**Audubon, Art, and Student Achievement**

The students at Lake Park Audubon have been learning about their town and school’s namesake, John James Audubon. Students first looked to the internet and found information on the city’s website that said,

“Audubon received its name before it became a town. In August of 1871, an official of the railroad came here on an inspection tour and a party of friends accompanied him. The prairie was bright with wild flowers, birds singing, and water fowl swimming on the lake. Audubon's niece was so impressed by the beauty of the place that she asked, if a settlement were ever established here, they name it after her uncle, John J. Audubon, a nature enthusiast.

Later when the town began in 1872 with a hotel, Northern Pacific Railroad and a small land office and streets were laid out, they were given names of local birds in honor of the naturalist.”

The study continued with careful, close reading activities that encouraged students to compare articles and information about the life of John James Audubon. When the articles had been read, analyzed, and compared, the students then selected the method in which they would demonstrate mastery of that information. Some students wrote an essay, others created a wall display, another created a multiple-choice test, and many created trivia board games.

Together with Audubon Dakota and US Fish & Wildlife Service field experts, the students ventured onto the restored Minnesota prairie, located 1.5 miles north of the school. There, students harvested prairie grass seeds and observed birds in their natural habitat, just as Audubon himself would have done.The students returned to school and set out bird feeders in the wildflower garden, and have been tending to them as the weather gets cooler and food becomes more scarce for the birds.

Back in the classroom, students researched Audubon’s paintings (and looked carefully at the prints displayed at our school). Then selected a bird to paint- one, specifically, that would be found in the prairies of Audubon, Minnesota. The students again researched the features of the birds, then drew and painted them on large 20x24 canvases. They were thankful, as was their teacher, that they only had to draw and paint the birds. Unlike Audubon, they did not need to kill and stuff the birds so that they could see the birds’ features. Time and technology benefitted the students viewing opportunities!

This place-based, rural school grant, has provided the sixth graders with the opportunity to study the history of their town and school, as well as the conservation efforts of John James Audubon. Not only are they cognizant of the town’s history and street names, but they are also more appreciative of nature and wildlife that surrounds this special, little town.