

## Grade 4 Informational

### Bird Beaks

#### Crossbill

At first glance, the crossbill bird looks like a mistake. Its body looks normal. But what happened to its beak? The top and bottom parts of the crossbill's beak do not fit together. They cross over each other and point in different directions. You might wonder how the crossbill is able to eat with a beak like that. But the crossbill's beak is no mistake. It's a useful tool for getting food.

There are about 10,000 kinds of birds. Each kind looks different and has its own way of behaving. Each kind also has its own special beak. A bird's beak is an important tool. Many beaks work in surprising ways.

#### Spoonbill

The spoonbill bird has a long bill shaped like a paddle. The spoonbill wades in the shallow water of streams. Its feet stir up the dirt on the bottom of a stream. Then it swishes its open beak back and forth. When its beak touches a tiny animal, it snaps closed. Yum! The spoonbill has caught a meal.

#### Hummingbird

Many hummingbirds have beaks that are long and thin to reach inside flowers. One kind of hummingbird is called the white-tipped sicklebill. It has a long beak that bends like a U-turn. This curved beak fits perfectly into Heliconia flowers. Heliconia is said like this: "hel-i-KO-nee-uh." Without its special beak, the sicklebill would not be able to reach the delicious food inside these flowers.

#### Toucan

You may have seen the colorful toucan in a zoo or on television. Its brightly colored bill is hard to forget! The bird uses this beak to pluck fruit and insects from trees. Toucans also use their bright bills to find each other in the jungle.

That brings us back to the crossbill's beak. What could it possibly be used for? Here is the crossbill's secret: its beak is perfect for pulling apart pinecones. Crossbills live in forests of trees such as pines, firs, and spruces. These trees have pinecones. The crossbill slides the tips of its beak between the scales of a pinecone. Then it opens its beak, and the crossed tips spread apart the pinecone's scales. The crossbill uses its sticky tongue to grab the seed hidden between the scales.

Many other birds have unusual beaks, too. The next time you're outside, take a look at the birds around you. Study their beaks, and ask yourself how the birds might use their beaks as tools. You might be surprised by how many different bird beaks there are.

## Grade 4 Narrative

### Walking on the Moon

When I was in third grade, I got to take a trip to the moon. I remember the day like it was yesterday. It was one of the strangest experiences I'd ever had.

It all started when Miss Fritz, our third grade science teacher, was showing a video about the solar system and different planets. Half way through the video, I noticed a sparkling metal disc, about the size of a quarter, lying on the floor. I kept trying to pay attention to the video, but found myself reaching over to pick up the shiny disk that was next to my desk.

As soon as I touched the metal disk, something strange happened. I wasn't in the classroom anymore. I was hovering in the air, way above the school. I could see the whole town, or rather the rooftops of the whole town. I was a little nervous, but also pretty excited. What was happening? How could I be floating?

It was then I remembered the metal disk I'd picked up from the floor earlier. Did it have something to do with the strange things that were happening to me right now? I opened my palm and looked closely at the disk. On the disk were the words:

*"Floating through the air, like a helium filled balloon, your travels will not stop, until you reach the moon."*

The next thing I knew, I was soaring through space, dodging satellites and asteroids. Oddly enough, I wasn't cold and I was able to breathe just fine. Before I knew it, I was standing on the moon. It was amazing! It looked very different than Earth. No trees, water, or houses. There wasn't even any wind.

For each step I took I would bounce way up into the air. Every step I took left a huge footprint in the dust. I had to be careful and make sure I didn't jump into a crater because I wasn't sure if I'd be able to get out. Sometimes I couldn't even see the bottom. I was bounding over to something in the distance that looked very out of place. When I got there, I realized it was a flag. On the flag were the words:

*"To go to Earth, close your eyes and think of what you've learned. You will find in no time at all, you will be returned."*

I wasn't sure I wanted to go back just yet, but I knew it might get dark soon and I didn't want to be on the moon by myself in the dark. I decided to close my eyes and think of the weather and other characteristics of the moon I'd learned that day.

When I opened my eyes I was sitting in my desk in my science classroom. Miss Fritz was turning on the lights because the video was over. I sat there wondering about what just

happened. I opened my hand to look at the metal disk, but it was gone! Did I really take a trip to the moon or was it just a dream?