

Using Head Voice with Young Children

By Wolf Trap Master Teaching Artists Mary Gresock and Sue Trainor

Singing in Head Voice

Children have small vocal chords; because of that, their singing range is high relative to the vocal range most adults commonly use. On a classroom xylophone, find children's range from notes D to A. If we want children to sing WITH us, it helps to pitch songs in the range where children sing comfortably.

Explore vocal range using a slide whistle:

1. Pull the slide all the way out and blow – identify that this is “low” sound.
2. Push the slide all the way in and blow – identify that this is “high” sound.
3. Have children follow the sound from low to high and back, following high and low with their hands.
4. Put the slide whistle down. Let's imagine we all have slide whistles. All “play” (vocalize) a low sound. All “play” (vocalize) a high sound. Play low to high and back. Repeat. Put imaginary slide whistles away.
5. Pick up the slide whistle and play a high or low note. Ask children which it is.
6. Play a game: Children follow the sound of the slide whistle with hands, feet, elbows, and other parts of their bodies that they choose.
7. ADULTS: Notice that when you are vocalizing in the imaginary slide whistle segment, when you are in low range, you feel vibration in your chest voice. When you are in high range, you feel vibration in your head. That's called head voice. Let your voice slide up until you don't feel the chest vibration. Hold that note. Try starting “Wheels on the Bus” on that note.

Self-Check: When you sing, can you feel vibration in your chest? Are the children singing along, or is the sound they make more like talking, shouting, or whispering? Perhaps some don't try to join at all. Our goal is for children to use singing voice, which will achieve the greatest benefit in your lesson.