

Oak Arbor New Church Sunday School – Lessons for Intermediate Level

Lesson 37: BIRDS IN THE WORD AND IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD
Luke 13:19; Matthew 13:3-4, Arcana Coelestia 3219

PREPARATION:

You might want to bring a bird book with large pictures to show the students.

INTRODUCTION:

You probably know by now that everything mentioned in the Word has a deeper meaning. And do you know that everything around us has a deeper meaning as well? Every animal and plant acts a certain way because of the deeper thing that it represents.

Today, we will take the example of birds. Birds flit about, up above us. They fly here, they fly there; they land here, they land there. Some birds are beautiful, some are ugly. Some make beautiful sounds, some make obnoxious sounds. Some are helpful, and enhance the beauty of the world. Some are destructive, and are pests.

So what might birds represent? What flits about in our minds, flying here, flying there? Thoughts and ideas! Think how many thoughts and ideas fly through your mind every day. Some ideas “land” awhile, maybe making a nest. These are ideas that you think about a lot, or for a long while. Maybe you’ll make something out of those ideas, like a bird laying eggs and raising young. Other ideas just fly right through your mind and don’t stay long – you might hardly notice them, like the many birds that pass over your head as you walk outside.

Are all thoughts and ideas good? Are all thoughts and ideas bad? There are a great mixture of thoughts that fly through our minds each day, aren’t there? Some are good, some are bad. Some are true, some are false.

READING AND DISCUSSION:

In the Word, birds either represent true and good thoughts, or false and evil thoughts. The way you can tell which is which is by the way the birds are described. Are the birds helpful, or harmful? Let’s look at a couple of examples.

These examples are from a couple of parables that the Lord told. The Lord said:

“What is the kingdom of heaven like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.” (*Luke 13:19*)

What kind of birds do these seem to be? This description paints a nice picture of a large tree, with birds contentedly making their homes in its branches. Since the mustard seed is showing a picture of heaven, which can grow big and beautiful in our lives like the tree, the birds are representing the many true thoughts that can settle in our minds, when we are living a heavenly life.

What about this example, from another parable:

“Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.” (*Matthew 13:3-4*)

Lesson 37 – Oak Arbor New Church Sunday School, page 2

Were these helpful birds? Not at all. The seeds that could have grown into plants were instead snatched away and devoured, before they could even take root. These birds are a picture of false or wrong ideas, that can snatch away things that the Lord is trying to plant in our minds.

In the spiritual world, animals and other things appear because of things that angels or spirits are talking about. When angels or spirits talk about thoughts and ideas, birds appear in the world of spirits. The way the birds look depends on what kinds of thoughts are being talked about.

Do you think thoughts and ideas come from outside of us, and flow into our minds, or from inside of us? When you see a snake, what do you think? Do you think, “Cool!” or do you think “Gross!” Does everyone think the same thing when they see a snake? No, it all depends on what’s inside them already. If they have an affection for reptiles inside them, they’ll think, “Cool.” If they have an aversion to reptiles, they’ll think, “Gross!” It’s not the snake out there that is causing the thought. The snake is just bringing a certain thought up, a thought that comes from a feeling that is already inside the person.

Swedenborg witnessed many times the amazing symbolism of the things that appear in the spiritual world. Here is one account that he wrote about:

Once, in the world of spirits, I saw some birds. One was dark and ugly, but two others were noble and beautiful. When I saw them, suddenly, some spirits fell upon me so violently that my nerves and bones began to tremble and shake. I thought that these must be evil spirits attacking me, trying to destroy me, because this has happened before. But this was not the case. When the trembling stopped, I spoke to the spirits who had fallen on me, and asked them what was the matter.

The spirits said that they had fallen down from a certain heavenly society, where they were having a conversation with angels about thoughts and where they come from. These spirits had held the opinion that thoughts come from outside of us, and flow into our minds through our senses. The angels, on the other hand, had held the opinion that thoughts flow from within.

Since the spirits were wrong in this matter, they had fallen down, right out of that heavenly society. It was not, they told Swedenborg, that they had been thrown out. Angels never throw anyone out or down. It was because their ideas were wrong that they had fallen down themselves.

So this was the reason that I had seen those birds. The dark and ugly bird had represented the wrong idea, about thoughts coming from outside of us, that these two spirits had been talking about. The beautiful and noble birds had represented the right ideas that the angels had been talking about.

Even though it seems like thoughts can come from outside of us, they always come from within (retold from AC 3219).

Lesson 37 – Oak Arbor New Church Sunday School, page 3

PROJECT: Rainbow Birds

Do the enclosed “Rainbow birds” project.

Supplies:

colored construction paper cut into long strips about ½ inch wide
scissors
stapler
white glue
toothpicks
pens, nails or knitting needles to curl the paper strips
(I use scissors to curl ribbon so scissors may work for this, but you might also want to try using pens.)

Consult with the children as to exactly what they’d like to do.

They could make a display of just colorful birds, to represent true thoughts,
OR

They could make a display of some colorful birds, and some birds that are only black or black and gray, to represent both true thoughts and false thoughts.

Procedure:

When the birds are finished, glue them onto a background paper or poster board. Photocopy this page, then cut out the appropriate text below and glue that onto the picture as well. Display the picture somewhere at church.

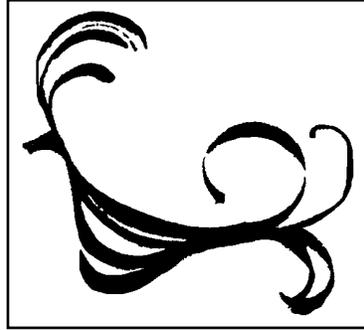
Project Quotes

**Beautiful and noble birds
represent true thoughts.**

**Dark and ugly birds
represent false thoughts.**

Instructions for Bird Project

Use all the colors of the rainbow to make these birds. Perch them on a tree branch or dangle them from strings at your windows.



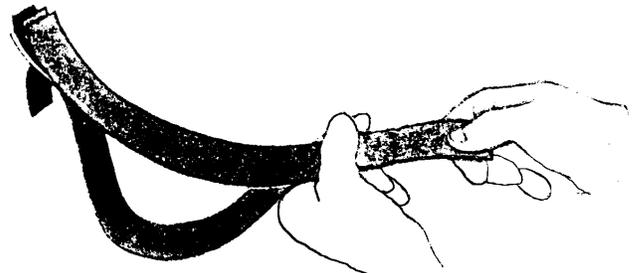
1. Color or paint designs on five strips of colored construction paper. Stack them together. Staple them about three inches down from the top.



Steps 1-3

2. Cut the tops of the strips down over the staple to make a beak.

3. Pull the back strip tight. Let the other strips loop down to make the bird's stomach. Pinch the strips together.



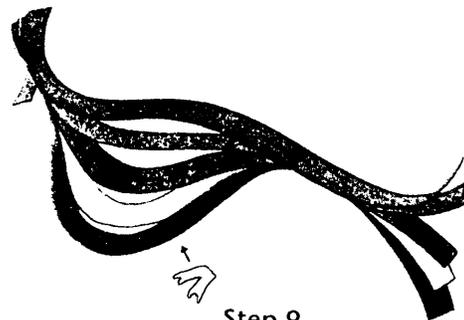
Steps 4-5

4. Pull the inside strips so they fill the bird's body. Then staple at the tail where you pinched.

5. Curl three of the tail strips down. Curl the other strip up. Trim the papers to the length you want.

6. Curl back the strips above the beak.

7. Cut short strips for the feet. Curl the toes. Clue them onto the bottom of the bird's stomach.



Step 8

8. Glue on a loop of thread to hang your bird.