



Project OspreyTrack

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S4 – Bird Metaphors In Writing

Teacher Notes

Ospreys are stunning iconic birds which by the middle of the 19th century were almost extinct in the British Isles due to persecution by man. They are now happily responding well to the huge efforts of conservation bodies to reintroduce them.

It was not always that way and indeed during Shakespeare's time they were common all over Britain. So much so that he was able to use them as a metaphor.

Coriolanus by William Shakespeare,
Act 4 scene 7;

"I think he'll be to Rome as is the Osprey to the fish"

The metaphor highlights the power of Coriolanus and his true dominance over Rome. The fact that Shakespeare could use the Osprey as a metaphor must have meant that people in the time of his writing must have not only been familiar with the birds but also of their fish eating ways. They ate fish and therefore had power over them, as did Coriolanus over Rome.

Information about Ospreys, plenty of pictures, live video and other stimulus material is available on the website http://www.nhnature.org/programs/project_ospreytrack/index.php. and links to other Osprey websites are available on the "links page"

Thus a potentially dry and difficult topic as the metaphor can be made more real and interesting.

Extension ideas;

1. Other bird metaphors and their meanings....

For example in Samuel Coleridge Taylor's poem The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, the albatross is used metaphorically to mean a psychological burden that feels like a curse.

2. The meanings of old sayings and metaphors which use birds, such as;

Daft as a **coot**

Straight as the **crow** flies

Wise as an **owl**

One **swallow** does not make a summer

A **bird** in the hand is worth two in the bush.