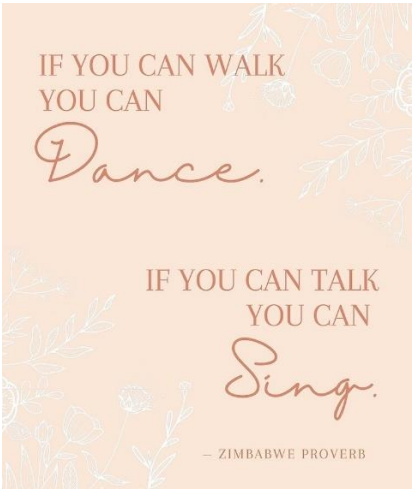
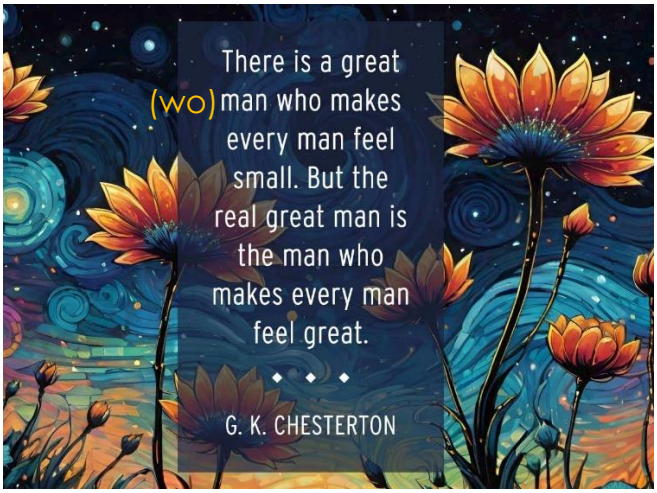
LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE BOYS!

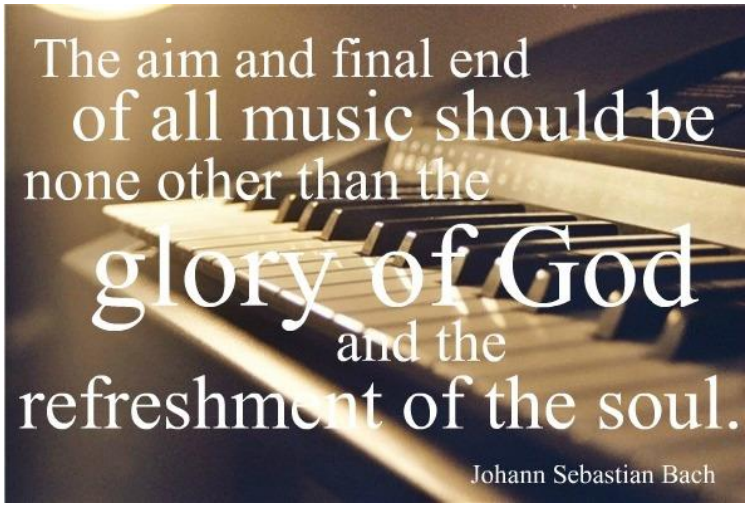
ENGAGING & EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT MALE SINGERS

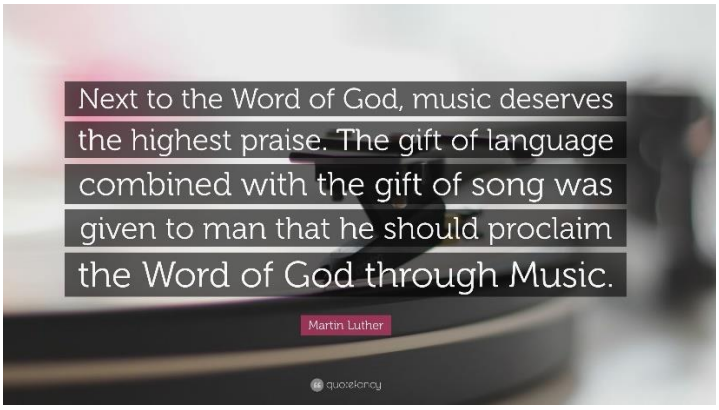
presented at the 2024
WELS National Conference on
Worship, Music, & the Arts

What are YOUR Guiding "Philosophies"?



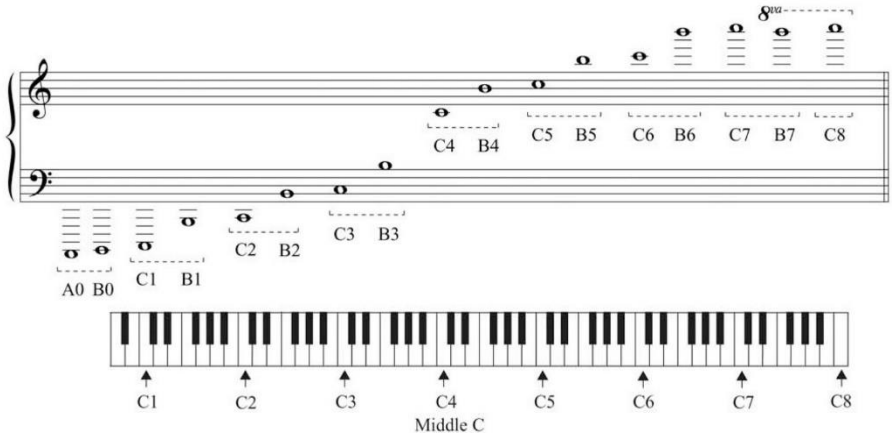






**"For God has cheered our hearts and minds through His dear Son,
whom He gave for us to redeem us from sin, death and the devil.
He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it.
But he must gladly and willingly sing."
–Martin Luther**

Octave Naming System



Common Terminology Defined

Range: the full range of notes one's voice can produce

Tessitura: "texture" in Italian, the most comfortable vocal range for a singer where one's best-sounding timbre is produced. (Tessitura can also refer to the pitch range that's most common in a specific part or piece of music.)

Speaking Fundamental Frequency (SFF/SF0): the frequency at which the vocal folds vibrate when voiced speech sounds are made. It's an acoustic measurement that's closely related to pitch- how our brains interpret the signal. SFF is measured in Hertz (Hz) and is typically between 80 and 450 Hz.

Modal (Chest) Register: vocal register used most frequently in speech and singing; refers to the most resonant mode of the vocal folds (where the optimal combination of airflow and glottal tension yields maximum vibration). Created by thick vocal cords, felt in the chest.

Head Tone: the register above the chest voice; a higher range of the singing voice that brings the cavities of the nose and head into sympathetic vibration

Falsetto Register: meaning 'false' voice, it's the product of a vocal technique in which only the thinner edges of the vocal folds enter into the vibratory pattern (a loose glottal closure). The result is a breathy, flute-like sound that's more limited in dynamics than the modal register. Falsetto and head voice are often used interchangeably for men.

Fry Tones/Vocal Fry: an attempt to extend the voice beyond normal functioning to emit lower pitches, created through a dysfunction of the vocal cords. Tone is gravelly and unpleasant; jaw is typically pushed down into the larynx. When checking range, discourage students from using this approach, and do NOT count the low notes made in this way as part of their "singable" range.

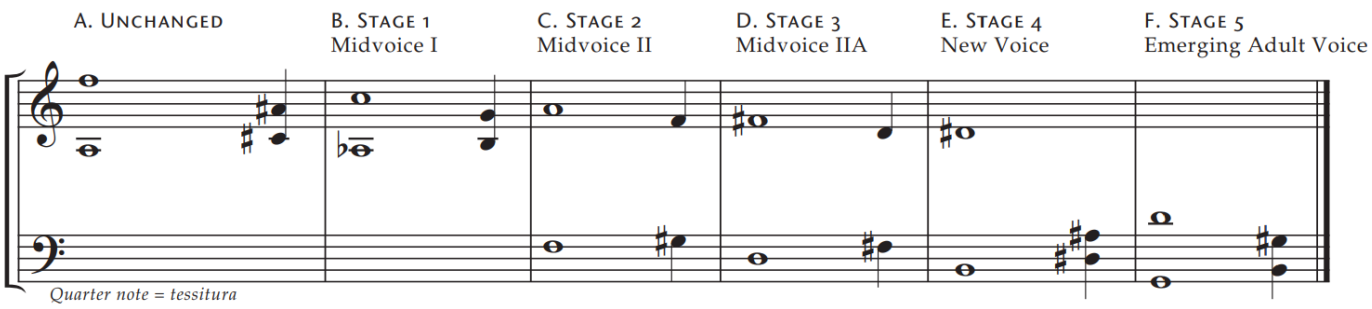
Quick Facts on the Male Changing Voice

- the male voice change occurs in approximately 5 stages
- all normally healthy boys pass through these stages in a sequence that is 100% predictable (according to research), yet the speed/age at which they enter or pass through each phase is not universally consistent
- each boy's voice "expansion" journey is a unique experience
- voice change can begin as early as 9 or as late as 15-16; stages of change can last days, weeks, or months
- the way a voice changes is directly related to the speed and the manner in which the larynx is growing, specifically the change in length of the vocal folds (called vocal mutation)
- outside of invading privacy to verify physiological changes (height, hair growth, testicular volume, etc—see Tanner Stages of Puberty) the most reliable indicator of the stage of voice change is the total range of the singing voice (excluding falsetto)
- male and female vocal folds reach essentially adult size by puberty; the increase in the male vocal folds is, on average, approximately 10 millimeters in length as compared to 4 millimeters in the female. (roughly 67% increase in males, 24% in females)
- the significantly greater growth of the male vocal folds as compared with the female explains, in part, the dramatic drop in fundamental frequency in the male voice during puberty
- voice training can't alter the stage of change (you can't change physiology), but does assist boys in singing throughout the change process & building their future voice
- one part may not fit each individual voice; boys may need to sing "excerpts" of a given part and/or have alternative notes planned out
- frustration is common no matter the stage of development; the new size and configuration in anatomy are still uncoordinated, so singing in the "new voice" can be difficult because the brain/muscle memory is still programmed for a boy's voice
- boys need constant encouragement that voice change is normal and indicates they are maturing (maybe not behaviorally, but physically ☺)
- Boys' voices expand while changing, if they continue to sing in their high voice and vocalize from top down across the break while their lower range is developing!
- KNOWLEDGE IS POWER- we must teach boys about the process of voice change!
- "Singing MEN make singing boys"- the example of singing by fathers, laymen, pastors, and teenage boys of the congregation is absolutely imperative

John Cooksey's
Eclectic Contemporary Theory of Male Adolescent Voice Change

From 1977 through 1980, John Cooksey, Ralph Beckett, and Richard Wiseman conducted *The California Longitudinal Study of Male Adolescent Voice Maturation: An Investigation of Selected Vocal, Physiological, and Acoustical Factors Associated with Voice Maturation in the Male Adolescent Attending Junior High School.*

Cooksey's Mean Ranges and Tessitura during Voice Change



**falsetto often emerges during Midvoice IIA, indicating the peak of the change process, and is often easier to produce after this stage.*

Music Note To Frequency Chart MixButton

NOTE	OCTAVE 0	OCTAVE 1	OCTAVE 2	OCTAVE 3	OCTAVE 4	OCTAVE 5	OCTAVE 6	OCTAVE 7	OCTAVE 8
C	16.35 Hz	32.70 Hz	65.41 Hz	130.81 Hz	261.63 Hz (A piano middle C)	523.25 Hz	1046.50 Hz	2093.00 Hz	4186.01 Hz (A piano's highest note)
C#/D♭	17.32 Hz	34.65 Hz	69.30 Hz	138.59 Hz	277.18 Hz	554.37 Hz	1108.73 Hz	2217.46 Hz	4434.92 Hz
D	18.35 Hz	36.71 Hz	73.42 Hz	146.83 Hz	293.66 Hz	587.33 Hz	1174.66 Hz	2349.32 Hz	4698.63 Hz
D#/E♭	19.45 Hz	38.89 Hz	77.78 Hz	155.56 Hz	311.13 Hz	622.25 Hz	1244.51 Hz	2489.02 Hz	4978.03 Hz
E	20.60 Hz	41.20 Hz (A bass's lowest note)	82.41 Hz (A guitar's lowest note)	164.81 Hz	329.63 Hz	659.25 Hz	1318.51 Hz	2637.02 Hz	5274.04 Hz
F	21.83 Hz	43.65 Hz	87.31 Hz	174.61 Hz	349.23 Hz	698.46 Hz	1396.91 Hz	2793.83 Hz	5587.65 Hz
F#/G♭	23.12 Hz	46.25 Hz	92.50 Hz	185.00 Hz	369.99 Hz	739.99 Hz	1479.98 Hz	2959.96 Hz	5919.91 Hz
G	24.50 Hz	49.00 Hz	98.00 Hz	196.00 Hz (A violin's lowest note)	392.00 Hz	783.99 Hz	1567.98 Hz	3135.96 Hz	6271.93 Hz
G#/A♭	25.96 Hz	51.91 Hz	103.83 Hz	207.65 Hz	415.30 Hz	830.61 Hz	1661.22 Hz	3322.44 Hz	6644.88 Hz
A	27.50 Hz (A piano's lowest note)	55.00 Hz	110.00 Hz	220.00 Hz	440.00 Hz	880.00 Hz	1760.00 Hz	3520.00 Hz	7040.00 Hz
A#/B♭	29.14 Hz	58.27 Hz	116.54 Hz	233.08 Hz	466.16 Hz	932.33 Hz	1864.66 Hz	3729.31 Hz	7458.62 Hz
B	30.87 Hz (A 5 string bass's lowest note)	61.74 Hz	123.47 Hz	246.94 Hz	493.88 Hz	987.77 Hz	1975.53 Hz	3951.07 Hz	7902.13 Hz

https://mixbutton.com/mixing-articles/music-note-to-frequency-chart/

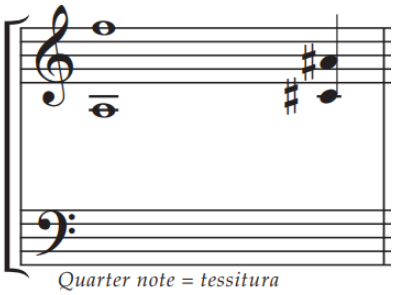
Pitch to Frequency Calculator https://www.flutopedia.com/pitch_to_frequency.htm

Cooksey's Stages	Ages & Characteristics
Unchanged (Stage 0) **"Pre-mutational"** Vocal Range: 220–698 Hz [a3–f5] Tessitura: 278–466 Hz [c#4–a#4] Average SF0 range: 220–260 Hz [a3–c4]	**Ages 10-11** **Grades 5-6, sometimes early 7th** full, rich soprano-like quality
Mid-Voice I (Stage 1) **"Early Mutation Period"** Vocal Range: 208–523 Hz [g#3–c5] Tessitura: 247–392 Hz [b3–g4] Average SF0 range: 220–247 Hz [a3–b3]	**Ages 11-13** **Can begin Grade 6, majority in 7th** some alto characteristics, increased breathiness on upper notes, also somewhat darker quality
Mid-Voice II (Stage 2) **"High Mutation Period"** Vocal Range: 175–392/440 Hz [f3–g4/a4] Tessitura: 208–349 Hz [g#3–f4] Average SF0 range: 196–220 Hz [g3–a3]	**Age 13-14 years (with many exceptions)** **Late 7th/early 8th grade (can be found in 5th/6th)** thicker, darker in color, less resonant
Mid-Voice IIA (Stage 3) **"Climax of Mutation"** Vocal Range: 147–370 Hz [d3–f#4] Tessitura: 185–262/294 Hz [f#3–c4/d4] *sometimes with extension to 330 Hz [e4]* Average SF0 range: 175–185 Hz [f3–f#3]	**Age 13-14 years** **Late 7th into 8th grade** lower range approaches new baritone quality, but upper range retains treble quality; most vulnerable to abuse/misuse
New Voice/New Baritone (Stage 4) **"Stabilizing Period"** Range: 123–311 Hz [b2–d#4] Tessitura: 156–247 Hz [d#3–b3] Average SF0 range: 131–165 Hz [c3–e3]	**Age 13-15 years** **Grades 8-9** light, thin "baritone" quality yet not truly settled; limited agility and coordination with the new-found voice
Emerging Adult Voice (Stage 5) **"Post Mutational"** Range: 98–294 Hz [g2–d4] Tessitura: 123–220 Hz [b2–a3] Average SF0 range: 110–139 Hz [a2–c#3]	**Ages 14-15(+)** **Grade 9+** early adult phase, voice is more powerful, "resonant," and more closely resembles the adult sound

Unchanged (Stage 0)

- light voice quality, commonly through age 10-11
- greatest resonance often occurs prior to voice change
- can sing upper or lower parts with clear tone and good intonation
- flexible voice with ability to sing wide range of dynamics

A. UNCHANGED

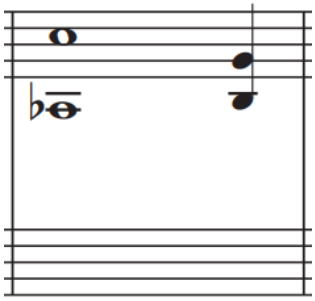


Repertoire Considerations

- Unison to 4-part treble music
- ranges of A3-F5, with a C#4-A#4 tessitura
- able to sing SA parts with wide range
- music with equal voicing possible

Mid-Voice I (Stage 1)

B. STAGE 1
Midvoice I



- appears on average between ages 10-12, some in HS
- light quality
- increased breathiness with less clarity & projection above C5
- best range Ab3-C5, with tessitura of B3-G4
- less flexibility, especially in upper range

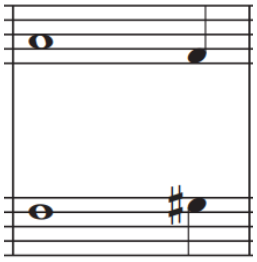
Repertoire Considerations

- choose music with some parts below C5
- consider choosing music with narrow range melodies (5-7 notes)
- simple or repetitive lower harmonies help boys develop confidence in new range
- find music which features the lower part singing the melody
- look for music with melodies or parts that can be sung in octaves, but verify the tessitura for the boys' part to ensure it doesn't fall out of their comfortable range on the low end

Mid-Voice II (Stage 2)

- average age 13-14; late 7th-early 8th grade
- voice quality can be breathy or husky, with decreased projection and agility
- falsetto may emerge above G4, with decreased pitch accuracy in upper range
- alto is often too high, tenor parts can be too low
- pitch range F3-A4, but G#3-F4 realistic
- vocalize top down, to help boys bring falsetto downward

C. Stage 2
Midvoice II



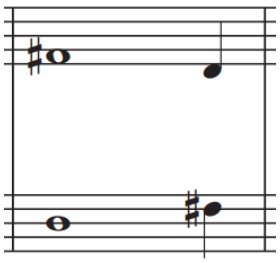
Repertoire Considerations

- find music with strong melodies/parts between F4-F5 that can be doubled by changing voices an octave lower at F3-F4
- carefully assess SAB & 3-part mixed voicing; 4-part music usually works better to assign them to tenor part- but must be chosen judiciously
- avoid part writing that requires boys to sing awkward leaps
- closed position harmonies can be effective and give the choir a fuller sound
    - notes in a very narrow range, where top and the bottom are no more than an octave apart
    - Melody and harmony where no two parts are further than a sixth apart from each other

Mid-Voice IIA (Stage 3)

- Most insecure time for a boy's voice
- Usually age 13-14, average 8th grade/late 7th grade
- Husky tone, often with noticeable register breaks
- Unstable upper range, often with emerging baritone notes in lower range
- Falsetto transition is challenging for some boys, while some may have no falsetto
- Pitch matching difficulty/intonation issues are common during this stage
- Pitch range D3-F#4, tessitura F#3-D4 but realistically, best range perhaps F3-C4
- Part assignment requires creativity and sometimes incorporates multiple parts, flipping between octaves, etc

D. Stage 3
Midvoice IIA

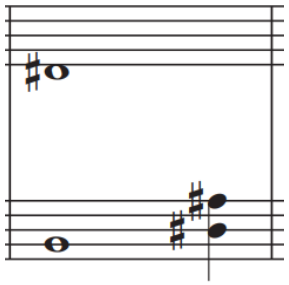


Repertoire Considerations

- Boys need vocal rest within the music
- They should not be expected to sing every note of their parts
- Their voices can be different from day to day
- Carefully vocalize the falsetto downward within warm-up; boys are often proud of this new sound, so they will use it if you request it!
- Choose music that alternates SA with TB or pairs ST/AB
- Avoid parts with many sustained pitches for an extended period of time
- Look for ways a part can be shared between T/B or S/A
- Breath control is an issue as boys learn how to support their new range

New Voice/New Baritone (Stage 4)

E. Stage 4
New Voice



- average age 14, but ranges 13-15
- many at this stage are in 8th/9th grade, some 7th/8th
- sound is gaining clarity but lacks fullness of an adult male voice
- voice is becoming less breathy, with more stability in falsetto range
- some boys may have no sound C4-G4, yet they can sing above that!
- projection still limited, and some bass parts too low
- pitch range B2-D#4, tessitura is D#3-A#3, but realistic range is Bb2-C4
- intonation issues may appear, especially in upper range

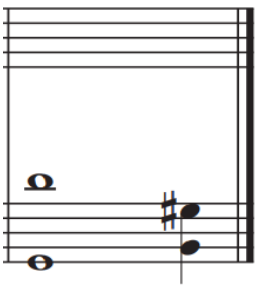
Repertoire Considerations

- option for SATB or TTB music now due to wide variety of male changing voices
- SAB or 3-part mixed music is often too high for baritones and too low for tenors
- Avoid bass parts below A2 or tenor parts below F3
- Voices begin to regain some flexibility and can sing more complex lines
- Improved balance with the treble voices begins to return
- Voices still require rest within a part
- Remind boys they may not have every note of every part yet in their range, but they can sing what feels comfortable
- While there are glimpses of an emerging SATB sound, high school level repertoire may be too challenging yet due to limited range and endurance

Emerging Adult Voice (Stage 5)

- boys in this stage are generally in 9th grade or beyond and age 14-15+
- emergence of their unique vocal quality that will develop into adulthood
- range expansion continues, confidence gains with new instrument
- tone is more stable and consistent
- gaining focus but lacking the range and color of fully mature adult male voices
- upper range and falsetto gain clarity and flexibility
- bass-baritone parts accessible, range of G2-D4, tessitura B2-G#3, but best range tends to be Bb2-A3
- boys have some tendency to push in their upper range above A3

F. Stage 5
Emerging Adult Voice



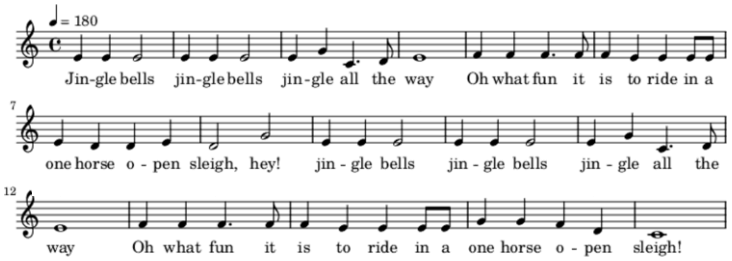
Repertoire Considerations

- Not the focus of this presentation

Voice Classification- "Quick" Group Method

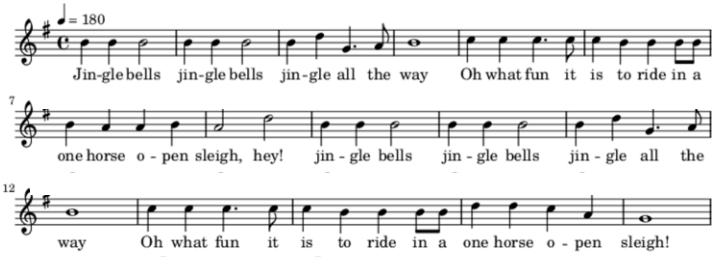
Step One: Locate the Low Voices (Stages 4-5, New Voice/Emerging Adult)

- Use a well-known melody with a limited range of about a 6th: Jingle Bells, My Country "Tis of Thee, For He's a Jolly Good Fellow, etc.
- Have the choir to sing the song in the Key of C Major
- Circulate choir, tap the shoulder of anyone who sings in the lower octave (below middle C, bass clef)
    - Don't worry about pitch matching at this time
    - Just listen, tap, move on
- Ask those you've tapped to stand separated from the group
- Have them sing again in the same key to confirm all are in the low octave
- *Caution: listen for boys who may be singing in the falsetto register during this process! Some Midvoice II's and New Baritones/New Voices may do this- when in doubt, individually test their range!*
- This group would be your "Baritones"



Step Two: Locate the High Voices (Stages 0-1, Unchanged/Midvoice I)

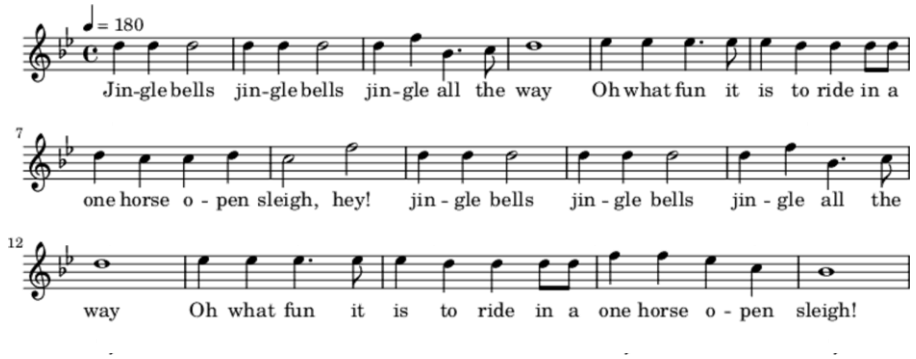
- After separating the baritones from the unchanged voices, have the remaining boys sing the song again, this time in the Key of G.
- Circulate, tapping the shoulder of any boys who are obviously singing in the upper octave with ease; note the lightness of the quality!
- Motion for them to stand away from group.
- Confirm by having them sing alone as a group in the key of G again.
- These would be your Trebles (includes Unchanged/Midvoice I)
- Unchanged voices likely to be most comfortable on soprano, while Midvoice I's may be more comfortable on alto lines, depending on the range of a given part



Step Three: Locate the Middle Voices (Stages 2-3, Midvoice II/Midvoice IIA)

- remaining singers stand together and sing the tune again in the Key of B-flat*
- confirm their mid-range pitches (between the staves)
- move any misplaced highs or lows
- these singers would be assigned to tenor parts in an SATB choir
- consider parts that don't fall below F3/G3, as best range for Mid-Voice II is G#3-F4 & Mid-Voice IIA is F3-C4

` *students should sing an octave lower than written (start them on D4)



Individual Voice Check

1. As you greet the student, observe basic signs of maturity, the quality of speaking voice, etc.
2. Have student count backwards from 20, to determine speaking voice pitch (SFF).
    - You can also use the months of the year forwards and backwards; anything repetitive that engages the brain will prevent them from manipulating their voice to match their peers or an imagined goal.
    - Their SFF will typically be about a minor/major third (3-4 half steps) above the lowest note in their singing range, with the exception of Midvoice I (which is often two half steps).
3. Determine the pitch by humming while they speak, then locate the pitch on the piano.
    - This can be *TRICKY!*
    - Stage 3 voices can fool you, as the harmonic makeup during this stage can sound an octave higher or lower than the true pitch.

    TIPS:
    - Use a voice analyzer app to determine their SFF (in Hz) & then correlate it to the sung pitch (see chart on pg. 5). Do this in a quiet room.
    - Consider recording and analyzing a few times to ensure accuracy or to determine a range or arrive at an average.

4. Using their SFF as starting pitch, sing an ascending 5-note "ah" to find highest comfortable sung pitch.
5. Starting in mid-voice, sing descending 5-note "ah" to find lowest pitch—don't count any fry tones!
6. Write their SFF, highest/lowest sung pitches & stage on a staff as below. Continue to track progress.

Options for Accommodating Changing Voices

1) Transposition
    - transpose exercises and songs into a key which is more suitable and comfortable
    - using electronic keyboards now makes this easy!

2) Swap Parts
    - singers shift mid-song to another vocal line, if necessary, in order to sing notes that fit their current vocal range

3) Octave Displacement
    - Have boys drop the octave when the part gets too high, or up if too low
    - use this with caution
        - young baritones/basses tend to entirely avoid using their upper register if allowed, which limits the development of the upper extent of their range
        - dropping the octave for the entirety of a piece (especially hymns!) often requires most changing voices to sing notes that are *too* low and out of their comfortable range (vocal fry may occur, tuning, or monotone issues)

4) Doubling Parts
    - have two voice parts sing in octaves to accommodate changing voices
    - in two-part literature, tenors are placed on the soprano part at the lower octave, baritones/basses are placed on the alto part at the octave
    - this may have to be used in combination with the occasional octave displacement for some voices
    - unchanged voices can remain in the octave that best fits their current vocal range

5) Write a New Part
    - some male adolescent voices may be limited to just a few pitches, so it might be necessary to create a new vocal line
    - whatever you create, choose notes that are predominately the pitches they can sing with confidence
    - write the alternate notes into their music or create a separate score (https://www.noteflight.com/ is quick, easy, and free!)

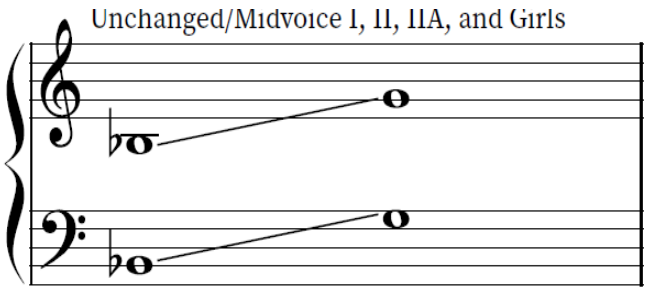
Composite Unison Range

"One of the most important pedagogical implications for teachers of middle school age choirs concerns the composite unison range of a choir—the pitches that all singers can sing in unison (as opposed to the unique range of each individual singer). The composite unison range of an adolescent vocal ensemble will only be about a sixth…with students singing in different octaves as appropriate." –Patrick Freer

What does this mean in practical application?

If we select a unison piece of music and just encourage the boys to "drop the octave", we're likely not asking them to sing within their comfortable tessitura. Often, a melody (hymns especially) will span larger than an octave and on the low end of the range, several pitches will lie outside of most boys' acceptable range (listen for fry tones!), while other pitches may be too high. This is why we often then hear pitch-matching issues, monotone, straining, tightness, and generally unhealthy vocal technique.

Composite Unison Range
for Unchanged & Changing Voices



New & Emerging Baritones

Octave Displacement

Female teachers will typically want to avoid dropping the octave when modeling pitches, especially those that lie within the boy's upper range (roughly between F3-F4). This is because the boys will mimic the perceived height of her voice. So if the teacher sings a C4, the vocalist will sing C3 because he ascertains that C4 is low in her voice.

Helpful Strategies:

- sing the note in YOUR octave (i.e. they need to sing a B3 but are phonating at a B2, then you may need to model a B4 instead of the B3
- have them slide down to land on the note from above on a neutral "oo" or "ah"
- have the singers start at the octave below and sing up the octave step by step to the desired pitch
- find a male student singing the correct pitch and have them model for the class, then have the others attempt to match

The Blank Spot (Phonation Gaps)

- Often occurs toward the second half of the voice change process, beginning around the transition between Midvoice IIA and New Voice- sometimes before that.
- Some singers experience difficulty in producing pitches from about C4/D4 to F4/G4, or in the transition area from modal to falsetto. Others may have difficulty producing tones in falsetto, while still others with this problem can find the falsetto above G4. This is heard as a gap or a "blank spot" in their full range from modal through falsetto.
- In Cooksey's study, blank spots nearly always happened in boys whose voice change processes were progressing faster than usual (i.e. over about one year instead of an average of about two years.)
- The falsetto register is often easier to produce after Midvoice II and IIA stages, so patience and time are needed.
- Boys should use a light head voice quality, avoiding forced sounds in the upper range.
- Use slow downward sighs/sirens/glides, beginning in falsetto register to assist in the transition toward full pitch range singing and the absence of gaps.

Part Assignments and Labels

- adolescent boys often have fragile egos & are just beginning to formulate their masculine identities
- avoid the labels of "sopranos" or "altos"; consider instead Part I, II, II, trebles instead of sopranos, etc.
- low voices may be labeled "baritones", yet understand this designation is different from the adult male voice classification yet- do teach that to the boys

"What boys are labeled, musically, is not as important as your continually nurturing their self-esteem and helping them recognize their overall growth, personally and musically, during the year."

-Dr. Terry J. Barham

from "Strategies for Teaching Junior High and Middle School Male Singers"

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PRESENTER BIOGRAPHY

Lisa Uttech serves as the Choral Director and a Fine Arts Music Instructor at Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee, WI, where she directs the Freshman Choir, A Cappella Choir, and the Wisco Kids Show Choir.

Upon graduation from Martin Luther College in 2002, Lisa was assigned to Bethany Lutheran School in Manitowoc, WI where she taught 3rd grade, then 6th grade and departmentalized upper grade English. She also assisted with the school and church music programs by directing adult and children's choirs, handbells, the school musical, and serving as an organist.

In 2005, Lisa transitioned to serving in parish ministry as the part-time Music Coordinator at Grace Lutheran Church in Manitowoc. At this time, she also expanded her private voice and piano studio, which she would maintain for over 15 years while raising their 4 children. In 2009, a work relocation brought their family to the Milwaukee area. In addition to rebuilding and maintaining her private voice studio, Lisa began teaching private voice lessons and later also class voice at Pewaukee High School (WI) and voice lessons New Berlin Eisenhower High School (WI).

Lisa accepted a call to serve as the part-time Director of Parish Music at Christ the Lord Lutheran Church in Brookfield in 2016, where she oversaw the congregational music ministry, taught Grades 1-8 classroom music, directed the adult choir, Sunday School choir, handbell choir and school musical, and served as an organist. In 2018, she accepted a full-time call to CTL, where she continued to serve until she was called to Wisconsin Lutheran High School in 2021.

In addition to teaching, Lisa has been privileged to serve the church and community as a conductor, clinician, adjudicator, soloist, and presenter for a variety of workshops and conferences. Some of these include the WELS National Conference on Worship Music and the Arts, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Mission and Ministry Conference, WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership, Wisconsin Lutheran State Teachers Conference, and the WELS National Youth Rally. Lisa also enjoyed serving as a member and co-director of the Lakeshore Lutheran Chorale (Manitowoc, WI) and singing many seasons in the soprano section of Canticum Novum, a WELS chamber choir.

Lisa resides in Waukesha, WI with her husband, Josh, and their four children, Eviana ('24), Jocelyn ('27), Gabe ('28), and Nolan ('31).