

# Mocking Birdies

By Annette Simon • Simply Read Books, 2005



Reviewed by  
Marilyn Gunn

To sum up *Mocking Birdies* in a single word, it would have to be “elemental.” The illustrations are elemental with simple circles, triangles, and straight lines. The colors are elemental: red, yellow, blue, orange, green, and purple, but the book seldom has more than two colors per page. The language is elemental. The form is elemental with echo and question and answer phrases. Readers can experience the complete Orff process through this simple, yet elegant, picture book.

*Imitate:* Read the story out loud. Where the text echoes, through gesture, you can invite the children to echo. Use a different voice with each repetition. One page has the word “you” echoed four times. How many ways can you say “you?” Say it high. Say it low. Say it fast. Say it slow. Sing it. Whisper it. Shout it.

*Explore:* Now it is the children’s turn to make decisions about how the story should be expressed. They can explore all their many voices. Let them search for instrumental timbres that capture the essence of a conversation among birds and cats.

*Read:* The birds have their little dialogue on the wires of a power line. It is no coincidence that there are five wires on this line. Vocal pitch can correspond to the placement of the birds on the wire. These simple birds could easily be replicated to be placed on a staff for solfège reading. Speech patterns from the text may be rhythmically notated.

*Improvise:* Often the best place for young children to begin improvisation is through movement. Students could pantomime the action as the story is told. Let the children become mocking birdies, with a leader improvising movements, sounds, or words while the others imitate. Where the echo form of the

beginning of the book is ideal for imitation, the call and response form that appears later is excellent fodder for improvisation. Children may create their own responses to each statement. The teacher may play a call on a classroom instrument for students to answer. What if this story was about dogs instead of birds?

Music classes for young children are nests of mocking birdies. This lovely book can inspire a classroom culture of elemental, that is to say, essential music-making. Speak it. Sing it! Whisper it. Shout it! Above all, don’t forget to add *Mocking Birdies* to your classroom library of inspired books.

