

Reviewed by **Karen Williams**

Birds

By Kevin Henkes

Illustrated by Laura Dronzek

New York: Greenwillow Books, 2009

Starting with birds singing in the morning, Kevin Henkes' and Laura Dronzek's imaginative picture book *Birds* delves into the colors, shapes, and sizes of our feathered friends. A tiny hummingbird, a pink flamingo, owls, seagulls, bluebirds, and others fill the opening pictures.

The primary-colored birds, simply illustrated in eye-catching acrylics, reinforce color identification for young children. Seven little brown birds on a wire seem to disappear when we turn the page, just as they do in real life when we look away for a moment. Yellow clouds represent birds flying as the sun sets. Birds sleep, heads tucked under their wings, under a starry sky. A barren tree in the snow harbors a single cardinal on a branch, looking "... like one red leaf left over." A mob of blackbirds crowds a large tree, filling the branches with dark silhouettes. They scatter all at once into the sky, startled into flight.

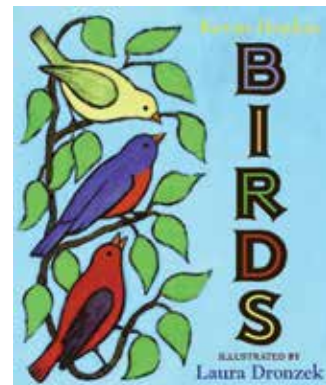
Dronzek paints fanciful swirls and loops representing the birds' colorful tail feathers in the sky as they fly. Children can vocalize, sliding their voices up and down, while tracing the curved lines with their fingers.

In other illustrations, flocks soar through the sky, perch in trees, and peck and hop on the ground. In a scene of a rainy day devoid of life, the author wonders, "...where all the other birds go when it's stormy and they can't get home to their nests."

The book concludes with a child flapping her arms, but unable to fly like a bird. Undaunted, she delightfully discovers that she can sing like a bird.

Birds extends easily into singing, playing instruments, movement, and drama. Insert any from a myriad of familiar bird songs throughout the book, or use songs as introductions, interludes, or codas. Try folk songs such as

"Bluebird," "Ah, Poor Bird," and "Three Blue Pigeons." Songs about weather are also applicable, such as "Rain, Rain, Go Away" or "Rain Is Falling Down." Allow students to use their voices to create bird sounds and whistles.



Barred instruments work well as Orff accompaniments to this book. An instrumental piece from the Volumes might serve as an introduction, coda, or interlude. Have students create a sound cloud to accompany the bird-shaped clouds. Try small percussion instruments to enhance other scenes, such as a gong for the birds exploding out of a tree, or a slide whistle for the swirl of tail feathers.

Possibilities for solo, pair, or group movement, dance, and drama for *Birds* vary. A child standing on white fabric holding a red scarf could represent the lone cardinal. Groups of children could morph from one bird-cloud shape into another. Enhance movement visually with colored shirts, scarves, ribbons, or large pieces of fabric. Colored ribbons can reflect tail feathers coloring the sky.

Birds is ideal for younger children. It reinforces classroom objectives such as identifying colors, counting, silhouettes, weather, and seasons, while providing opportunities for music and movement exploration in the music classroom. With more difficult music and movement, this book will interest and engage older children. *Birds* is an imaginative book that will spark your students' creativity. ■

KAREN WILLIAMS teaches PreK–Grade 5 music at Oveta Culp Hobby Elementary School, Fort Hood, TX. Karen is certified in Dalcroze Eurhythmics and the top level of Orff teacher education. She is the treasurer for the Heart of Texas Chapter of AOSA. In her 27 years in education, Karen has taught middle-school band, fourth grade, remedial writing to grades 2-5, and elementary school music.