



Read through the story of Ahmed and the Feather Girl by author and illustrator Jane Ray. At the end of the story you will find a template and some instructions to make a beautiful, colourful paper bird.





There was once a little orphan boy with big dark eyes.
He was called Ahmed and he lived with a travelling circus.

The circus was owned by an old woman called
Madame Saleem who was cruel and bad-tempered.
Ahmed was afraid of her.



She made Ahmed work very hard. He fetched firewood
and carried water. He swept out caravans and fed the animals.
He washed the clothes and cooked the food.

At night he huddled near the embers of the dying
camp fire and stared up at the stars, until he fell asleep.



One winter's day, Ahmed was picking up firewood in the forest. As he wandered, he came across a golden egg lying in the middle of the path. Where could it have come from?

Ahmed worried that the egg would get cold lying in the snow, so he carefully carried it back to the circus. He made a nest of willow branches close to the fire to keep it warm.



When Madame Saleem saw the golden egg she grew very excited. She snatched it up and locked it away in a golden cage.

From a distance, Ahmed kept a careful watch on the egg.



Spring came, and the days grew warmer.

One morning, Ahmed heard a cracking sound. The egg was hatching! He watched in amazement as the egg opened to reveal a beautiful little child. She uncurled her limbs, opened her big, dark eyes and smiled straight at Ahmed.

The circus people named the little girl Aurelia. Her hair was as soft as feathers, her eyes sparkled, and each morning, as the sun came up, she sang and sang.

When Madame Saleem saw the little child, she danced with delight. "We'll put her on show!" she cried.

Everywhere the circus went, people queued up to see The Girl Hatched From a Golden Egg. Madame Saleem counted in the money...

The Girl Hatched From a Golden Egg



Weeks went by and the circus moved on.


The little girl began to change and grow.
Tiny points appeared on her back and began to sprout
fine silken feathers.

The more beautiful Aurelia became, the more people
came to see her. The more people who came to see her,
the more money Madame Saleem counted in.



And every night, when he had finished his chores,
Ahmed lay down next to the golden cage, and he
and Aurelia stared up at the stars until they fell asleep.




A detailed illustration of a young woman with dark, wavy hair and a sad expression, looking down. She is behind vertical bars, suggesting she is in a cage. Several colorful birds are flying around her, and there are green leaves and branches in the background.

But as spring turned to summer, Aurelia grew unhappy. She could hear the forest birds calling to her. She longed to be able to spread her new wings and fly up into the sky.

Ahmed knew that he must free her – but how could he get hold of the key to the golden cage? By day it hung on a cord around Madame Saleem's neck and at night she slept with it under her pillow.



One day Aurelia stopped singing altogether, and Ahmed knew he had to act. That night, he summoned up all his courage and crept into Madame Saleem's caravan, where she lay snoring in her bunk. Holding his breath, he slid his hand under her pillow and found the key.



Ahmed ran out to the golden cage
and unlocked the door.

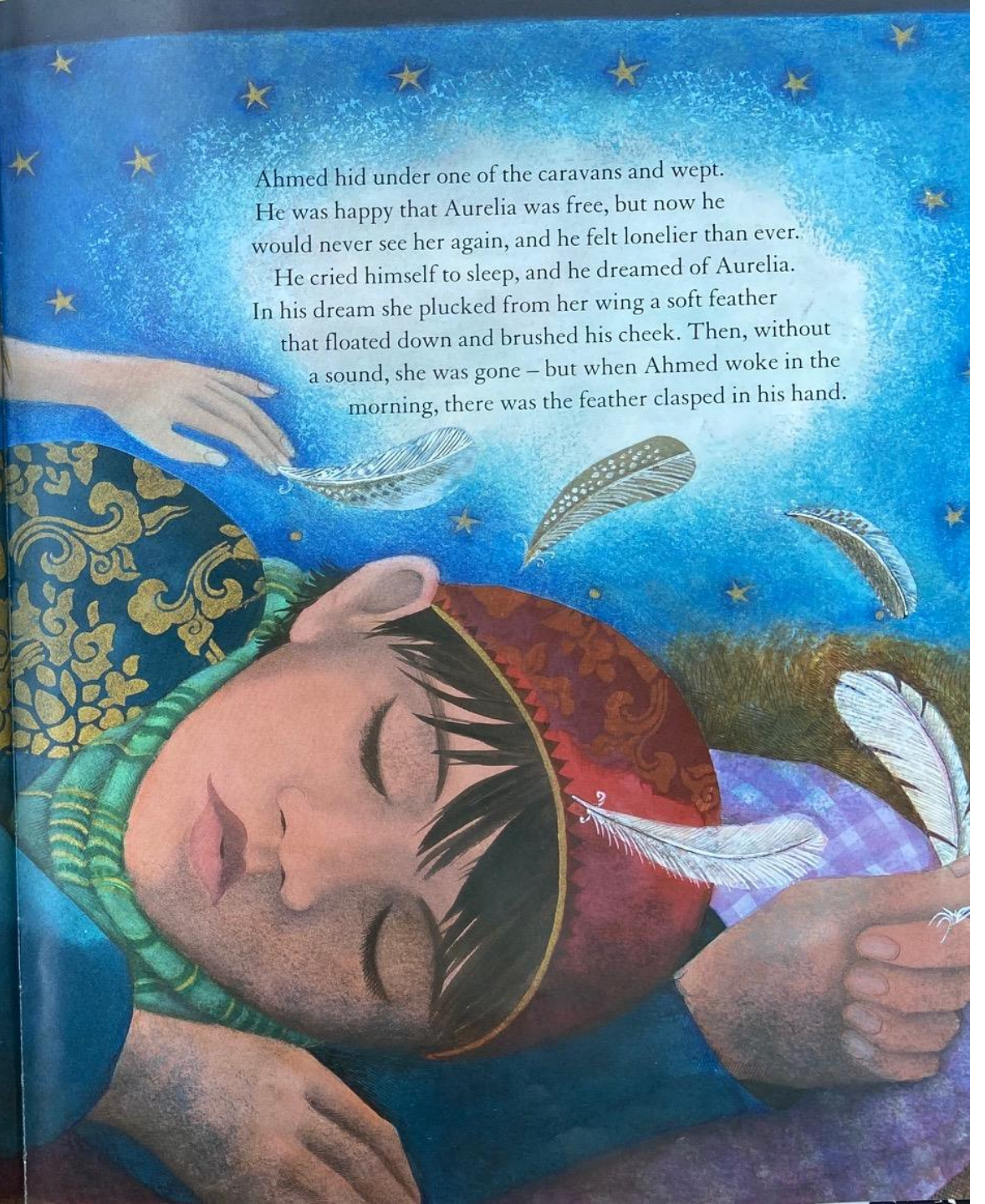
Aurelia felt the night breeze ruffling her feathers
and heard the nightingales calling. For the first time,
she could open her wings. With a deep breath
and a burst of song she flew up into the night sky.

Ahmed watched until she was just a speck amongst
the stars...



Ahmed ran to put the key back. But the rickety old caravan creaked as he crept in and Madame Saleem opened one eye. She shrieked and leapt out of bed, chasing Ahmed outside.

When she saw the golden cage was empty, Madame Saleem exploded with rage.



Madame Saleem made Ahmed work even harder as punishment for setting Aurelia free. Now he had only crusts and scraps to eat, and he slept huddled under a caravan. He was cold and hungry, and he missed Aurelia.

But each night he had the same dream, and each morning he awoke holding more feathers. He collected them in his tattered old blanket and kept them safe. They helped him remember Aurelia.



Summer passed and autumn came.
It was time for the circus to move closer to town.
Everything was packed up and the circus trundled
on its way.



One snowy night, as he lay shivering, Ahmed heard the most beautiful singing.

There, perched on the caravan roof, was Aurelia!

“Put on your feathers, Ahmed – it’s time to go!” she sang.

And Ahmed saw that all the feathers Aurelia had brought him in his dreams had become a soft, warm cloak of pink and grey, gold and amber.

He pulled the cloak around him. It fitted perfectly.



Aurelia took Ahmed's hand and gave it a little tug.
Ahmed found himself rising above the circus,
above the town.

He took a deep breath and leaned into the wind.



Together, Ahmed and Aurelia
flew through the snowflakes,
up into the dark night sky,
to the place beyond
the stars.

Paper Wish Birds



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We are going to make a beautiful, colourful paper bird - simple and fun!



You will need:

-  coloured card - thin enough to go through a printer, but not floppy
-  patterned papers (old wrapping paper, pages from glossy magazines)
-  scissors, glue stick, a paper straw, sticky tape, felt pens
-  ... and sticky dots (white and black) if you have them - not important!



STEP ONE

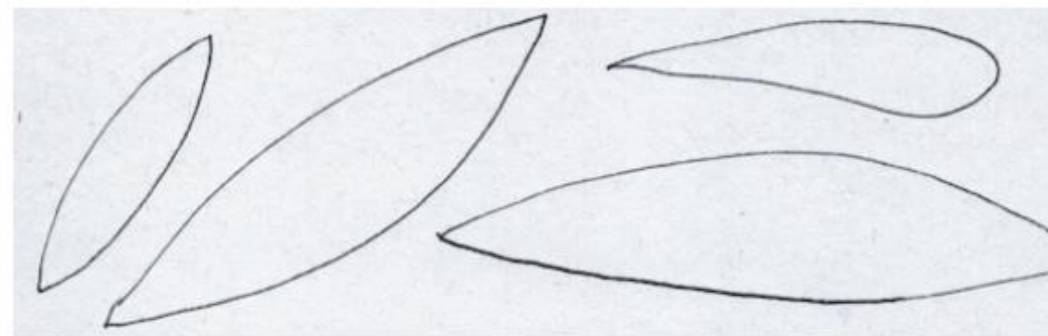
First print out the template onto card. Cut out the bird and wing shapes. Fold the wings in half along the dotted line. Then fold the opposite way along the unbroken lines.



STEP TWO

Cut out lots of feather shapes like this from the patterned paper.

They can be different sizes but between 5 and 8 cms long is about right.

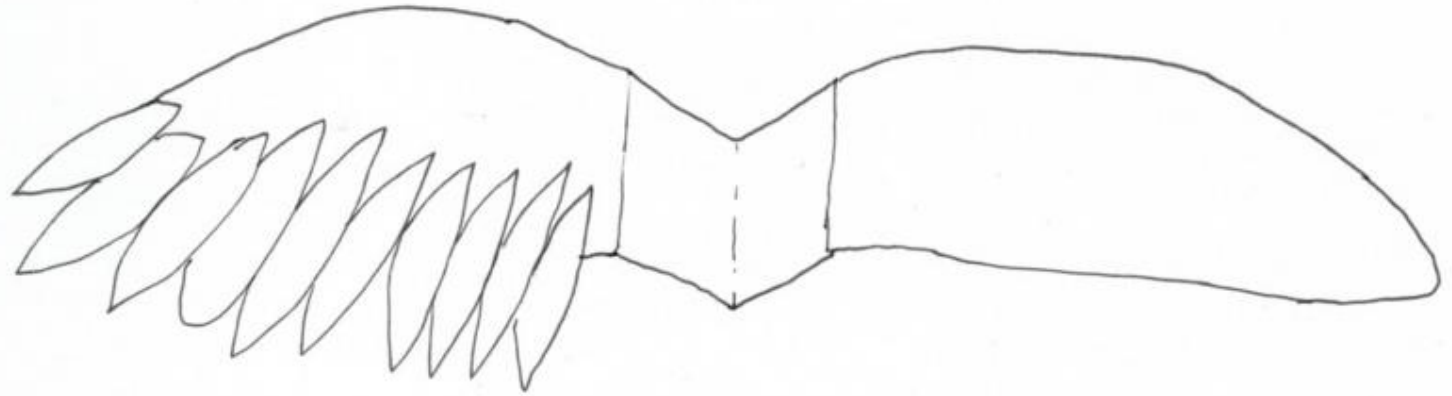


[Click here to download template.](#)

STEP THREE

Glue the feathers to the wings like this:

Make sure the fold lines are underneath the wings and the feathers are on top.

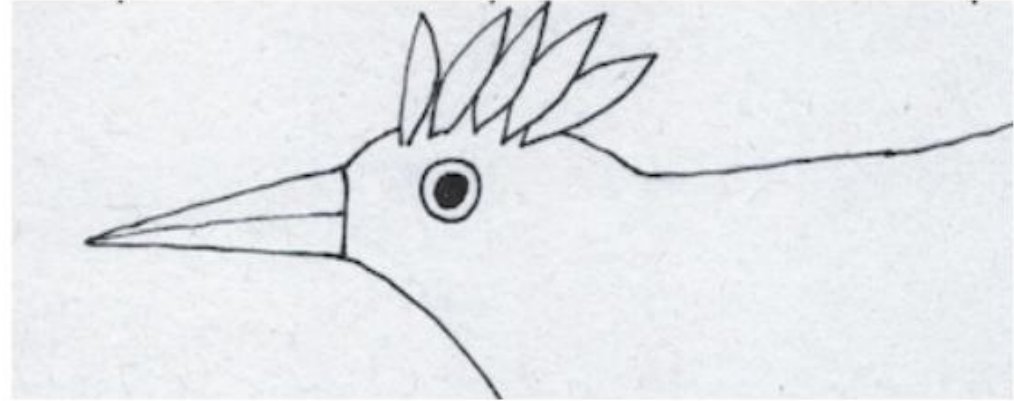


Glue feathers onto your bird's tail and head too, on both sides so that the bird looks good from the front and back! You can stick paper on the bird's beak or colour it with felt pens. And you can decorate the bird's body with felt pens.



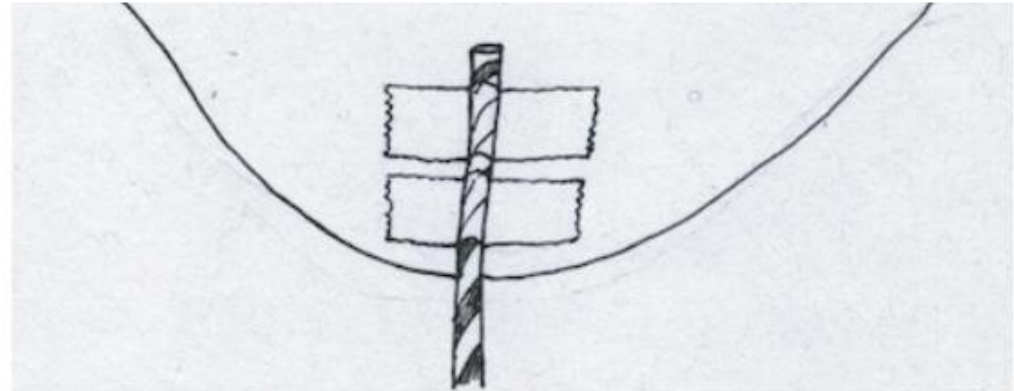
STEP FOUR

Add eyes - either use sticky dots or draw on with a felt pen.



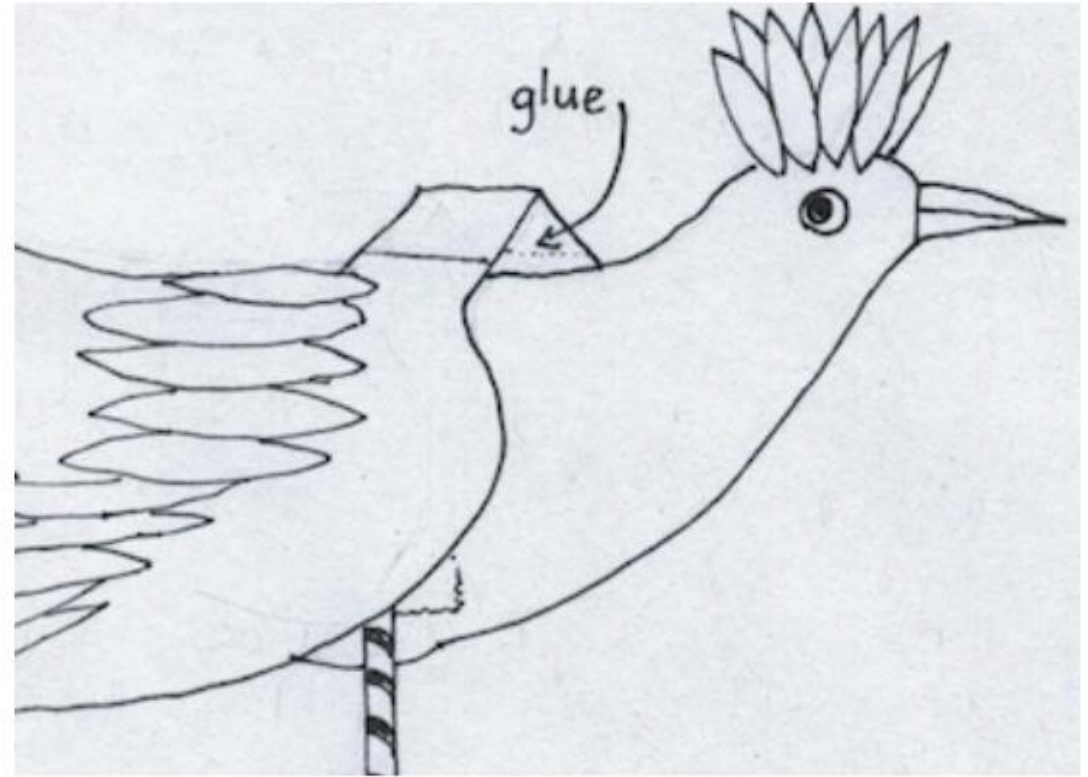
STEP FIVE

Tape the paper straw with two bits of sticky tape to hold it firm:

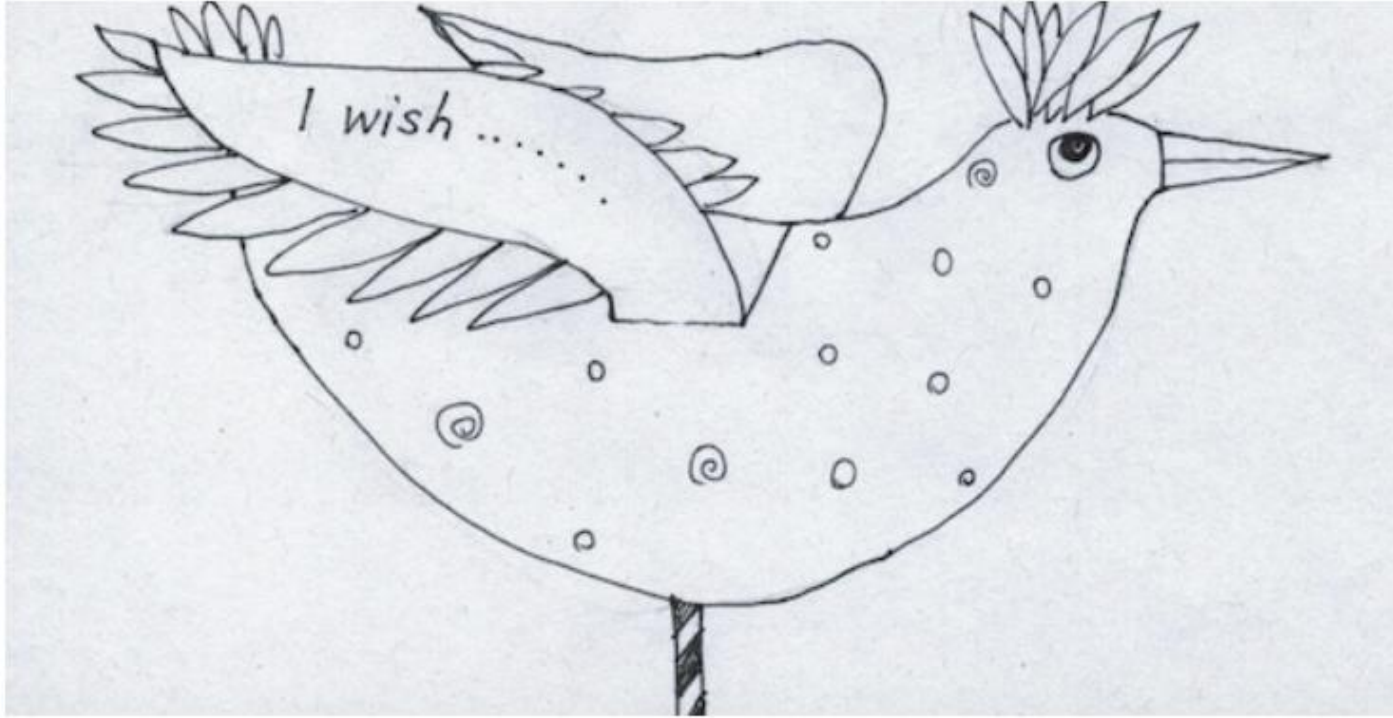


STEP SIX

Stick the wings on with glue like this:



You can write your wishes on the underside of the bird's wings!



Hold your bird by the straw and move it up and down - the bird will flap its wings!

