



COLOR the SKY

Words by **DAVID ELLIOTT**

Art by **EVAN TURK**

TEACHING TIPS

Readers respond in multiple ways, including making connections to themselves, their communities, and their literacy experiences; pursuing curiosity through discussion, inquiry, and self-expression; and changing attitudes and behaviors. This guide provides suggestions and resources for supporting and extending students' authentic reading responses. Select activities and resources that best meet the needs and interests of your students. Have students think about what they already know (about birds, colors, nature, etc.).

READ AND DISCUSS

Set the tone by asking pre-reading questions, then read *Color the Sky* aloud and discuss the book with students. What information or ideas stood out? What questions do they still have or what do they want to learn about now? Collect students' questions and ideas on chart paper or online platforms like Flipgrid or Seesaw, and/or invite students to record their thinking in notebooks or by drawing.

Pre-reading questions / Visual Thinking Strategies

1. What's going on in this picture?
2. What makes you say that?
3. What else can we find?

* Alternate questions based on VTS (in case using VTS is proprietary)

1. What do you think the story is about?
2. What clues does the title give us about the story?
3. What else do you see?



PERSONAL CONNECTIONS—CLASSROOM DISCUSSION & ACTIVITIES

1. **Discussion:** Point out the spread from the book that says, "purple joins the chorus too. She's with her cousins red and blue." Ask what they already know about how these colors work together. Are there other color combinations that they notice in the book? Why might the author and illustrator choose to put these colors together? Do they complement each other? What do light and shadow do to colors?

Activity: Using paint, paper, and a color wheel, have students explore ranges of color. Explain hues and their relation to primary and secondary colors. Have students choose one hue and experiment with adding white (tint), black (shade), and gray (tone), and observe what happens. Have students paint an object they noticed in the book, using tint, tone, and shade to differentiate how color is affected by light and shadow.

2. **Discussion:** Ask students if they noticed how the illustrator included swirls and scribbles, and colored outside the lines. Why do you think he did this and what is he trying to show? What other ways do artists show movement in illustrations? How does the placement of words on the page help to convey movement?

Activity: The illustrator used drawing paper, charcoal, and pastels to create the pictures in the story. As a class, experiment with pastels and water. In a group, have students share their observations, and thoughts about why they think this happened, and make predictions about what would happen when using different mediums.

As an extension, have students use other modifiers like ice, soap, fingers, brushes, etc.



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3. **Discussion:** Have students count out the nine different birds in the book and notice how some of them represent feelings. Point out how colors are often associated with emotions and action (ex. what does feeling blue mean?, what color is used when feeling angry?, what do colors mean at a stoplight?). Have students think about how colors and the movement of colors make them feel. Ask students how the main character changes by the end of the book after seeing and hearing all the colors singing, blending, and moving together.
Activity: Form a circle. Using their bodies and other classroom manipulatives, such as scarves, have students act out colors and emotions as the birds. Encourage movement, sounds, directions, and patterns. Suggest possible extensions and give students an opportunity to create their own games. Examples: showing opposites, acting out movement of trees and leaves with different weather and varying wind, etc.
4. **Discussion:** Invite students to share anecdotes about how they experience nature. Have they gone on nature walks, hiked, or gone camping? What does their exploration of nature look like in the city, their neighborhood, or around where they live? Have they seen any of the birds from the book? How does appreciation of nature fit into their family traditions and experiences? How does it connect them to other family members, friends, or community members? Model and set expectations for inclusivity and acceptance of all families and nature experiences—recognizing that many young people can feel uncomfortable sharing opinions, preferences, or experiences that reveal differences in their experiences. Encourage interest and respect for each other.
Activity: Conduct a nature walk in the classroom or school. Have students start a nature journal to record, by writing, drawing, and sketching their visual and auditory observations. Encourage students to collect leaves and flowers to do crayon rubbing art, etc. After the nature walk, students reflect on how nature is represented in the classroom and school and how it is important to them. Students can interview family or community members about how nature plays a role in their lives.
As an extension, have students think about how they use their senses when they are out in nature. Think about what you see, hear, touch, smell, and taste.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

5. Invite nature specialists (park rangers, ornithologists/bird watchers, urban planners, ecologists) into the classroom to talk about animals and plants that are part of your community. Ask visitors how they became interested in nature, how and why it is important to them, and ways that we can help birds or other animals/insects and help protect our environment.
6. Ask students what role nature plays in the school community. Brainstorm specific ways people impact nature. In what ways are they positive or negative? How can the school community proactively preserve and foster nature, making it safer for birds and other creatures that share the area? Examine general options for school sustainability efforts (i.e. reusable water bottles, lunch trays) as well as opportunities to support existing local efforts such as information campaigns, clean-ups, planting, etc. Have students work in groups or with other grades and classes on bringing awareness to the greater school community by creating posters, presentations, or videos.





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7. Think back to the story and have students recall the tree where all the birds meet. Like the tree, are there spaces they have noticed animals tend to gather? As a class, watch some of the feeds from the Cornell Lab Bird Cams (<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/cams/cornell-lab-feederwatch/>) or local feeds in your area. Have students make bird feeders for the classroom using instructions from the site and make observations of the creatures that come to visit. As a possible extension, have students imagine/create other kinds of animals/birds that might visit when they are not there.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Students' questions and a list of accessible resources provide a foundation for deeper inquiry and focused interdisciplinary connections. Consider reaching out to your school librarian/media specialist or local public children's librarian to help to build a list of websites, other books, school library databases, organizations, and other specialists in your community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Use these sites to have students explore more about birds and their place in nature.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology (<https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home>) Comprehensive site about birds and the natural world, and includes webcams, book guides, curriculum units, and activities.

Audubon for Kids/Audubon Adventures (<https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/activities/audubon-for-kids>)

A child-centered site in English and Spanish that has DIY projects, drawing activities, educational videos, and games.

The Handbook for Bird Educators by the North American Association for Environment Education

(<https://www.early-bird.in/handbook/>) An open access resource for educators with online webinars and training materials.



BOOKS

- *Every Day Birds* by Amy Ludwig VanDerwater illustrated by Dylan Metrano
- *Birds of the World: 250 of Earth's Most Majestic Creatures* by Cesare Della Pietà, illustrated by Shishi Nguyen
- *National Geographic Society: Little Kids First Big Book of Birds*
- *National Geographic Kids Bird Guide of North America*, Second Edition
- *All the Birds in the World* by David Opie
- *Bird Count* by Susan Edwards Richmond illustrated by Stephanie Fizer Coleman

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