



John James Audubon

FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

ACTIVITY

For a classroom arts-integration activity, have students select a photo from nature

- Draw a grid of 1" squares on the surface of the photo
- Have students draw a grid on a sheet of blank paper. **This grid on the paper can be the same size or enlarged, depending on the size you want the finished drawing.**
- Draw what is in each box of the photo grid onto the corresponding squares on the paper.

John James Audubon was not the first ornithologist to create a book on the birds of America, that was [Alexander Wilson](#), but he was the first to take a more naturalistic approach to the representation of America's avifauna. Born Jean Rabin in Saint Domingue, which is now Haiti, Audubon was raised in Nantes, France, where he developed his love for birds, nature, drawing, and music.

At the age of 18 he was sent to live in America on the family-owned estate at Mill Grove near Philadelphia. It was here that he met his wife, Lucy Bakewell, and spent his leisure time hunting, studying, and drawing birds.

In the days before the camera or binoculars, artists wishing to study nature up-close had to kill or capture their specimens. Audubon was adept at the use of the muzzle-loading shotgun, and of the 435 birds depicted in his *Birds of America*, there were very few he did not shoot. His process, like that of other ornithologists of the day, was to kill, clean, pose, and draw. Where Audubon differed from other artists was in his belief that the birds should be shown at life size and in their natural environments, engaged in natural activities. These large, lively scenes were quite different from the small, static profiles that had previously been the norm in ornithological circles. To get his proportions correct, Audubon would set up a grid behind his specimen and then trace a corresponding grid onto his paper. This is still a great way to teach students about proportions in drawing.



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John James Audubon, *Wild Turkey Cock,
Hen and Young* (detail), 1826, oil on linen.
Photography by Edward C. Robinson III.