



Name that Tune



Objectives: To investigate how birds communicate and to identify birds by their songs and calls

Time: Variable

Materials: Audubon Plush birds with sound or Internet access, Birdsong and Characteristics worksheet, Mnemonics worksheet, pencils, and any Bird Field Guide. *Peterson First Guide to Birds of North America* is a great resource for students that are first learning to identify birds (ISBN-10: 0395906660).

Before beginning this activity, familiarize yourself with websites that offer birdsongs or calls from local birds that are found in your area. Use a bird book to determine which birds are commonly found in your area at this time of the year. A good resource for bird songs is <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/search>

Discuss with the students the differences between a bird call and bird song. Bird songs are recognizable, repeatable melodies that are almost always sung by the male bird. Males sing to attract females in the spring for mating purposes. Males also sing to defend territories. Bird calls by comparison are not as complex as songs, and both sexes call. Calls have many different purposes such as expressing alarm, maintaining contact and communicating to other birds the location of food.

Divide the students into groups and have them take one of the Audubon Plush birds. Have them record the name of the bird on their worksheet. Play the bird's call several times and record how the bird sounds on their worksheet. Have the students look up the name of their bird on the Mnemonics worksheet and record the correct Mnemonic.

What field marks does their bird have? Field marks are something that stands out about their bird that they would recognize if their bird flew over while they were standing there watching. How big is their bird in centimeters? What is the bird's habitat? Use a field guide to answer these questions for each bird.

Place the Audubon Plush birds in a pillowcase and have a student reach in and squeeze one of the birds. The goal is to see if they can correctly identify the bird only by the hearing the song. Ornithologists correctly identify 95% of the birds that they hear in the field by song and call alone.

Extension: After you have completed these tasks, take your students on a short field walk. Listen for the birds your students have identified in class. Use the mnemonic tricks that you have learned to help you identify the birds you are hearing.

