

## 6-A American Flamingo, 1838

John James Audubon (1785–1851)



6-A John James Audubon (1785–1851), Robert Havell (1793–1878), engraver, *American Flamingo*, 1838. Hand-colored engraving with aquatint, plate 38 3/16 x 25 9/16 in. (97 x 65 cm.); sheet: 39 7/8 x 26 7/8 in. (101.28 x 68.26 cm.). From *The Birds of America* [plate CCCCXXXII]. Gift of Mrs. Walter B. James, 1945 [8.431]. Image © 2006 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

### The Art

*American Flamingo* is one of 435 hand-colored engravings made from John James Audubon's original watercolor paintings. To help make his images useful to people who watch and study birds, Audubon painted birds at eye level. He painted them as close to their actual size as possible. His images are huge, each about three feet by two feet. For some large birds, this wasn't big enough. Because the flamingo in this picture is five feet tall, Audubon had to paint it bending down to get it to fit on the page.

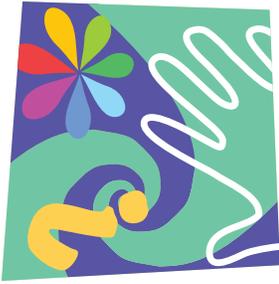
### The Artist

There are two names on this artwork because two men worked together to produce the final image of the flamingo. First, Audubon, known as "the American Woodsman," used watercolors to paint this flamingo in its natural habitat. After he finished about 400 such images of North American birds, he decided to put them together in a book. He traveled from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to England to find an engraving company that could make copies of these watercolor images. An engraver named Robert Havell copied the watercolor paintings on copper plates and then colored the black-and-white prints by hand. Through this process, many copies of the original watercolor painting are available.

Audubon was born in Haiti and educated in France, where he began to develop his eye for beauty and talent for drawing. He eventually set about locating, collecting, and drawing every species of bird from North America. For a time, he moved from his family farm outside of Philadelphia to New Orleans, Louisiana. In Louisiana, he could better explore around the Mississippi River, an area where many birds pass through.

### The Historical Perspective

Audubon lived at a time when much of the land reflected the unspoiled beauty of nature. Even close to the biggest cities, he was able to find birds in their natural habitats. Audubon captured the beauty and natural surroundings of the North American wilderness during the first part of the 1800s. Unlike the way birds were being drawn at the time—as still images—Audubon's pictures presented them the way they really looked in the wild.



## Conversations and Teaching Experiences

Head Start Children ages 3-to-5-years-old

Encourage children to look closely at this print—the images, background, and colors used. Introduce new vocabulary and find books that relate to the painting.

### Describing



✓ Use your “I Spy” telescope to look carefully at this picture. Have children use as many descriptive words as they can to explain what they see in the picture. What color is the bird?

✓ Guide the children in thinking about how the flamingo’s environment shown in this painting might give clues to how flamingos live. What kind of animal is the flamingo?

✓ Direct the children to continue looking closely and carefully at the artwork and ask what they think it might be named.

### Analyzing and Interpreting



Ask the following questions to stimulate thinking and discussion:

- The name of this print is *American Flamingo*. Why do you think it is named that?
- What is in the background of this print? What do you think a flamingo might eat?
- Show me how a flamingo might move.
- How is this print of the flamingo like a photograph? (It is an accurate drawing of a real bird.)
- What season do you think it is? What kind of weather do you think flamingos live in?
- Are there other things you would like to tell me about this print or about flamingos? Children might say: I’ve seen these birds before; we have one in our yard; I like the water best; I think it was hard to paint.

## Connecting and Extending

### Introducing Vocabulary

background	inlets
bird watching	oval
curve	perspective
delicate	scoop
habitat	shoreline
horizon	thin
horizontal	webbed feet



*A Flamingo Chick Grows Up* by Joan Hewett (Lerner Publishing Group, 2003)  
This book follows Puck, a Caribbean flamingo living at Busch Gardens in Tampa, Florida, from birth to independence.

*Feathers for Lunch* by Lois Ehlert (Harcourt Children’s Books, 1996)  
A housecat meets 12 birds in the backyard but can’t catch any of them and has to eat feathers for lunch.

*For Pete’s Sake* by Ellen Stoll Walsh (Harcourt Children’s Books, 1998)  
Pete, an alligator who thinks he is a flamingo, worries when he begins to notice the differences between his flamingo friends and him.

Books continued on page 39



## Connecting and Extending continued...

### Related Educational Experiences

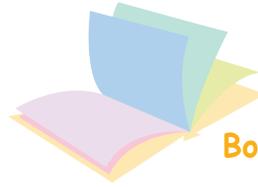
✓ If possible, pass around a feather. Let children examine the feather and describe how it looks and feels. Have children talk about how this feather might be similar to or different from what a flamingo feather might look like.

✓ If you have already shown children *The Dove* or *The Peacock Room*, remind them of the birds pictured in these artworks. Display two posters side-by-side. Compare and contrast the bird images in these artworks. Discuss similarities and differences.

✓ Talk about the sounds birds make (humming, singing, screeching, etc.). Have children make bird sounds they've heard. Ask them if they can recognize different birds by the sounds they make.

✓ Put descriptive words on a "word wall" or place them near the poster of *American Flamingo*. Children learn more complex and varied spoken vocabulary and improve communication abilities through meaningful discussion.

✓ Make a group collage or an "animal wall" using magazines, newspapers, or photos of environments similar to the children's neighborhoods. Find pictures of small animals and birds that live in their neighborhoods.

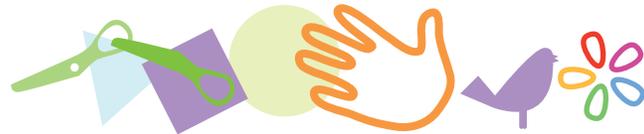


### Books continued...

*Mrs. Fitz's Flamingos* by Kevin McCloskey (HarperCollins Publishers, 1992)  
To improve her view, a woman who lives in a Brooklyn apartment buys flamingos at the department store and shows them off outside her window.

*Mud City: A Flamingo Story* by Brenda Guberson (Henry Holt and Company, 2005)  
A baby chick hatches, learns to fly away, and then returns to its nesting place to build a nest of its own.

*The Boy Who Drew Birds: A Story of John James Audubon* by Jacqueline Davies (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004)  
The young Audubon pioneered a technique essential to our understanding of birds.



✓ Discuss the environment where flamingos live. On a chart list reasons why water is important to people, birds, and animals. Have children draw a picture of their favorite water activity.

*The ideas listed are just a few of the many activities that could be used to introduce or extend children's learning. Your knowledge of your children and families supports your ability to ensure positive learning experiences and outcomes for students. As an educator, you probably have ideas for books, songs, finger plays, and activities that you have thought of when introducing or extending children's learning related to the "A Head Start on Picturing America" artworks. We encourage you to confer with your colleagues, visit the local library or bookstore, and share your ideas with others.*

### Related Family Literacy Experiences

Parents and children can:

✓ play the game "Guess Who?" by taking turns pretending to be different animals and guessing the animal.

✓ go to the zoo and talk about the different type of birds they see.

✓ go on a walk and listen to the different sounds birds make.