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For the Birds!
My Internship with Audubon New York

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Professor Colin Cathcart

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For the Birds!
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Mr. Audubon is a very extraordinary man. An acquaintance of half an hour enabled me to enter at once into his character and feelings. Divested of everything like pedantry, he is frank, free and amiable in his disposition and affable and polite in his manners. His engaging manner and mild deportment...enable him to accomplish many things which to another person would be unattainable; everyone appears to enlist at once in his service and to be disposed to promote his views...Mr. Audubon is the most enthusiastic and indefatigable man I ever knew. It is impossible to associated with him without catching some portion of his spirit (Rhodes 365).

Jean Jacques Audubon, who would later become known as John James Audubon, left France for the New World to escape Napoleon's growing army in 1803 (Streshinsky 5). His flight was one of great providence for the natural landscape and wildlife of his new home as John James Audubon would soon become one of the world's greatest naturalists and conversationalists. From a very young age, Audubon cultivated a growing passion for the environment and its creatures of all shapes and sizes. As he grew older, his passions became more specific, focusing eventually on birds in particular. His enthusiasm for all things avian created an influence and spirit that survived well past his lifetime and still lives on today.

During his initial, younger years in America, Audubon lived in a town called Mill Grove just outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Streshinsky 23). This would become the setting for his first sparks of interest and eventual love for the natural world. He spent majority of his days in the woods studying birds and observing their behavior while making notes and sketching them. An incredibly perceptive young man, Audubon's talents showed themselves clearly in his precision and accuracy for his depictions of birds. Beyond mere casual observation, Audubon began a process of catching and

marking birds with colored threads tied around their legs in order to see whether or not the same birds would return to their nesting grounds the following spring. Audubon's banded and tagged birds are believed to be the first to be observed in this fashion (Streshinsky 24). His bedroom soon became filled with stuffed birds that he himself had hunted and wired into particular poses.

Audubon's work undoubtedly has left an impression for many generations who learn and follow his years of study. The strength of his passion is such that it is felt by all who engage in his work, evident in the founding of The Audubon Society which opened their first sanctuaries in the United States in 1923 and 1924: The Rainey Sanctuary in Louisiana and the Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary in Long Island (National Audubon Society). Here, safe havens were created in order to protect birds as well as spread awareness about the importance of their existence. Today, these sanctuaries are also used as a home for injured birds and a refuge for birds that need healing. Among many achievements, The Audubon Society was also one of the first organizations to document the effects that DDT has had on the declining numbers of eagles in the 1960s (National Audubon Society). Certainly, the love that John James Audubon had for birds remains not only in this country but also the world.

When thinking about and considering New York City and its environment, birds are probably one of the last things that come to mind. With the tall towers, numerous people and pollution, it is any wonder that birds are able to survive at all in the urban environment. To the unaware individual, it may come to a complete surprise that Great Egrets, Red-tailed Hawks, and Yellow Warblers are quite notorious in New York City, and are actually thriving in the metropolis. These birds have adapted to the urban lifestyle

by building nests on skyscrapers and utilizing the small pockets of trees and green land as well as ponds and creeks New York City has to offer. Sadly, many of the other urban locals- human beings, are not aware or conscious of the birds that share this environment with them. Furthermore, many New Yorkers are not aware of how delicate their local feathered friends actually are; many human behaviors and actions can have devastating impacts. For example: when one uses rat poison to get rid of rodent pests, the rodents that survive later become food for a Red-Tailed Hawk. The sickly and contaminated rodent may end up poisoning the hawk that eats it. New York City certainly needs to be informed about the sensitivity of their environment and what it means to be part of a shared environment and this is one of the many goals that Audubon New York has in mind.

For the Birds! is a program regulated through Audubon New York intended to spread awareness and an appreciation of local environments. Most importantly, this program has given young students the key to a healthy and environmentally conscious future as well as the opportunity to engage scientific and naturalistic study. *For the Birds!* operates in multiple settings including the traditional classroom, local bird walks around their neighborhood as well as similar bird walks in green-hubs such as Central Park, Van Cortlandt Park, and Jamaica Bay. Students have also been fortunate enough to safely encounter birds of prey (an American Kestrel, Red-Tailed Hawk and a Great Horned Owl) up close. Throughout the program, the students were enthusiastic and motivated, nearly overcome with joy when myself and the programs education coordinator, Haley Main stepped into the classroom. My experience with P.S 28 has been absolutely wonderful.

The students at P.S 28, located on Anthony Avenue in the Bronx, begin each lesson in the same fashion. Every class begins with a thought provoking question such as, “What makes a bird a bird?” or “How are some birds different from each other?” With a fun opening like this, the students quickly come to attention and are more than willing to proceed with the lesson. Frequent participation is highly encouraged, inviting students to raise their hand and contribute their personal thoughts and questions. Every suggestion, comment, or point made, as well as answer, is written down in front of them for a clear visual to aid in retention and learning. The mode of visual is varied to keep attention, sometimes coming in the form of a picture or photograph around the classroom or a bird skeleton accompanied by careful explanation and description. The students are eager to learn this new and interesting material, as it is a break from their regular curriculum. Each lesson then ends with journal time that allows the students to write down future questions they have for Haley or I, draw pictures of a previously discussed bird, or simply record their feelings about their previous experiences.

For the Birds! is made up of a total of eight core classes where students learn about basic bird identification, adaptation and migration. The students also partake in a neighborhood bird walk, a pigeon watch and an up close experience with birds of prey. A video on a local celebrity, Pale Male, was also shown. They are taken on field trips outside of the school to nearby parks to observe different birds in different habitats. The program ends with students planting flowers and shrubs to enrich their local environment as a benefit for both themselves and the birds.

The lesson on bird identification instructed the students of P.S 28 about the concept of “field marks”. There are plenty of different types of birds in New York City

and the students were quick to learn how to go about identifying them. During this lesson, students were given a picture of a bird and then instructed to find that bird in actuality and identify it on their respective bird guides. The students took to this easily and were adept at learning how to identify various birds. They were instructed to take note of what makes their bird special from the rest: beak type, color, where it may be found, among other criteria of distinction all lead them to their conclusion. *For the Birds!* is an interesting program in that it starts from the “bottom” of bird watching skills and also utilizes multiple components of scientific study such as hypothesis testing and data analysis. The students were first taught basic recognition and how to distinguish birds using their field guide. The following week, they were ready for their neighborhood bird walk to see birds in real life.

The second lesson had students take a walk around their school block to discover the birds that were living just outside their classroom. Each student was given a field guide and bird checklist. Students were happy both to get out of their classroom and see birds as well. Perhaps most touching was that these students had never been able to do this simple yet exciting activity on their own. The students were astonished to discover the myriad of birds that were found living right in their own backyards. Pigeons, of course, were the only bird they had expected to see. Instead, the students found Sea Gulls, Cardinals, House Sparrows, European Starlings, and even a Red-Tailed Hawk, all from the sidewalks surrounding P.S. 28. It was impossible for the children to contain their astonishment and excitement, and expressed a sense of pride they developed for their own neighborhood. The children were seeing things that they only had imagined

could be found elsewhere. The miraculous perseverance of birds of all shapes and sizes in New York City made a lasting and deep impression.

The third lesson focused on the concept of adaptation. The students were taught about different types of bird beaks: seed-eaters, woodpeckers, hook-beaks and spear-like. The lesson concluded with the students engaging in a trivia based game where the knowledge acquired from the previous lesson was tested. Once again, the students were more than happy to partake. Two teams were formed and the objective was for them to discuss a final answer together before they gave their answer to the ‘judge’. All of the students actively participated and enjoyed the game greatly. Most importantly, the trivia game proved to both myself and the students that they had absorbed and understood the information from the lesson.

The following lesson proved to be quite an experience. I was now the head teacher and I found that teaching a class on my own was an absolutely wonderful experience. This lesson was on a bird all the students thought they knew very well: the pigeon. Beginning with a quick lecture on the different types of color morphs pigeons may have such as a checkered pigeon, a blue-bar, a red-bar, pied, spread, and white, the students were already discovering that there was much more to pigeons than they had ever thought to be possible. They had absolutely no idea there were so many types. One student made a comment, “A pigeon is just a pigeon” and many of his fellow classmates agreed. Although, the students were later in awe after learning that pigeons were once used as messenger birds during World War II. Students were also taught about particular behaviors pigeons may exhibit such as bowing (when the male literally bows his head and tries to win the attention of the female), tail-dragging (the male attempts to

show-off his tail feathers to the female), driving (where the male shoves the female from another male), billing (simply put, the beaks come together for what looks like kissing) and mating. The lecture ended, and the students were once again brought outside to go on a pigeon walk. Similar to the previous bird walk, the students were given a bird checklist, this time specifically for pigeons. Their neighborhood was packed with all the types of birds and the students were able to see in real life a majority of the behaviors discussed just previously in the classroom.

The next lesson involved some very special guests from the Theodore Roosevelt Audubon Society Sanctuary in Long Island. Simply put, some things are best learned up close and through experience. The students during this lesson were only a few feet away from birds that many had never seen, nor even planned on ever seeing. The first bird presented was the American Kestrel. The students learned how this bird lives in New York City during the spring and summer months but migrates to the southern United States and the Caribbean during the winter. American Kestrels also nest on the side of buildings. As previously noted, *For the Birds!* works in such a way that previous knowledge builds on newer knowledge and concepts. Students learned that the American Kestrel experienced adaptation by having black lines under his eye that are used to absorb light, giving them better eyesight. Next, a Red-Tailed Hawk was brought out. The students were quick to note that Pale Male, a notorious Red-Tailed Hawk in New York City, was the same type of bird. Now, they were able to see what this kind of bird looked like up close and personal. The students were informed that Pale Male has had a total of seven mates. Since Red-Tailed Hawks mate for life, Pale Male must have outlived all seven of his wives. The students learned that many birds are killed in the city because of

the actions of human beings. The reasons are endless: some are poisoned because of bad food, some are hunted and nests are sometimes destroyed. The last bird shown to the students was a Great Horned Owl. Again, the concept of adaptation was noted because of the 'horn' like feathers they have on their head for camouflage.

The field trips, which are presently continuing, allow students to leave their neighborhoods and see what other areas of New York City has to offer. Students have traveled to Central Park, VanCortlandt Park and Jamaica Bay. The field trips allow the students to apply their already learned knowledge from previous lessons. The students are furthermore given a rare opportunity to travel into wooded areas such as the Rambles of Central Park to see birds in a more natural setting. The field trips are perhaps the most appealing part of the program. Students truly are given the experience to feel what it means to be a bird watcher and see birds they had never thought they could encounter in their own homes. My personal experience in regards to the first Central Park field trip was equally as exciting for me as it was for the students. It was the first chance I have had to take a small group of young bird watchers into the field away from their local neighborhood. An ever greater variety of birds were spotted such as Blue Jays, a Double-crested Cormorant, and a Black-throated Blue Warbler to only name a few. The students thoroughly enjoyed going to sections of the park that they never knew existed such as the Ramble. There, as one student noted, the students did not the siren of an ambulance or a roaring truck, but instead, heard "music" from the birds. The students were also keen at spotting birds. Furthermore, they all showed impressive skills being able to identify the birds. There are many more planned field trips and hopefully my experience, as well as the children's experience, will continue to be positive.

The final lesson that is planned to take place will discuss matters of habitat enhancement. This capstone for the program will instruct students about the necessary quality of life many birds need in order to survive. More specifically, it will focus on the dilemmas birds must face in the urban environment. Surely, there are trees in the park in which birds may nest, which explains why the greatest varieties of birds are found there! The class lesson will teach the students as to why a green habitat is both important to humans as well as birds. Furthermore, this lesson will also incorporate the notion of bird migration and how important it is for them to have “green stops” along their journey. The students will then be faced with a pressing question: How can I make my local neighborhood into a positive bird habitat. The lesson will finally come to a close with the students partaking in planting of flowers around their school to provide nectar and seeds for birds, attract insects for the birds to eat, and provide nesting material. I am greatly looking forward to this lesson.

The *For the Birds!* program has also given me the opportunity to work in the Audubon New York headquarters located at 225 Varick St. Here, I worked on a lesson plan for this upcoming fall on global warming and its affects on birds (See Appendix A). I followed the general instruction and format of the previous lessons made by Haley Main. This however gave me another chance to act out another component of what it means to be a teacher. This project will allow students to discuss the matter of global warming and learn how they can contribute to the “going-green” phenomenon. I feel as though this project is very crucial and must be taught to students in this day and age. Currently, these children are bombarded with all of these concepts, yet most likely still do not quite understand what any of it means. The lesson begins with students learning key

terms such as “Greenhouse Gases” “Ozone” and “Going Green” and continues by incorporating this knowledge into its effect on birds. Penguins, for example, will lose their habitat and many migratory birds will become confused about where they should be and when. Their very existence on the planet is threatened. The lesson concludes with a Carbon Footprint checklist. Students are given a checklist and will discover how they much of an impact their daily lives have on the planet. It should be noted that this is in no way intended to point fingers or blame any of students and instead is meant to spread awareness and inform students how truly simple it is to help our planet. Every little bit counts.

For the Birds! is an incredibly special program. Many of these students do not have the opportunity to go out bird watching and appreciate the natural world that New York City has to offer. It was a complete shock for me to learn that many of the students that made up my group in the Central Park field trip, have never been to Central Park. *For the Birds!* gives these children an opportunity that they may never get. Through these lessons the students were engaged, attentive and enthusiastic. New insights were revealed as to the intricacies of the home in which they live as well as to the creatures with whom they share it. Hopefully, these children will continue to be curious and excited about the natural world and will use their knowledge to better the environment and to educate others in the workings of the natural and bird world.

The *For the Birds!* program is one that deserves far more credit than it receives. The program is excellent for instilling conscious awareness about local environments and their habitants in New York City. The program’s success really depends on the most receptive group, children. New York City’s children, who are

growing up in an environment that inhibits their knowledge and experiences of the diversity of the natural environment, benefited greatly from this program. *For the Birds!* truly gave children an understanding and appreciation for nature they may have otherwise never acquired under normal educational circumstances. This information inspired children to not only increase and expand their newly acquired knowledge, but also apply this information and share it with others toward protecting the environment. The *For the Birds!* program recognized this problem amongst inner city children and truly encouraged implementing more fun, educational, and useful attributes for these children to absorb, remember, and hopefully continue to pursue.

As mentioned previously, it was a complete shock for me to hear that a few children who only live in the within the city have never managed to make it to Central Park. Although this may come from a suburban bias, I am still in awe that children do not make use of their only backyard, Central Park. How could a child appreciate as well as respect the green trees of a park within New York City, should they have never had the opportunity to actually see them? Since this is such a critical issue, especially to an outside observer like myself, I am grateful that there are programs that recognize and actively seek to change this. In my personal opinion, all New York City schools should made a conscious effort to spread environmental awareness as well as appreciation, should the Audubon Society be involved or not. In this current time, environmental awareness is surely a pressing concern and issue. Being that these children will some day be the future of this planet, it is incredibly important that they learn these beliefs and values and this time of their life. Educational awareness concerning the environment must go beyond the reaches of *Wall-E*, a children's animated film in which they claimed

they learned a lot about the environment. Nevertheless, it was touching to see how these children quickly feel in love with the natural world. Although this was a positive outcome, it made me wonder about their parents' attitudes toward spending more time outdoors and learning about the environment. Additionally, if these children came from poorly educated families, what other influences in their lives (such as cartoons, videogames, and peers) may have prevented them from understanding and connecting with the natural world? I would hope that there are also outside-of-the-classroom programs that are aimed at targeting a specific child's interests and altering them to make them more aware of the environment. I remember as a child, there were more children's programs (such as *Captain Planet* and *The Magic Schoolbus*) that were concerned with spreading environmental awareness. Not only has the *For the Birds!* program made me question the influences for these children, but also for children across the nation.

The children made this program come to life. To be perfectly honest, I did not think that the children would be appreciative of the initial beginnings of this program. I felt extremely intimidated by inner city children, thinking that they would be sarcastic, uncompromising, and difficult to talk to about something they had little knowledge about. In fact, I expected a loud classroom filled with children who exclaimed that they were bored and uninterested. This was more difficult to alleviate since there are very few kid-friendly TV or games that the children would recognize as being environmentally friendly or conscious. Because of this, I felt like I was going to have to provide them with an adequate history of the program and it was going to fall upon deaf ears that would forever not pay attention to me or the program for the duration of the program. I was completely wrong. Since the first day, the children showed a genuine interest for the program and

the values it was trying to teach. This was prevalent in a lot of hand-raising, questions, interest in additional activities (such as field trips), asking if we could cover a particular bird or topic, and demonstrations. Furthermore, they had also shown an enormous amount of previous learned knowledge: not all concepts discussed in the program were foreign ideas. My previous ideas about their knowledge were completely changed on Day 1 alone. As the program continued, it was wonderful to start a lesson with questions pertaining to the previous lesson. The children did not forget what they had learned, implying the successful implications being made. Both Haley and I were surely making an impression. The children also exclaimed in later sessions that they had continued to notice “Bowing” behavior in pigeons, or that they explained to their parents how to distinguish between a House Sparrow and a Cardinal by taking into account of their respective field marks. These children were taking home their gained knowledge and in fact were spreading the ideology of environmental awareness to their own parents. Thus, the knowledge gained from the program hopefully made its way back into the children’s home. Moreover, there was a transfer of knowledge and interaction between child and parent. It would be really wonderful to create a program for both child, parent, and teacher to take more time to learn about the environment and help to spread awareness to others.

Finally, I must say how grateful I am to be a part of such a wonderful program. Not only did my knowledge of birds and environmental awareness increase, but I was also able to experience what it meant to be a teacher and see how much of an impact a teacher has. Additionally, my biases and all other expectations were completely evaporated – I may have learned more than the children during the course of this

program! I must say that the children of P.S 28 showed nothing but respect and interest to what was being taught. There is nothing more gratifying of a feeling knowing that you are having an impact. Being that my graduation is quickly approaching, this experience has led me to believe that teaching is a likely possibility for a future career. All the work that was put into constructing lesson plans and interacting with the children solidified this idea. The *For the Birds!* program was able to provide me with an experience I had been searching for the entirety of my undergraduate career at Fordham University.

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APPENDIX A: LESSON PLAN**GLOBAL WARMING
BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Our only home, planet Earth, has been continually growing warmer and warmer. Some scientists believe that the planet is getting hotter because of how human beings live their lives. Ever since the Industrial Revolution, people have been putting gases into the Earth's atmosphere. Normally, the sun's light passes through the ozone and atmosphere bringing with it heat. However, in a normal situation the most of the heat quickly escapes back into space. Greenhouse gases, such as Carbon Dioxide, create a blanket around our planet trapping the heat from the sun!

Greenhouse gases contribute to making the planet warmer. So what? What is the big deal if the planet gets a little bit warmer? Who doesn't love the summer? Well consider this example: An ice pop stays solid in your freezer at 32 degrees F. At 33 degrees F, it begins to melt and falls right off the stick! The slightest change in temperature can have an enormous impact on the planet. A hotter planet can result in melting glaciers, warmer oceans, extinction of plants and animals, and will hurt us too!

Of course, our planet is shared with many living creatures, such as birds. Many birds, such as penguins will become extinct if the planet continues to grow warmer. Other birds, such as the Ruby throated Hummingbird, will experience multiple difficulties when migrating due to the changing temperatures.

Although upsetting, every individual has the power to change his or her life style and help the planet. Through awareness and understanding, everyone can help the planet!

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GLOBAL WARMING?

Subject: Science/Environment/Math

Skills: Self-reflection, interpreting data

Duration: One class period

Setting: Indoors

Key Vocabulary: Carbon Dioxide, Carbon Footprint, Global Warming, Going Green, Greenhouse gases, Ozone layer

Objective: Introduce as a basic understanding of the concept of global warming. Students will learn how it affects human beings as well as birds. Finally, students will realize that they have the ability and power to help our planet.

Method: Students will first be given a simple activity in which they will become more aware of their own lifestyle that may contribute to global warming. Students will then be introduced to multiple aspects of global warming as well as how it affects the planet with all its inhabitants. Finally, the lesson will conclude by asking students ways that they know about how to help the planet. Teachers will then reinforce the students that they have the ability to save the planet!

Materials: Carbon footprint worksheet

Procedure:

- 1) Review previous lesson
- 2) Distribute Carbon Foot Print Activity sheet.

Instructions:

 - A) First and Second graders are to break into three separate groups. Each group gets one Carbon Foot Print questionnaire. In groups, students will work to see who has the least amount of points.
 - B) Third and Fourth graders are to break into three separate groups. There is one “leader” per group. The leader is to read off the questions and tally up points from the rest of their group members. The goal is to achieve the least amount of points.
- 3) Background Information – What is our planet called? **Earth**. It is our only home and we need to take care of it. Our home however is shared with many other creatures. A lot of scientists who have done research claim that our planet’s temperature is changing faster than ever. However, not everyone agrees. Some scientists believe that the planet’s changing temperatures are a natural occurrence. Ask students what we have been doing to the planet to hurt it. (Cutting down forests, polluting our waters, not recycling, putting gases into the air). The planet needs our help. Sadly, we keep harming it. Cars, factories, and electric power plants are not helping! They are putting

“**Greenhouse Gases**” into the Earth’s “**atmosphere**” and destroying the earth’s “**ozone**”.

- 4) Draw a picture of the Earth on the overhead. Draw the healthy atmosphere around the Earth. Without the ozone layer, there could be no life on Earth (Rose, pg. 16). However, the ozone, which is part of the atmosphere, is disappearing because of pollution! “Hole in the Ozone”. It protects us from the strength of the sun. Carbon Dioxide is the largest contributor and it may be our fault! Carbon dioxide is a natural gas, but we are putting too much of it into the air. Carbon dioxide is called a Greenhouse gas. Why? Because it keeps the hot air from escaping. Demonstrate and draw how Greenhouse gases get caught in the Earth’s atmosphere. Greenhouse gases are trapping the heat. Explain that the planet is getting warmer. An ice pop stays solid in your freezer at 32 degrees F. At 33 degrees F, it begins to melt and falls right off the stick! (David & Gordon, pg. 5)

- 5) So what? Who doesn’t love the summer weather! Ask students what would happen if the Earth got warmer. Many animals and people too will not be happy! A hotter planet can result in melting glaciers, warmer oceans, extinction of plants and animals, and will hurt us too! It may change our weather system as well.

- 6) How does this affect birds? The Earth is not just the humans home. We share this planet with many animals, including birds.
 - A) Emperor penguins – with the temperatures getting warmer, their habitat is being destroyed. They lay their eggs on sea ice: which needs to be strong enough to hold for the duration of time it takes their eggs to hatch as well as for the chicks to learn to live on their own (David & Gordon, pg. 55).
 - B) Adelies penguin – found in Antarctica. Today, they are traveling further from their nesting grounds (rookeries) in search of krill, their main source of food. The hard effort itself is shortening their life span (David & Gordon, pg. 57).
 - C) Ruby-Throated Humming Bird – this tiny and fragile bird migrates from Central America all the way up to Canada along the east coast of the United States. This journey is long and tough! They spend their winters in Central America. However, because of cutting down trees (disforestation) there are no places to rest!

- 7) Tell and reinforce to the students that they too have the power to help prevent climate. Every little bit counts. Explain the concept of “**Going Green**”
 Examples: Turning off the television and lights, turning off the faucet to save water when brushing your teeth, recycling, carpooling, planting a tree, using a reusable bag, picking up trash.

How Large is Your Carbon Footprint?

1. How did you get to school today?

Walk = 0 points

Bus = 1 point

Train = 1 point

Car = 2 points

2. Do you leave the water running when you brush your teeth?

Yes = 1 point

No = 0 points

3. Do you recycle everyday?

Yes = 0 points

No = 1 point

4. Do you turn off the lights when you leave a room?

Yes = 0 points

No = 1 point

5. Do you turn your computer off when you're not using it?

Yes = 0 points

No = 1 point

6. Do you bring your lunch in a bag or a lunch box?

Lunch Box = 0 points

Bag = 1 point

7. How often do you shower a day?

Once a day = 1 point

Twice a day = 2 points

Three times a day = 3 points

8. Have you ever planted a tree?

Yes = 0 points

No = 1 point

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

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