

# Cranes and Culture



## Summary

*Students will use visual and language arts to explore how whooping cranes are tied into everyday culture.*

## Objectives:

*Students will be able to:*

- Read, interpret, and critically analyze poetry
- Read and discuss nature poetry in order to understand the human experience
- Write their own nature poetry
- Work independently and collaboratively to produce ideas and works of art
- Explore their own ideas about the purposes and meanings of art
- Connect their knowledge and skills in art to other areas, such as science and social studies
- Explore the similarities and differences of world cultures by studying their fine arts

## Standards:

Art and Design I.8.7, J.8.5, K.8.1, and K.8.6  
English Language Arts A.8.2, A.8.3, B.8.1, and B.8.2

## Materials:

*For Crane Origami:*

- Square pieces of paper
- Copies of “Make Your Own Origami Crane!”

*For Crane Art:*

- Materials for making crane art using dance, theater, illustration, literature, or music

*For Crane Poetry:*

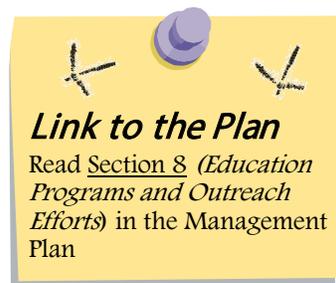
- Copies of nature poems
- Pencils and paper

## Background:

Cranes of all species have served as cultural symbols across the world. In Japan, the crane represents health, happiness, peace, and longevity. It is frequently represented at Japanese weddings as a symbol of honor and loyalty, because cranes often mate for life. In China, cranes symbolize wisdom, nobility, longevity, immortality, and determination. In Vietnam, cranes are a symbol of longevity. In Africa, cranes represent love, long marriage, and happiness. In fact, the blue crane is the national bird of South Africa. In ancient Greek times, cranes were considered intelligent, and it was thought that the crane served as a guide to Hades, the Greek god who ruled the underworld of the dead.

Cranes have also played an important role in North American cultures. For example, the crane is a symbol found in the totem of many Native American cultures. The Crane is one of the clans for the Ojibwe people here in the Midwest. The members of the Crane clan were known for their excellent speaking skills, displaying loud and clear voices, and were one of the clans granted Chieftanship.

Cranes are celebrated in many different ways. In Japan, people make origami cranes. It is thought that a person who folds 1,000 cranes will have a wish granted, such as living a long, healthy life. Some cultures perform crane dances that copy the exaggerated leaps, bows, and wing-flapping that cranes display when they are seeking a mate or reinforcing their pair bonds. These dances date back thousands of years and often involve elaborate crane costumes.



*Source: www.inkart.net*



Cranes have been included in stories and myths. For example, *The Cranes of Ibycus* by Friedrich Schiller is a poem based on ancient Greek mythology. The great poet Ibycus was traveling to a theater in Corinth where he was to perform at the chariot races. He walked alone through the forest carrying his lyre (a harp played by the ancient Greeks), as a flock of cranes was flying overhead, which he considered to be a good omen. As he was crossing a bridge, he was suddenly approached by two murderers. Trained as a musician and not as a warrior, he was unable to defend himself. Ibycus was mortally wounded, and realized he was about to die alone in a faraway place. As he lay dying, he called upon the cranes to avenge his death.



**Drawing of what a costumed crane dance might have looked like thousands of years ago.** *Illustration: John-Gordon Swogger*

Word of Ibycus's death quickly spread through Corinth, and he was greatly mourned because he was so adored as a poet and singer.

The two murderers then went to the theater in Corinth. One of the murderers looked up to the sky and saw the flock of cranes rapidly approaching the theater. "See there, see there, Timotheus! Behold the cranes of Ibycus!" he cried as the cranes drew nearer. The murderer knew that the cranes were coming to avenge the death of Ibycus. In exclaiming these words, he revealed his heinous crime to the crowd in the theater. Word quickly spread through the theater that the murderers were present, and the crowd demanded the arrest of the man who spoke the words to expose his own guilty deeds:

"Of Ibycus!" - That name so blest  
With new-born sorrow fills each breast.  
As waves on waves in ocean rise,  
From mouth to mouth it swiftly flies:  
"Of Ibycus, whom we lament?  
Who fell beneath the murderer's hand?  
What mean those words that from him  
went?  
What means this cranes' advancing band?"

And louder still become the cries,  
And soon this thought foreboding flies  
Through every heart, with speed of light -  
"Observe in this the furies' might!

The poets manes are now appeased:  
The murderer seeks his own arrest!  
Let him who spoke the word be seized,  
And him to whom it was addressed! "

That word he had no sooner spoke,  
Than he its sound would fain invoke;  
In vain! his mouth, with terror pale,  
Tells of his guilt the fearful tale.  
Before the judge they drag them now  
The scene becomes the tribunal;  
Their crimes the villains both avow,  
When neath the vengeance-stroke they fall.



The cranes revealed the guilty murderers and serve as the messengers of justice in the poem.

The poem in its entirety can be found online at:  
[www.fln.vcu.edu/schiller/ibykus\\_e.html](http://www.fln.vcu.edu/schiller/ibykus_e.html)

Cranes have been celebrated across cultures using various forms of art. Let's explore some of these different types of art and symbolism with the students.

### **Crane Origami Procedure:**

Using blank sheets of paper and the instructions in Appendix 6, have students make origami cranes. The PDF is also available on Operation Migration's website at:  
[www.operationmigration.org/Origami.pdf](http://www.operationmigration.org/Origami.pdf)

### **Crane Art Procedure:**

Divide students into groups of three or four. Have each group create an art project to celebrate and educate others about whooping cranes. Students can use any type of art form they wish, including dance, theater, illustration, literature, or music. Each group should share their project with the class. Ask the class to interpret each group's work, and then ask the group to explain what their artistic intentions were. Students should describe why they chose the art form that they did, how they created their work, what they learned in creating it, and the challenges that they faced.

### **Crane Poetry Procedure:**

- 1) For an introduction to poetry, have students read and learn about poems involving animals and nature. You can use the poems below, or select your own. For example, choose one or some of the well known nature writers (Robert Frost, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, etc.) and discuss some of their poems in detail. Some topics for discussion include:
  - In which style of poetry did the poet write?
  - What type of rhythm and meter did the poet use?
  - Which parts of nature is the poet describing?
  - Does the poet relate what he or she sees in nature to his or her own life? If so, how?
  - Does the poet use similes or metaphors? What is the poet comparing nature and its components to?
  - What type of symbolism is found in the poem?
- 2) Have each student write their own nature poem involving whooping cranes. The poem can be written in any poetic form or genre, but should include at least one simile, metaphor, and hyperbole. The poem can be factual (such as describing how whooping cranes are bred in captivity and learn to migrate by following ultralight planes) or fictional (such as the tale of the hardships of an individual crane).
- 3) Have the students share their poems with one another in small groups.



## **Extensions:**

- 1) Have students select a threatened or endangered species and trace how it has been used symbolically in visual and/or language arts throughout different cultures. Students should write up their findings in a report.
- 2) Have students define anthropomorphism and explain why it is important for biologists to try to avoid being anthropomorphic in their work. How can biologists be careful to avoid being anthropomorphic?



THE OVEN BIRD

*By: Robert Frost*

There is a singer everyone has heard,  
Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,  
Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.  
He says that leaves are old and that for flowers  
Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.  
He says the early petal-fall is past  
When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers  
On sunny days a moment overcast;  
And comes that other fall we name the fall.  
He says the highway dust is over all.  
The bird would cease and be as other birds  
But that he knows in singing not to sing.  
The question that he frames in all but words  
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

I SAW IN LOUISIANA A LIVE-OAK GROWING

*By: Walt Whitman*

I saw in Louisiana a live-oak growing,  
All alone stood it, and the moss hung down from the branches;  
Without any companion it grew there, uttering joyous leaves of dark green,  
And its look, rude, unbending, lusty, made me think of myself;  
But I wonder'd how it could utter joyous leaves, standing alone there, without its  
friend, its lover near--for I knew I could not;  
And broke off a twig with a certain number of leaves upon it, and twined  
around it a little moss,  
And brought it away--and I have placed it in sight in my room;  
It is not needed to remind me as of my own dear friends,  
(For I believe lately I think of little else than them:)  
Yet it remains to me a curious token--it makes me think of manly love;  
For all that, and though the live-oak glistens there in Louisiana, solitary, in a  
wide flat space,  
Uttering joyous leaves all its life, without a friend, a lover, near,  
I know very well I could not.