

# Guidelines for Exploration Time in K-2

## Introduction

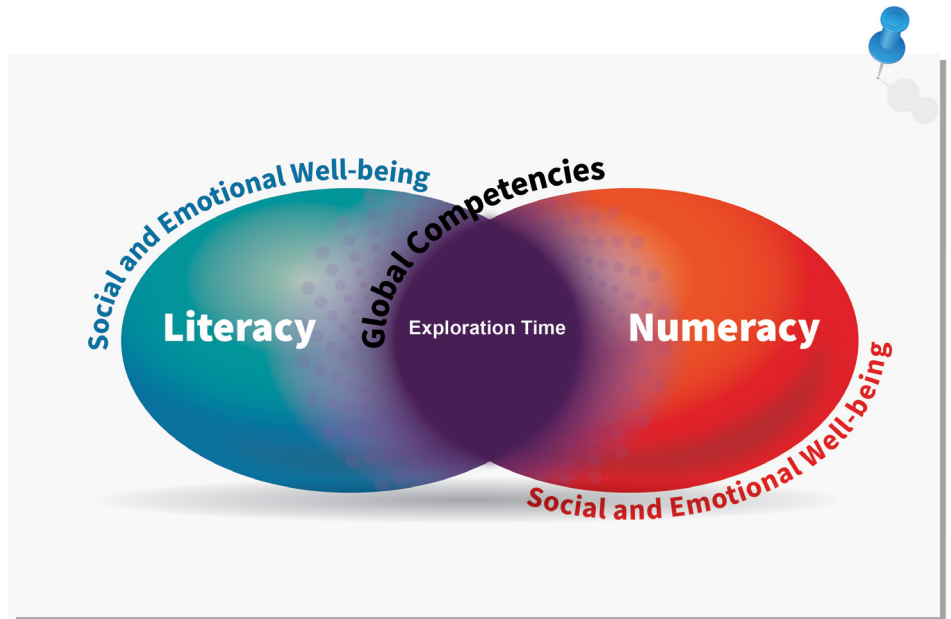
Curriculum decisions must start with the vision articulated in the *Portrait of a Learner*. It states that balance in mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual components of life are needed to be ready to learn and emphasizes the importance of the whole person to living and learning well. This document reflects that vision. Developed with the guidance and advice of educators who work with children in Kindergarten to Grade 2, it outlines prioritized learning and exploration time—dedicated time in the school day for children to learn, grow, and develop friendships.

## Prioritizing Learning in K–2

Educators need time and flexibility to meet the needs of all learners. Through consultations with district leaders and a team of educators, a framework to prioritize learning has been developed for Grades K–2 in English Prime and French Immersion. It was shared with educators through their school administration in June of 2020. The framework was designed with a recognition that the prescribed curriculum would need to be prioritized to ensure the needs of children can be met by personalizing their learning.

This framework suggests approximately 80% of instructional time will focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills. Time for exploration will be embedded in both literacy and numeracy instruction and in learning centres and/or blocks of uninterrupted time for whole class exploration. Approximately 20% of time throughout the day will support and develop social and emotional well-being which includes social-awareness, self-awareness and self-management, and relationship skills so learners feel safe, valued and ready to learn. While the NB global competencies will be developed throughout the day, this time to explore provides the opportunity to learn, practice, and apply these competencies.

**Please note:** The percentages of time in the framework should be regarded as fluid since there will be many natural and meaningful connections between learnings in literacy, numeracy and the exploration time, and through support for social and emotional well-being.



**Personal Safety** is one part of social and emotional well-being. Outcomes at the K-2 level include: naming body part s accurately, distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy touch, trusting your gut instinct, seeking help when ma de to feel uncomfortable, and following safety practices.

## Prescribed Curriculum and the Exploration Time

Teachers will follow the K–2 literacy and numeracy curriculum and will evaluate learners on the prescribed language arts (English or French) and math outcomes. Two supporting documents have been developed: *Building Blocks of Reading* supports formative assessment of foundational reading skills and development of plans for reading instruction, and a list of prioritized math outcomes for each grade supports the planning of adequate time for learning where there are concepts and skills that are not yet solid or to mitigate learning gaps.

Rather than instructing and assessing subject specific outcomes in *You and Your World*, teachers indicated that an exploration time would enable more flexibility. This time is to extend learning in authentic teachable moments (e.g., foster relationships, observe the goings on outside the window, or to linger a little longer when observing a spider) with an emphasis on the value of following the interests and themes emerging from the learners and the local contexts. The intention is to provide time for teachers to slow down, observe and respond to children’s curiosities and needs.

Teachers advised that guidelines for the exploration time would be helpful to maximize learning potential and to support the purposeful and consistent use of this time. The guidelines that follow provide ideas to support planning purposeful exploration for K–2 children. They were developed in consultation with early childhood educators<sup>1</sup> but are not a prescribed curriculum. Rather than evaluating specific outcomes, teachers will use an anecdotal space on the report card to share with families the learning and development of their child during exploration time.

## Exploration Time Guidelines

The ultimate goal of the exploration time is for children to learn, grow, and develop friendships by engaging in meaningful and developmentally appropriate experiences. With their knowledge of child development and pedagogy, educators have the flexibility to use the guidelines to design instruction to best respond to their learners.

Considerations for planning exploration time:

- Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and co-planning through a team approach reduces the overall planning time and efforts of individual teachers.
- The more intentional and targeted the planning, the greater potential for depth of learning during precious instructional minutes.
- In the K–2 day, making the most of every conversation, read aloud, challenge, and focal point of curiosity provides opportunities to layer experiences with meaningful literacy, numeracy, exploration, and social-emotional learning.
- There is no one set way to organize the flow of a K–2 classroom; however, effective practices for supporting purposeful exploration with younger students are outlined in the guidelines that follow (see [Appendix A: A Sample Day](#)).

<sup>1</sup> The following document was used in the consultation process to inform the guidelines for exploration time. Hachey, S., Rose, S., & Whitty, P. (2013). [Valuing Early Learning and Child Care in Action COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT TOOL \(CAT\)](#).

## Planning Purposeful Exploration Experiences

The experiences that promote exploration will vary according to the context. With thoughtful planning, these experiences will allow for deeper learning opportunities within and outside the school building. They will support children's inquiries and investigations through projects and/or develop concepts through learning about and exploring:

- events and/or objects observed in nature and the natural world;
- how things work;
- seasonal and cultural events;
- local culture and history;
- children's home and heritage languages, and cultures;
- First Nation tradition and culture in New Brunswick;
- art, music, and physical education;
- outdoor play and physical movement; and
- a variety of topics initiated by children and influenced by their families, community and world events.

## Examples of Exploration Experiences

- Food-system awareness exploring agriculture, gardens, local food, seasonality, and/or healthy food
- Weather awareness exploring clouds, raindrops, puddles, and/or temperature
- Examining how things such as zippers, buttons, Velcro, or laces work
- Investigating the behaviours of living things, such as exploring birds, insects, fish, and/or personal pets
- Learning about a First Nation community by engaging First Nation speakers and Elders, and/or exploring pictures, videos, and books

Exemplars of authentic explorations can be found in the [Early Years Frameworks](#).

## Curriculum Resources with Ideas for Exploration

- Learnings in the [You and Your World](#) curriculum
- First Nation education resources: [K-12 Visual Arts](#), [K-12 Literacy](#), [Office of First Nation Education One Site](#)
- [Learning experiences](#) to introduce French language and culture
- [Grade 1 French Immersion](#) and [Grade 2 French Immersion](#) instructional planning resources
- [FLORA](#): interactive modules for French language learning

## NB Global Competencies

The development of competencies and attitudes to become life-long learners is a process from early childhood to graduation and beyond. The *Portrait of a Learner* states, “Learners need to develop global competencies to meet the shifting and ongoing demands of life, work, and learning; to be active and responsive in their communities; to understand and respect diverse perspectives; and, to act on issues of significance. These skills, sets of knowledge, and attitudes are transportable across disciplines and are required to take action to make life better for oneself and others” (p. 11).

From the first day of kindergarten, the approach to learning, the experiences, the environment, the topics, and the concepts provide opportunities for teaching and learning that further develops and strengthens children’s competency in:

- [Collaboration](#)
- [Communication](#)
- [Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving](#)
- [Innovation, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship](#)
- [Self-Awareness and Self-Management](#)
- [Sustainability and Global Citizenship](#)

Exploration experiences affect children’s well-being, sense of belonging and identity and have the potential to develop the six global competencies when children are:

- involved in community initiatives and events;
- engaged in acts of kindness to support them to be responsible and responsive members of the community;
- valued for and engaged in their own initiatives, ideas, decision-making, and actions;
- encouraged to actively persist with challenging situations;
- encouraged to pursue multiple solutions to the problems they encounter;
- encouraged to celebrate their own identity and the identity of others; and
- encouraged to draw on past experiences, and the cultures of their homes and communities.



FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS: LITERACY AND NUMERACY, AND CORE LEARNING IN SUBJECT AREAS



## Safety During Exploration Time

Health and safety protocol documents will guide educator actions and plans for their classrooms. This section is intended to acknowledge that how learning happens in the exploration time will be dependent on those protocols. No matter the parameters, children are at the center of education. Safe interactions and handling of materials and resources can be promoted in the classroom to make sanitization as easy as possible to implement. For example, it may be necessary to provide sets of art and construction materials and exploration kits to be used by individual children. Teachers should engage children in the routines and responsibilities for keeping the classroom environment safe. With guidance, they will adjust to working together, developing friendships and learning within the safety protocols.

## Designing the Environment to Promote Purposeful Exploration

There are four aspects to consider when designing indoor and outdoor environments to promote exploration: Physical Space, Material Resources, Time, and Interactions and Relationships. Intentional planning of the environment will allow for engaged, purposeful exploration.

### PHYSICAL SPACE

The layout of the space influences interactions, movement and exploration. It is often referred to as the “third teacher.” Teachers may consider the following practices.

- Set up stations for learning and choice (e.g., art studio, construction, science, imaginary play, math, writing, crafting, etc.).
- Bring materials and learning outside for alternate exploration.
- Use natural spaces to invite possibilities, provide for physical development, and to challenge personal limits.
- Design spaces which meet children’s diverse needs and reflect the diverse cultural identity and backgrounds of learners.
- Involve children in decisions about the design and organization of their physical spaces.
- Convey a calming and welcoming feeling (e.g., organization of belongings and materials, routines, evidence of children’s explorations and class experiences, use of colour and light, etc.).
- Place materials, where possible, within children’s view and reach.
- Support children’s ownership by including them in the care and maintenance of the indoor and outdoor spaces.

## MATERIAL RESOURCES

Intentional selection of props and various resources will support the desired learning goal, challenge children's thinking, and provide opportunities for children to explore, tinker, and engage in authentic representations of life. When introducing and displaying materials, teachers may use the following suggestions to inspire wonder, curiosity, and creativity, foster imagination, invite exploration, and extend learning throughout the year.

- Stay current with children's interests and passions to inform what you might bring into the classroom or what families might contribute as materials to explore.
- Listen to children's ideas and conversations.
- Consider the possibilities for children's cherished items.
- Include children's home cultures and knowledge including those of First Nations, Acadian, and newcomers.
- Use books, real photographs, and authentic materials.
- Extend centre possibilities (e.g., animals in the block centre, card stock in the writing centre, magnifying glasses and tweezers, a basket of pine cones, etc.).
- Consider how the careful display/introduction of specific materials may spark interest or build on current interests.
- Consider how material resources such as a local event can influence exploration (e.g., voting materials during an election).

## Using Materials as Invitations for Exploration

An *invitation* is an intentional, planned collection of materials which are set out to invite the children to play by creating interest in the exploration of materials.

Invitations:

- are visually pleasing or interesting;
- tempt the children to touch and explore;
- are arranged in an interesting way to help the children see the possibilities, to create a suggestion as part of the set-up, to help them consider something that they did not see, or to stimulate a new interest; and
- include authentic materials that respect children as competent and capable; children are interested in using the same materials they see their caregivers use.

## TIME

The organization of time throughout the day will have an impact on children's interactions and experiences. Blocks of uninterrupted time, both inside and outside, provide opportunities for children to explore, make choices, investigate and experiment with materials, and develop ideas and relationships more deeply. Teachers may consider the following suggestions to increase engagement and provide opportunities for extending and documenting learning.

- Limit transition time as much as possible to preserve instructional time.
- Begin with a teacher-directed routine and invite children to co-create the flow of the day over time.
- Allow for flexibility and predictability so when children are absorbed, the clock does not diminish the learning in those "teachable moments."
- Provide ample time for developing friendships, persisting with challenging tasks, initiating activities, and cleaning up/securing works in progress.
- Respond to spontaneous, community, historical, natural, and cultural events by allowing time to participate in, learn from, and enjoy what is currently happening.

## INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Interactions with people, surroundings, and materials influence children's experiences and generate ideas for exploration. Creating an environment which supports meaningful connections, conversations, and relationships contributes to each child's well-being, sense of belonging, active engagement, and learning. Teachers may adopt the following practices to inform next steps for learning and create avenues for new exploration.

- Engage in authentic back and forth conversations by listening to children's ideas and asking thoughtful questions.
- Ask open-ended questions to talk with children about their discoveries and learning experiences.
- Hear and acknowledge children's thinking and value different perspectives.
- Model problem solving, a sense of wonder and curiosity.
- Try out and consider how children will respond to new materials, and plan how to introduce these to maximize the possibilities.
- Acknowledge and celebrate children's problem solving, acts of kindness, ideas, independence, etc.
- Use talking, reading, creating, and playing indoors and outdoors to introduce and reinforce new vocabulary.
- Make the thinking of individual children and groups visible by posting their questions, comments, and conversations in the classroom.
- Document, post, and revisit learning (e.g., annotated photographs, journaling, anchor charts of learning, etc.).
- Be a participant in the exploration and make your own (adult) thinking visible (e.g., "I wonder...").

### Questions to Generate Exploration

Tell us more about... ?

Why do you think... ?

What do you know about... ?

Why might... ?

## Reporting on Learning in the Exploration Time

By observing and recording children’s interests, personal needs and strengths, teachers are better able to guide children on their path to future learning and growth. By documenting children’s learning during exploration time, new and fascinating activities can be developed to help children stay engaged and interested in learning. Also, by reviewing documentation, changes in behavior or new needs can be identified and areas of concerns can be promptly addressed to resolve any potential issues. Reviewing documentation also provides an opportunity for children to be proud of their work and will contribute to their sense of success.

### ONGOING COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

While there will not be as much in-person interaction with families in the 2020–21 and 2021-22 school year, families can be involved by communicating as often as possible if efforts are made to agree on how best to do this. Electronic media and digital platforms<sup>2</sup> may increase family engagement because they facilitate more regular communication and will provide an avenue to share the documentation of learning. Sharing evidence such as photos, records of children’s thinking, and descriptions of ongoing project work and collective investigations, will support learners to revisit these learning experiences at home.

### REPORT CARDS

Learning in exploration time will not be evaluated with the 1–4 scale on the report card. Instead of evaluation of the outcomes for *You and Your World*, there will be an anecdotal space for teachers to:

- describe children’s engagement, interests, contributions, and initiatives;
- document the experiences and learning; and
- provide information about strengths and emerging competencies.

Reporting on language arts and math outcomes will not change although the outcomes in these areas may be reached or observed during the exploration time. This evidence will also be useful for reporting.

## Documentation of Learning

Documentation during exploration time can help to make learning visible and is a model of authentic literacy. The following are examples of documentation:

- descriptions (children’s words and teacher observations) of events and shared learning;
- collaborative recounts and learning stories;
- quotes from children’s interactions;
- photos and children’s drawings of works in progress;
- products, such as art work, writing samples, and photos of models, solutions, etc.;
- records of individual explanations and conversations about *why*, *how*, etc.; and
- records of friendships and acts of kindness.

<sup>2</sup>Please note: Privacy rules and preferences of families must be followed. Teachers should check district media release protocols prior to setting up a method of sharing information.



# Appendix A: A Sample Day with Exploration Time

## Prelude

In Ms. Clark’s classroom, there is a table where children can bring in and display items that they are curious about and want to explore/investigate. Last week, two children in her class found a feather and brought it to the table. A variety of learning experiences resulted which included the safe handling of feathers (hand washing, how to sanitize the tip with alcohol with adult assistance, and how to handle only the quill using tweezers or a clothespin), exploring a bird identification book, and observing additional feathers in the science centre with magnifying glasses. The class has spent time doing observations outside and in their neighbourhood for birds, bird’s nests, bird feeders and bird houses and had created a graph to record their findings. Ms. Clark introduced both foundational and more complex vocabulary using a graphic word wall to illustrate words in both English and French (nest, feather, fly, egg, wing, preen, soar, quill, plume, fowl, *oiseau, nid, voler, oeuf, and plume*). She also added the Mi’kmaq words **ga’qaquj** and **gitpu** (crow and eagle), and invited students with other languages to add words to the graphic word wall for everyone could learn.

It is important to note that this did not start as a thematic unit; it began because two children found a feather on the playground.

### Please note

This is a sample day. Sometimes there is no common topic of interest, and explorations are more individual or shorter term. These are as valid and valuable for teaching and learning as a larger group focus over numerous days. Curiosity and inspiration are an ebb and flow of opportunities.

## Ms. Clark’s Schedule

8:10-8:30   Welcoming Start	
Social-emotional Learning	<p>Greet and complete routine to settle in. Proceed to centres to connect and explore. Make sure to ask Vince if he was able to sleep last night.</p> <p>This time supports a gentle start to the day.</p> <p>The children engage with materials, settle in on their own terms, and connect with a friend before the busy day begins.</p> <p>The teacher checks in with learners as they enter and takes advantage of this time to encourage those who need help to start the day on a positive note, to engage in conversations to support oral language goals while learning more about children’s personalities and interests.</p>

8:30-9:00 | Class Meeting/Sharing Time

Social-emotional Learning  
Literacy  
Exploration Skills

Chart prep:  
Bird Observation Guide

1. Type of Habitat
2. Size and Shape
3. Colour pattern
4. Behaviour

Presentation: Jax signed up to talk about a bird he had observed in his yard. Fill in the chart and discuss the challenges with identifying the bird even with the aid of the bird book.

The sign-up sheet routine reinforces shared ownership for learning as children decide when they have something to present/share. This provides a record of who is using their voice in the classroom regularly and who is participating in other ways.

View [video about identifying birds](#) and discuss how birds may be different in other parts of the world. This is also dependent on the time of year.

**Ask:** Would it be desirable to take the next few days in class meeting/ sharing time to look at images of birds from different places? Think about which places and help me make a list today, so I can do some research tonight. (Post a list of places to look at birds at the door

Focus on places the children and teachers in the school have lived or visited.

9:00-9:05 | Body Break

Physical Education  
Exploration Skills

Think of a bird and stretch your body as though you are that bird. Breathe in deeply and quietly sing or make a bird call (repeat 5 times) while you transition to numeracy centres.

9:05-9:50 | Numeracy

<p>Numeracy</p>	<p>Warm up: <i>Notice and Wonder</i> pictures of birds from <i>Nature</i>. Use vocabulary and prior knowledge to ask questions and notice what they see in the picture.</p> <p>Mini-lesson (carpet time): Review the term <i>attribute</i>. Introduce photos of birds for analysis. Ask how they would sort the pictures by using one attribute. Model and describe the sorting rule. (e.g., beaks, colour patterns, wings, size, etc.)</p> <p>Guided groups and numeracy centres: Meet with groups A and E. Sort objects by using one attribute and describe the sorting rule. Use clipboard cruiser to note student work and progress.</p> <p>Numeracy centres:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pictures of sorted objects where students need to describe the sorting rule</li> <li>• Subitizing bird cards</li> <li>• Story bags that contain objects for students to count and sort</li> <li>• Which one does not belong bird cards</li> </ul> <p>The children engage with the math materials (including games and manipulatives) to build skill in the numeracy centres. Often these are assigned to ensure skill development is matched with need.</p> <p>Closure (carpet time): Give an attribute for students to sort themselves by in preparation for the nutrition break.</p>
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9:50-10:15 | Nutrition and Outside Break

<p>Social-emotional and Physical Well-being</p>	<p>Talk quietly with friends. <b>Discussion prompt:</b> With a friend, discuss your snack. Is there anything in your snack you think a bird would like to eat? Would it be healthy for the bird? Why or why not?</p>
<p>Exploration Skills</p>	<p>Outside for some running around.</p>

10:15-10:45 | Read Aloud

<p>Literacy (background knowledge for exploration time)</p>	<p>Read and discuss <i>Have You Seen Birds? (Ah! Les oiseaux!)</i> by Barbara Reid</p> <p>Focus question: What does the author do to get her reader interested?</p> <p>The choice of children’s literature will support planning to make the read aloud purposeful. The sharing of children’s literature is an important daily event in the primary classroom. Books will invite and extend learning and can be connected to and build upon the interests of the children. Select a variety of fiction, nonfiction and poetry.</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Although planned stops target key learnings, it is important to read children’s literature for the experience and enjoyment of the book. Rereading the same book throughout or on multiple days can be an effective learning tool.</p>
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10:45-11:45 | Literacy

Literacy and  
Exploration Skills

Full-class mini lesson on long e spelling pattern

**Shared Message:** *Eagles dive for fish and soar through the air. Chickadees eat seeds. Robins like worms. Birds build nests and lay eggs. Big birds build big nests and lay big eggs. Small birds build small nests and lay small eggs. Eagles and chickadees live here in New Brunswick. Like all birds, they have beaks and wings.*

Underline all words with a long e sound. Discuss the different combinations (ea, ee, v-c-v with ere).

This block provides time for mini lessons in reading and writing, shared and independent writing, and time for guided and independent reading. Mini lessons and reading groups focus on key concepts (phonological awareness, word work – phonics and spelling patterns, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension). Some days, the time is focused on explicit instruction and on other days it includes exploration choices.

**Guided reading:** meet with Group B and Jax

Complete benchmark assessment of skills with Shahad (letter naming)

Learning Centres

- Independent Reading/Writing
- Word Work: search books and list any words with a spelling pattern that makes a long e sound.
- Science: ongoing work on text projects related to birds (Materials: add pictograph of bird eggs today)
- Technology: use computer to research birds in [Worldbook Online](#)

Include clip boards, paper and pencils in each learning centre so children can jot down ideas, create designs of nests, or record questions for further exploration.

11:45-12:30 | Lunch and Free Time Outside

12:30-12:40 | Physical Education

Physical  
Education  
Exploration Skills

Game: “Here to There” from school wall to fence. Move from here to there like ducks, bald eagles, hummingbirds, chickadees, and *ga’qaquj*. Observe Sharon’s locomotor skills and Billy’s participation.

12:45-1:30 | Exploration Time

Exploration Skills

Exploration time will be rich with learning if routines and expectations are well-established. Role playing routines and co-constructing expectations improve the engagement and depth of learning. The invitations to learning are meant to inspire learners, but children may go in a different direction.

Construction centre – Materials: blocks, strings, grasses, and [video](#) (invitation). Task: Construct a home for a bird.

Imaginative play – Materials: cut outs from bird magazines/old bird books glued to popsicle sticks (I have found some images corresponding with Barbara Reid’s Book) and construction materials with place puppet shows. Task: open ended.

Science centre – Materials: bird identification books and other bird books from the class collection. Task: Create a non-fiction book or text that we can add to the class library or post on the bulletin board to help others learn about birds (e.g., rules for bird watchers, flight, bird homes, bird groupings).

Arts centre – Materials: crayons or pastel nubs for rubbings, coloured pencils, paper, Plasticine, 2 or 3 real feathers and tweezers (for rubbings or replicating in some other way). Task: use the materials to create a bird inspired piece of art.

Technology centre – Materials: iPad with Stop Motion app; *See How They Grow/Regard Moi Grandir about the Penguin* as an invitation to explore the life cycle. Task: create a fiction or non-fiction stop motion video/clips presentation.

Sensory bin centre – Materials: sand, rocks, feathers, plastic eggs, sticks and leaves. Task: explore and sort the objects in the bin by touching, smelling, and comparing the objects in the bin. Assessment opportunity: observe if students are able to sort using one attribute and record the evidence.

Other choices not necessarily related to bird exploration:

- FLORA modules to learn French
- Independent or partner reading
- Math games from the numeracy centres

1:30-1:35 | Tidy Time

1:35-1:45 | Music

Music  
Exploration Skills

End-of-day activity to wind down: listen to a chickadee and a blue jay (e.g., [www.bird-sounds.net/alphabetical/](http://www.bird-sounds.net/alphabetical/)). What do you hear? (high/low, fast/slow, loud/soft)

Clap what you hear. Can you find a steady beat?

Homework: Think about these questions: Is a bird call music? What do you think the bird is trying to say? Can you hear any birds from your window?

Farewell



## Resources

Depending on access, there are many ways technology could be used. Here are some helpful resources.

- [Canadian Museum of Nature: Bird Identification Clues](#)
- [Musée canadien de la nature : L'identification des oiseaux](#)
- [World Book Online](#)
- [The Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)
- [eBird Essentials for Educators](#)
- [Pourquoi les oiseaux migrent-ils?](#)
- [Sid le petit scientifique : Les abris des animaux](#)
- [Mi'gmaq – Mi'kmaq Online](#)