



Bird Songs

Introduction

It's possible that birds may sing just because they want to, but for the most part, they are using their songs to communicate with other birds. Birds have a variety of vocal sounds they use to communicate in different situations. Kids can explore how birds use calls and songs to communicate and learn how to listen for songs and use mnemonics to identify the birds they hear and see.

Supplies

- Computer or other device with audiovisual display
- Internet connection
- Bird Journals (see Appendix)
- Pencils



Get kids thinking ...

Just like people, birds sing! They also use their voices to communicate in other ways. How do you use your voice? Why do we sing? **ASK KIDS:** Why do they think birds sing?

Let's get started!

In many bird species, both females and males sing incredibly complex songs, but in some species, females do not sing at all. Birds may sing to attract a mate. They may also sing to identify their territory, letting other birds of the same species know that this territory is taken.





Start with a Book: Bird Buddies Toolkit

Bird Songs

Birds also communicate when they make calls — shorter and simpler vocalizations — to let each other know their location or make alarm calls to warn of danger approaching, perhaps a hawk in the area. Each song is specific to a species, so you can identify a bird by what it is singing.

STEP 1: Play the videos below for each bird (or choose others if you prefer):

AMERICAN ROBIN

allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Robin/sounds

BARRED OWL

allaboutbirds.org/guide/Barred_Owl/sounds

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black-capped_Chickadee/sounds

MOURNING DOVE

allaboutbirds.org/guide/Mourning_Dove/sounds

STEP 2: HAVE KIDS WATCH AND LOOK AND LISTEN FOR:

- the size, shape, and color of the bird
- what the bird is doing in the video
- the sounds the bird is making





Start with a Book: Bird Buddies Toolkit

Bird Songs

STEP 3: Play the sound for the video again (without showing kids the screen) or some of the audio files found on the same page, letting kids know which bird they are listening to. ASK KIDS to listen carefully and describe each of the birds' songs or calls in their Bird Journal.

STEP 4: Now see if kids can identify the bird just by hearing the song of that bird. Use a different audio file than before and have kids close their eyes and listen. After each file ends, ask kids to offer their identifications by raising their hand when you say the name of the bird they think they heard. Discuss how successful kids were at identifying birds with just their ears.

Sometimes it is easier to remember bird songs by using mnemonics — a memory tool. Birders often come up with phrases or sounds in their own language to help remember bird songs. Mnemonic phrases follow the same rhythm birds use and need to be catchy to help people remember them.



Sample of bird sound mnemonics (© Bird and Moon)

STEP 5: SHARE THESE MNEMONICS FOR THE BIRDS YOU LISTENED TO EARLIER:

American Robin: *Cheery up, Cheerio! Cheery up, Cheerio!*

Barred Owl: *Who cooks for you? Who cooks for yooou-allll?*

Black-capped Chickadee: *Chick-a-dee-dee-dee. Chick-a-dee-dee-dee*

Mourning Dove: *Hooo-ah hoo-hoo-hoo*

ASK KIDS: Are these mnemonics good representations of the sounds the birds make? Would they help you remember the bird's song? Share additional English-language mnemonics for other birds:





Start with a Book: Bird Buddies Toolkit

Bird Songs

BIRD SOUND MNEMONICS: EASTERN BIRD SOUNDS (BIRD AND MOON)

birdandmoon.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/birdsounds.jpg

BIRD SOUND MNEMONICS: WESTERN BIRD SOUNDS (BIRD AND MOON)

birdandmoon.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/birdsoundswest.jpg

MNEMONIC BIRD SONGS (SOUTH BAY BIRDERS UNLIMITED)

web.stanford.edu/~kendric/birds/birdsong.html

STEP 6: After kids review the phrases, let them look up some of the birds online or use a bird identification app and **listen to the songs of birds they are interested in**. Ask them to write down the bird name and mnemonic in their Bird Journal if the mnemonic works for them. If they can think of a better mnemonic or one in a language they prefer, have them include their version in their Bird Journal.

STEP 7: To conclude, you can play a variety of bird songs and **let kids invent their own mnemonics and drawings** similar to the Bird and Moon comic mnemonics.

More bird song activities

BIRD COMMUNICATION (THE CORNELL LAB)

birds.cornell.edu/k12/bird-communication/

SONGBIRD SONGS – ACTIVITIES (NEARBY NATURE)

nearbynature.fwni.org/2018/09/09/songbird-songs-activities/

