Eagle Nests
Learning about animal homes

Time Needed: 45 min

Ages: pre-k to 1st

Season: Any

Materials: A book about animal homes, art supplies, paper bags

Lesson Outline

I. Introduction to eagle nests – 5 minutes
II. Read story book – 10 minutes
III. Life Cycle – 10 minutes
IV. Create a nest – 20 minutes

Overview of Lesson: Students will learn about eagle nests and build an animal home themselves.

Standards
1.4.2.1.1 – Recognize that animals need space, water, food, shelter and air.
1.4.2.1.2 – Describe ways in which an animal’s habitat provides for its basic needs.
Background Information:

The average bald eagle nest is four to five feet in diameter and two to four feet deep. Each year, the adult pair adds one to two feet of new material to the nest. The largest recorded bald eagle nest, located in St. Petersburg, Florida, was 9.5 feet in diameter, 20 feet deep and weighed almost 3 tons.

Bald eagles typically build their nest in large trees near aquatic environments. The nest is constructed of interwoven sticks. The interior is lined with grass, corn stalks, and other material. The bowl filled with soft materials including moss (which may serve as an insect repellent) and the downy feathers from adults.

Once the pair puts the finishing touches on the nest, the female will lay up to four eggs. It takes approximately one month of incubation for the eaglets to hatch. Young eagles grow up fast! By the time they are 10 weeks old an eagle is fully grown – as big as their parents!. At 12 weeks old, an eagle is fledging, or taking their first flights.

More bald eagle nesting and life cycle information can be found at the National Eagle Center’s website at http://www.nationaleaglecenter.org/eagle-nesting-young/

Prior to Teaching:

Locate the storybook and other materials needed. Also find an outdoor location where students can gather “nest building” materials.

Lesson Outline:

I. Introduction (5 minutes): Have the students all sit in a circle so that their toes are touching. This is the approximate size of a bald eagle nest.
   a. Bald eagles hold the record for the largest nest ever built by a bird. It was more than nine feet across, 20 feet tall and weighed more than 3 tons.

II. Reading (10 minutes): Read a book about the different homes animals use.
   Suggested: Whose Nest? by Lynette Evans

III. Act out the life cycle of the eagle (10 minutes)
   a. Spread students out so that they have room without touching another student or desk
   b. Have everyone crouch down into a ball to represent an egg. Each eagle lays up to four eggs per year. It takes one month of mom and dad incubating the eggs for the eaglet to hatch.
   c. Have students start to stretch their neck and wiggle their arms. This is hatching.
   d. Grow! Students should slowly stand up to show growing. An eaglet is fully grown at just 10 weeks old.
   e. Student can start “flapping” their arms to represent fledging or learning how to fly. This happens at about 3 months.
   f. Once an eagle is 5 years old, they are ready to have their own nest and kids. They spend the first 5 years learning everything they need to be a good hunter and parent.
IV. Give students the chance to create their own nest (20+ minutes)
   a. Give each student a paper bag as a base – they could cut it, roll it etc.
   b. Take the class outside to collect materials – pinecones, pine needles, stones, bark. Make sure they know to take things only from the ground or dead plants.
   c. Using glue and other available art supplies, students can build and decorate a nest for a critter of their choosing.

V. Optional Extensions:
   a. Have the students complete a KWL chart about animal homes.
   b. Have students compare their home to the one they just built.
   c. Have the students write a story about the family that uses the nest.
   d. Have students draw the animal that uses the nest.

References:

National Eagle Center Frequently Asked Questions – Eagle Nesting
http://www.nationaleaglecenter.org/eagle-nesting-young/

Photographs provided by Eagles4Kids http://www.eagles4kids.com/
An adult bald eagle looks down on two eggs in the nest. Parent eagles incubate the eggs for about one month before they hatch.

Photo courtesy of Eagles4Kids.com
Adult bald eagle with two chicks in the nest. The eaglets are covered in soft gray down. These eaglets are about three weeks old.

Photo courtesy of Eagles4Kids.com
Two young eagles with a parent eagle on the nest. The young bald eagles are covered in dark brown feathers and are almost as big as their parents. These eaglets are about 8 weeks old.

Photo courtesy of Eagles4Kids.com
Young eagles are ready to fledge, or take their first flights, at 11-12 weeks old. This one is practicing flapping at the edge of the nest. 

Photo courtesy of Eagles4Kids.com