



A DAWN CHORUS

All animals have developed ways to communicate with individuals of their own **species** and other animals with which they come in contact. In our own daily lives, pets make their needs clear through vocalizations and body language. A dog wags its tail, barks or growls. People learn to interpret and respond to these communications.

In the bird world, the most obvious signs of communication are through songs and calls. Birds sing to attract a mate, to continue the pair bonding that is required during the breeding season, to help delineate their nesting or feeding territory, and to warn competitors not to intrude. Bird calls are usually single notes that convey information about a bird's specific needs or concerns: the begging calls of **nestlings**, the alarm note of a bird that detects a **predator**, the insistent chirps of a bird that is defending its territory, or the flight call of a migrating bird.



BASIC CONCEPTS

- ☞ Animals communicate with each other.
- ☞ Birds communicate through songs and calls.
- ☞ Each bird species has its own song or call.

PROCESS SKILLS

Communicating, observing, classifying, inferring, identifying variables, experimenting.

MATERIALS

- bird song sheet (Figure 10)
- cassette recorder
- blank cassette
- bird song tape or CD (optional)
- bird pictures

PREPLANNING

Collect and mount pictures of the birds used in Figure 10.

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

Lead the students in a discussion concerning the ways people communicate with each other about the events in their lives. Ask the students the following:

1. How do you introduce yourself? (Students say name.)
2. Why don't we all have the same name? [Analyzes relationships and makes inferences.]
3. How would you warn someone of danger? (shout, yell, scream) [Applies understanding to practical situation.]
4. Show how you would protect your favorite toy from a thief. (aggressive behavior)

If people communicate different messages in different ways, what messages might a bird want to communicate? (They identify themselves; they warn of danger, and they defend and delineate territory.) [Discriminates and makes inferences.]

PROCEDURE

1. Tell the class that many birds like to sing in the morning and we call this "dawn chorus." As a class they are going to learn some bird songs and create a dawn chorus.
2. Divide the class into groups. Each group will represent a different bird. If working with very young students select only two or three birds for the entire class.
3. Show the students a picture of a bird, imitate its song, and have the students practice the song as a class.
4. Give each group a picture of one bird, imitate its song, and have the students repeat the song (see sample bird songs, Figure 10). Have students practice their songs. [Demonstrates understanding by imitation.]
5. Tell the students that a dawn chorus starts softly (predawn), gets louder (at dawn and shortly afterwards), then gets soft again (as the heat of the day sets in).
6. Arrange the students in a half circle. Explain to them that as you point to each of them, they are to begin their songs and continue until you point to them again.
7. Practice the songs. Have the entire group "sing" for about 10 seconds, then begin pointing to the students to stop.
8. Repeat the songs. Record the chorus on a cassette.



NEW JERSEY
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Putting It All Together

? Do birds actually say words when they sing? (No. People have given human words to some birds' songs to help them remember.) [Distinguishes between fact and anthropomorphisms.]

? Why do birds sing? (Birds sing to communicate with other birds and animals.) [Demonstrates understanding by listing examples.]

? Why don't all birds have the same song? (Each species of bird has its own song so it is better able to communicate with its own species.) [Draws inferences.]

Take Another Step

✓ Ask the students to listen to the bird songs around the school yard or their homes. See if they can recognize any of the ones used in the "dawn chorus".

✓ Listen to the "real" song of the birds used in the activity. Bird tapes and CDs are available in some libraries and can be purchased through NJ Audubon Society. There are also numerous "mood" tapes that include bird songs. The Dawn Chorus tape can be purchased from NJAS Department of Education.

✓ Find out how other animals communicate.

✓ Research one of the birds in the Dawn Chorus. Find out what food it eats, where it nests, and some unique adaptation or behavior.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Walton, Richard K. and Robert W. Lawson. *Peterson Field Guides: Backyard Bird Song*.

Elliott, Lang and Marie Read. *Common Birds and Their Songs* (book and CD).

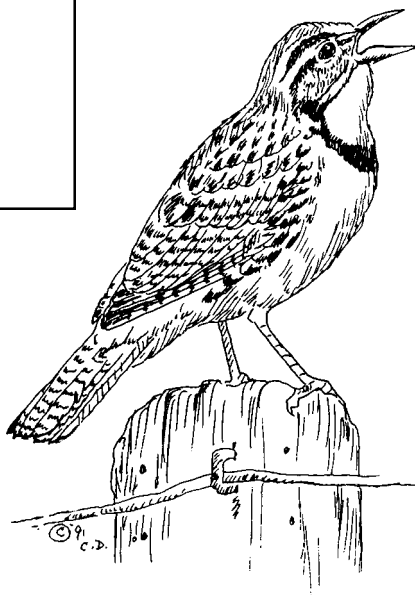
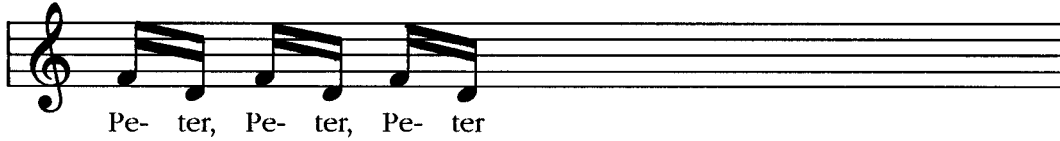


Figure 10 - Bird Songs

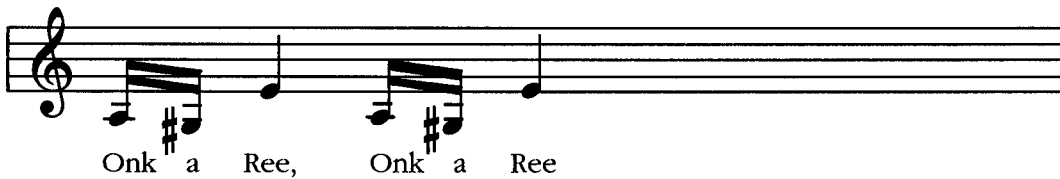
Tufted Titmouse



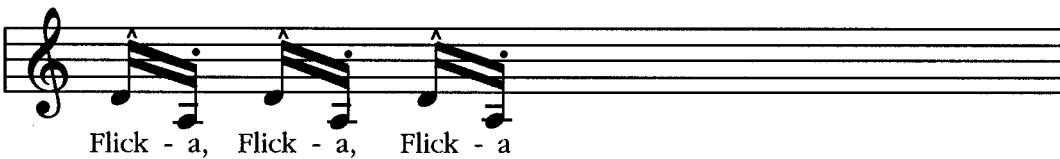
Northern Cardinal



Red-winged Blackbird



Yellow-shafted Flicker



Blue Jay



Black-capped Chickadee



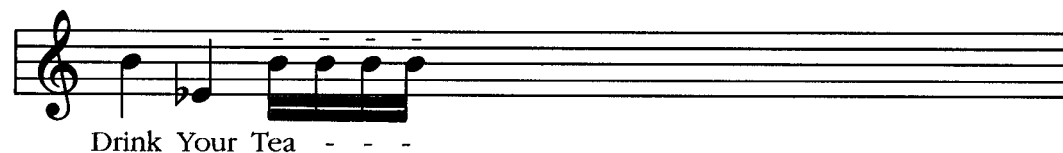
American Goldfinch (Eastern)



White-throated Sparrow



Rufous-sided Towhee



Indigo Bunting



American Robin



Red-eyed Vireo



American (Common) Crow



White-breasted Nuthatch



Gray Catbird



Ovenbird



Common Yellowthroat

