

# Bird Songs:

## Recorder is for the Birds!

By Amy Fenton, East Lansing MI

### Concepts/Objectives:

1. Explore using the recorder in traditional and non-traditional ways to create the “essence” of bird songs that are included in the children’s book *Birdsong* using such techniques as:

- Trills
- Flutter tongue
- High register, and learning to use the thumb to move up to the octave
- Using separate parts of the recorder to make other types of calls, such as using the body of the recorder as if it were a brass instrument
- Humming into the recorder

2. Recreate the story with narration, movement, recorders and props

3. Introduce students to a few North American birds

**Children’s Literature:** *Birdsong*, by Audrey Wood, Illustrated by Robert Florczak; copyright 1997; Harcourt Brace & Company; ISBN 0-15-200014-3

**Resources for the “Low Technology” version of this lesson---**The following three books are high quality bird guides that are printed in color. Each has an attached digital audio module to allow the reader to listen to the call of each bird included within the guide. All three are published in collaboration with Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Although they are currently difficult to find in bookstores, they are readily available in used condition online.

- *The Backyard Birdsong Guide* by Donald Kroodsma; copyright 2008; Chronicle Books.com; ISBN 978-0-8118-6342-1
- *The Bird Songs Anthology* by Les Beletsky, copyright 2007; Chronicle Books.com; ISBN 1-9322855-88-2
- *Bird Songs 250 North American Birds in Song* by Les Beletsky; copyright 2006; Chronicle Books.com ISBN1-932855-41-6

### Audio Recordings:

- *Birds of Michigan* – CD: ISBN–13: 978-1-59193-042-6 and ISBN-10: 1-59193-042-1; Copyright 2004 by Stan Tekiela
- *The Stokes Field Guide to Birds of North America* – Book with CD: ISBN – 978-0316-01050-4; Copyright 2010 by Donald & Lillian Stokes

**Website for the “High Tech” version of this lesson:** I use this website by bookmarking the specific bird-calls on iPads: [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org) . The website is run by Cornell University. You can read about, listen to and watch video clips of individual birds.

### Teaching Process:

As a nature lover and an owner of pet birds, I’ve always looked for ways to integrate these interests into my music lessons. Fifth graders at my school participate in the February Backyard Bird Count as part of a science unit. I have found that this assignment is

the perfect pairing for recorder. Not only does this lesson peak my students' interest in birds and their calls, but it also gives them a chance to explore using their recorders in traditional and non-traditional ways.

I begin the lesson by reading the book, *Birdsong*, by Audrey Wood, to my students. I then explain that I would like them to work in small groups to recreate the book. Each group is charged with recreating the "essence" of the bird-calls on their recorders, while also narrating and bringing the visual part of the story to life through movement.

In order to prepare my students for some of the recorder skills they might use, I ask them some of the following leading questions about how they might use their recorders and have them try the suggestions. I take the opportunity to label these techniques at this time.

- What happens if you switch very quickly from one neighbor note to another? (trill)
- What happens if you let your thumb leak just the tiniest bit? (moving to the upper register)
- What happens if you roll your tongue, like you roll an "r" in Spanish, while playing a pitch on your recorder? (flutter tongue)
- What happens when you hum into your recorder?
- Are there any other ways that you can create sounds with your recorder?
- How can you make sound with each individual piece of your recorder?
- How can you use just your airflow to control and change the pitch of your recorder?
- Can/does the speed of the air you use have an effect on the tone?

There are 18 birds mentioned in this book. I assign each group of students three birds. This plan allows me to have six groups with four to five students in each. To facilitate their work, each group is given a copy of *Birdsong* and a bird guide with sound clips (low-tech) or an iPad (high tech). They also have their own recorders and access to scarves and other movement props. The groups are given several class periods to create and practice their performance. The lesson culminates in a small performance.

**Listen to some examples created by 5th grade students:**

Click on the name of a bird. A box will appear asking you to choose an application for listening to the file. Depending upon your browser, the prompt may reappear for each bird.

[Rail](#) [Whippoorwill](#) [Red Tailed Hawk \(1\)](#) [Red Tailed Hawk \(2\)](#) [Bobwhite](#) [Kingfisher](#) [Cardinal](#)