



## Build a Wildlife Blind

**Grade Level:** Upper Elementary and Middle School

**Concept:** Wildlife photographers and researchers often use blinds to hide from the wildlife they are observing.

**Subjects:** Science, engineering

**Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- Use the design process to design and build a wildlife blind to observe wild animals in their schoolyard.

**Teacher's Notes:**

- A **wildlife blind** is a structure built to hide from the wild animals you want to observe.
- This lesson uses the **design process** presented by the Next Generation Science Standards and has three main components: define, develop solutions, and optimize.

**Summary:** Throughout his years as a wildlife photographer Karl Maslowski built **blinds** to hide himself from the wildlife he was trying to photograph. His structures were usually made a variety of materials, including wood and nails, and were sometimes built to towering heights. After observing some of Maslowski's blinds in the *Wildlife Photographer* film, elementary students can build their own simple wildlife blinds facing a natural area in the schoolyard to create a hideout in which they can observe and photograph wild animals.

**Materials:**

- *Karl Maslowski Photo Slide Show*  
[https://voyageurmedia.org/portfolio/km\\_edu\\_slideshow/](https://voyageurmedia.org/portfolio/km_edu_slideshow/)
- Film clips from *Wildlife Photographer*, *The Life of Karl Maslowski*:
  - *An Introduction to Karl Maslowski*, (1:29 min)  
<https://vimeo.com/687651671>
  - *Wildlife Blinds*, 4 combined clips (4:40 minutes),  
<https://vimeo.com/687649286>
- Various building materials safe for student use, such as:
  - Cardboard boxes (large appliance boxes work well)
  - Folding chairs
  - Trash bags for covering the floor
  - Duct tape
  - Brown or green tarps
  - Camouflage fabric
  - Scissors
  - Clothespins
  - Sticks
  - Leaves
  - Binoculars (optional)
  - Camera (optional)

**Safety Note:** Students should build their wildlife blinds on the ground with materials that are safe for them to use. Adult supervision required.

**Introduction:**

Show students the Karl Maslowski Photo Slide Show featuring wildlife photographs taken by Karl Maslowski. Ask questions such as,

? What do you notice about these photographs?

? What do you wonder about them?

? Where do you think these photographs were taken?

? What do wild animals usually do when they see humans?

? How do you think the photographer was able to get these up-close photographs of these wild animals? (Students may guess that the photographer had to hide, stay still, and be quiet in order to take these photographs.)

? Have you ever taken a photograph of a wild animal?

Tell students that all of these photographs were taken by wildlife photographer, Karl Maslowski. When Maslowski was starting out, cameras were big, bulky, and took a lot of skill to use. And photographs of wildlife were rare. Karl Maslowski's dedication to capturing and sharing photographs with people brought them up-close with wildlife in a way they hadn't experienced before. Show students the following film clip, *An Introduction to Karl Maslowski* (1:29 min)

<https://vimeo.com/687651671>

**Procedure:**

1. Show students the following clip from the film, *Wildlife Photographer: The Life of Karl Maslowski*, to observe how he used blinds to hide from the wildlife he was photographing.

*Wildlife Blinds*, 4 combined clips (4:40 minutes), <https://vimeo.com/687649286>

2. Choose a natural area in your schoolyard to observe wildlife. (If you do not have a natural area, you could create a space to draw in wildlife by setting up a bird feeder station.) Take students to the natural area and tell them that they are going to have the opportunity to build a wildlife blind to hide in so that they can observe the wild animals in that area. As you look around the natural area, ask questions, such as:

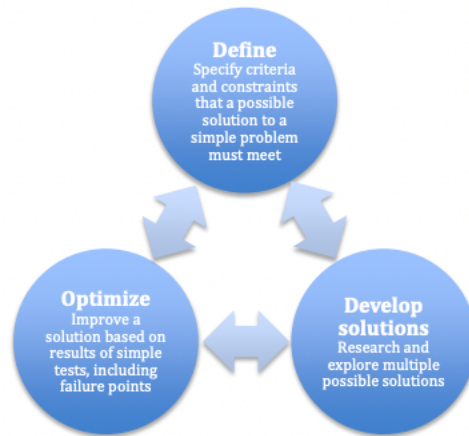
? Where would you place a wildlife blind?

? What would you use to build it?

? What would be colors of materials would be best?

? What kind of openings would you create to view the animals?

3. Tell students that when designing a solution, it is helpful to use the **Design Process**. Share the graphic below, which can be downloaded [here](#).



[Next Generation Science Standards, Appendix I, p. 4, April 2013.](#)

Introduce each part of the Design Process and guide students through each step.

**Define:** Ask students guiding questions, such as,

? What is the problem we are trying to solve? (We are trying to observe wild animals, but they will run away if they see or hear us.)

? What *criteria* would make this wildlife blind successful? (It will blend in with the area.

Then animals won't notice it. It will allow us to see the animals. It will not fall down. A few people will be able to fit inside at a time.)

? What *constraints* are we working under? (We can't use nails or wood. We can only use materials provided by or approved by the teacher.)

Show students the building materials you have collected and allow them to bring in additional materials if necessary.

**Develop Solutions:** Have students sketch their ideas in small groups and then share them with the whole class. See the "Resources" section below for YouTube videos and books that might inspire your students' wildlife blind design. Then the class can select ideas to incorporate into a final design.

**Optimize:** Have students begin testing their design ideas. For example, they might test a few ideas for a frame (e.g., cardboard box, folding chairs) to hold up a tarp and see which one works best. Have different teams of students work on different tasks when building their final design, such as:

- Creating the frame
- Lining the "floor" with trash bags or tarps
- Creating lookout holes at various levels
- Providing bait and water to attract wildlife
- Gathering leaves and sticks for camouflage
- Making a sign to explain the purpose of the structure to other students, including tips for wildlife viewing

4. When students have finished the blind, create a schedule that allows small groups to use the blind to observe wildlife. Discuss how to behave in the blind to optimize wildlife viewing – be still and quiet. You may want to provide binoculars, cameras, or create nature journals for students to draw and write about what they see.

Tip: With an animal that might be especially wary of humans, you may want to place the blind far away from the subject and move it closer over time.

**Extensions:** You may want to follow-up with a lesson about how to take photographs of wildlife. See the “Resources” section below for tips from the experts.

Note: Students might not get the amazing photographic results that Maslowski did from building blinds. They will not likely have the minutes, hours, or days he spent getting to know his subjects behaviors and finding just the right moment to take the photo. However, there are lessons to be learned from this as well -- patience, the importance of location, understanding the life habits of your subject, etc. So even if students don't get amazing photos of wildlife, they will learn these important lessons.

## Resources:

### Websites

How to Make an Easy Bird Blind by Eco Elsa

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4VIGgILv6M>

How to Make Your Own Bird Hide from WWT

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMjOrc77UoE>

*Getting Youth to Focus on Nature* by Clay Bolt, The National Wildlife Federation

<https://www.nwf.org/Magazines/National-Wildlife/2017/June-July/PhotoZone/Photo-Tips-For-Kids>

Tips for Watching Wildlife from the Cincinnati Zoo

<https://cincinnatizoo.org/get-know-local-wildlife/>

### Book

*Wildlife Ranger Action Guide: Track Spot & Provide Healthy Habitat for Creatures Close to Home* by Mary Kay Carson, p. 16 “Wildlife Spotting Blind”.

<https://www.marykaycarson.com/my-books/wildlife-ranger-action-guide.html>

### **Academic Standards Addressed in this Lesson**

**Depending on grade level taught, the following standards can be addressed by taking the focus of this lesson to one or more topics below:**

#### **Elementary Life Science: Grades 3-5**

3.LS.2: Individuals of the same kind of organism differ in their inherited traits. These differences give some individuals an advantage in surviving and/or reproducing.

4.LS.1: Changes in an organism's environment are sometimes beneficial to its survival and sometimes harmful.

5.LS.1 Organisms perform a variety of roles in an ecosystem.

#### **Middle School Life Science**

LS2.C: Ecosystem Dynamics, Functioning, and Resilience

#### **Elementary and Middle School Engineering**

The Design Process