figures, and native birds (turkey, bald eagle, Benjamin Franklin, great seal).
- Students will practice reading and comprehending an informational text.
- Students will complete a creative project to reinforce their learning.

#### Materials:

ARTICLE: [America's Bird: Bald Eagle Vs. Turkey](#)

HANDOUT: Describing words for the eagle and turkey

HANDOUT: Fill in the gaps comprehension exercise

HANDOUT: Design a seal activity

#### Other:

- colored pens/pencils

#### Suggested Procedure:

1. Begin with some dramatic play. Students choose their favorite animals to "act out." Alternatively, the teacher can provide pictures of different birds and have the children identify them before imitating the birds (suggestions: goose, chicken, duck, pigeon, vulture). Include any birds native or common to the area. Finish with the turkey and the bald eagle.
2. Read out a series of facts – if the students think it describes the turkey, they make a turkey noise and action, if they think it describes a bald eagle, they act like an eagle. This could be played cooperatively or as a competitive team game. Suggested facts:
  - This bird is on the U.S. Great Seal.
  - This bird says, "gobble gobble."
  - Americans often eat this bird at Thanksgiving.
  - This is the national bird of the United States.
  - This bird is both wild and farmed.
  - This is a bird of prey.
  - This bird's young are called "poults." (answer: turkey)
  - This bird has a white head, a brown body, and a yellow beak.
  - This bird was sacred in Ancient Mexico; it was called Great Xolotl. (answer: turkey)
  - This bird mates for life. (answer: bald eagle)
  - The skin under this bird's beak is called a "snood." (answer: turkey)

- This bird built the world’s largest nest. (answer: bald eagle)
- You can tell whether this bird is male or female by the shape of its poop. (answer: turkey)
- This is actually a sea bird that is often found living by lakes and rivers. (answer: bald eagle)

For a quieter variation of this activity, students can vote on the answers or strike a pose for each bird.

3. Students brainstorm words to describe each bird. They can write their answers on the attached student handout. Then go through the answers together, with students making their suggestions to the teacher.
4. Ask students which bird better symbolizes the United States, and why.
5. Read the article [America’s Bird: Bald Eagle Vs. Turkey](#). Depending on students’ reading level, this can be done as a class, led by the teacher, or completed individually.
6. Students may circle or point to words they don’t understand – make a list together and try to figure out the meanings from the context.
7. Verbally ask comprehension questions about the article. Some suggestions:
  - What animal is on the U.S. great seal?
  - Who thought the bald eagle was a “lazy” and a “coward”?
  - Who did Benjamin Franklin write to?
  - What other bird did he suggest in his letter?
  - How did Benjamin Franklin describe the turkey?
  - Which bird steals fish to eat?
  - When was the Declaration of Independence signed?
  - Who was in charge of coming up with a picture for the Great Seal? What did they suggest?
  - What was Benjamin Franklin’s real suggestion? Did Congress approve it?
  - Who designed the U.S. great seal as we know it today?
8. Students complete the fill-the-gaps handout to create a summary of the article.
9. Show students the U.S. great seal and ask whether they think it is a good representation of the U.S. Informally brainstorm ideas of other U.S. symbols.
10. Creative project: Students imagine the turkey was chosen to represent the U.S. instead of the bald eagle. They design a new U.S. seal depicting a turkey instead of an eagle and write three sentences describing what ideals the turkey could represent. They can also include other U.S. symbols in their design.

*Extension:* Students imagine they are Franklin’s daughter and write a response to his letter.

Alternatively, students imagine they are Thomas Jefferson, one of the other Founding Fathers in charge of designing the seal, and write a letter to Benjamin Franklin responding to his complaints.

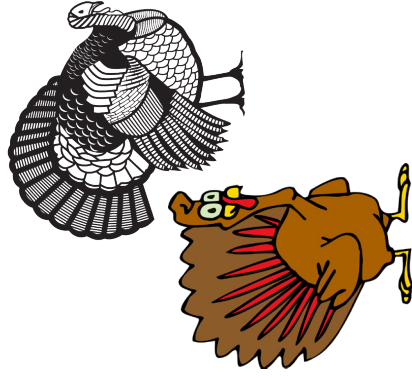
*Extension:* Class debate. For higher grades, split students into teams. Assign half the teams the position “The national bird should be changed to the turkey,” and the other half the argument that “The bald eagle should stay the national bird.” Give each team time to formulate their answers before holding a debate. In smaller classes, the student(s) can debate against the teacher.

*Extension:* Research project. Students look online or in books to discover what other design ideas were put forward for the U.S. seal. They can create a list or write a few sentences about one proposal of their choice.

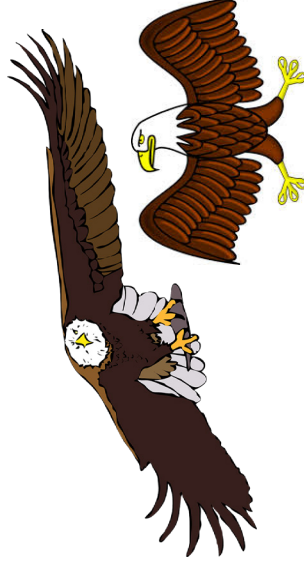
## Bald Eagle Vs. Turkey

Look at the pictures of each bird. How many words can you think of to describe each one? Write them in the correct box.

### Turkey



### Bald Eagle



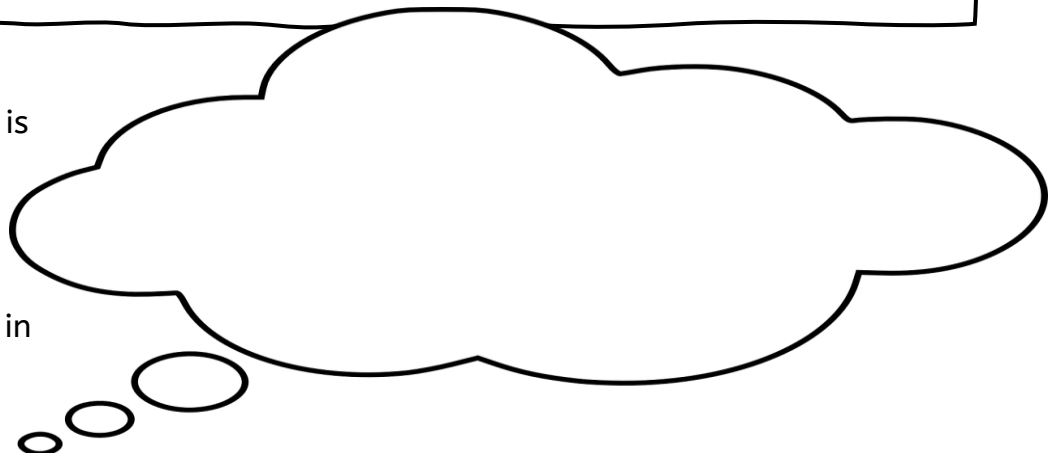
## America's Bird: Bald Eagle Vs. Turkey

Read the article and then fill in the gaps using the words in the box.

1. The bald eagle and \_\_\_\_\_ are birds native to America.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ is on the United States Great Seal.
3. Benjamin \_\_\_\_\_ wrote a letter to his daughter. He complained about the bald eagle.
4. He called the bald eagle \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ because it \_\_\_\_\_ fish.
5. He called the turkey \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ but a bird of \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Franklin didn't really want a turkey on the Great Seal. His real \_\_\_\_\_ was a picture of Moses from the Bible.
7. In the end, Charles Thomson came up with the \_\_\_\_\_ we know today.

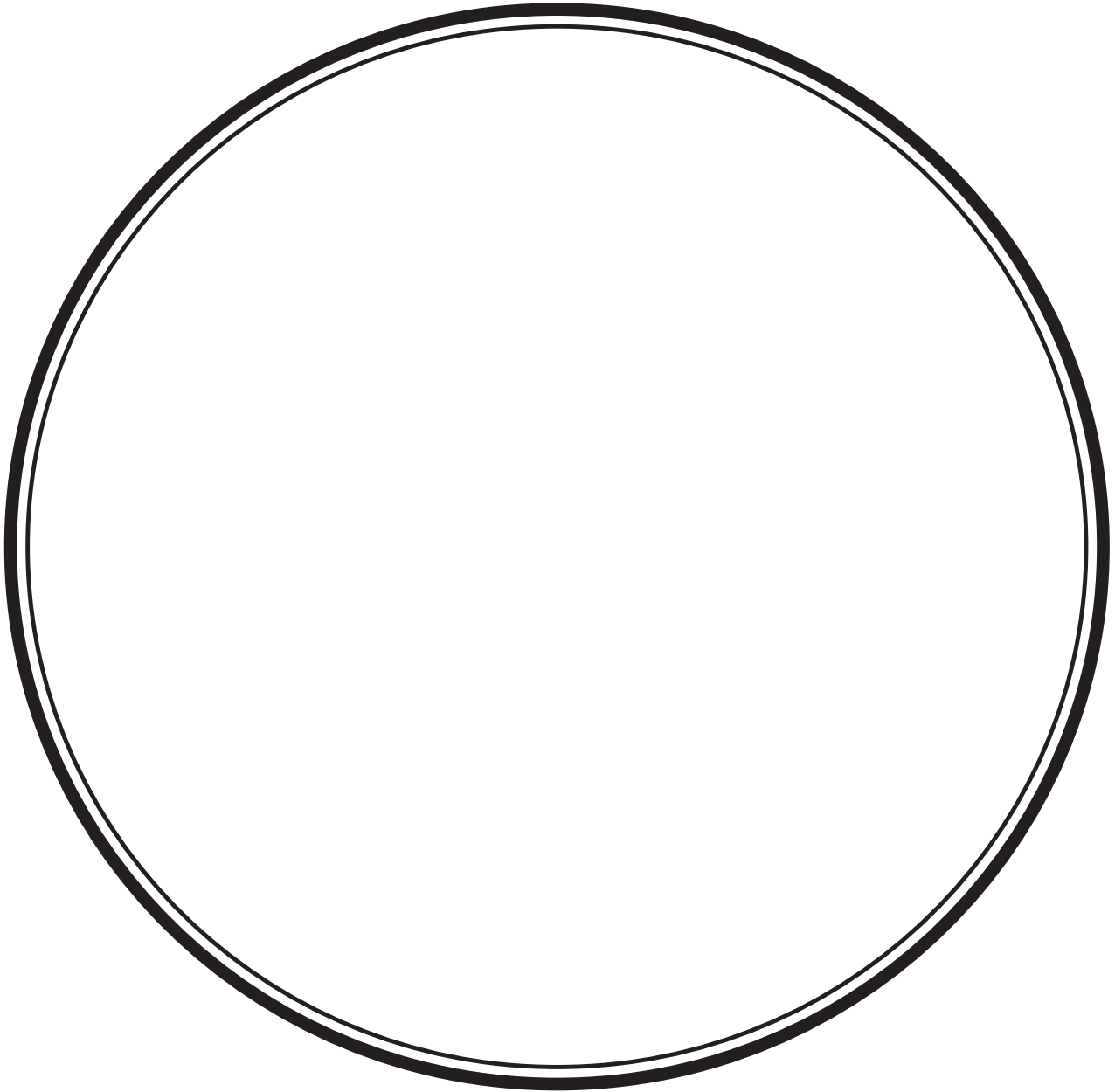
silly	seal	Franklin	lazy	steals	idea
vain	bald eagle	courage	turkey	coward	

What do you think is the better choice for the U.S. Great Seal, the eagle or the turkey? Write your answer in the bubble.



## America's Bird: Bald Eagle Vs. Turkey

Imagine the turkey was chosen to be on the U.S. Great Seal. Draw your own seal starring the turkey. Write 3 sentences describing your design and what the turkey could stand for.



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