

**LET'S HEAR
IT FOR THE
BOYS:** **STRATEGIES FOR
DEVELOPING A THRIVING
MEN'S CHORAL PROGRAM**

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**BOYS WILL BE BOYS.
BUS ON THE WAY TO MPA.**



VISITING THE GATOR BOYS



STUDENT AWARD NIGHTS



SPRING CONCERT

A middle school men's choir is a very special and important part of any choral program. With our students going through so many emotional and physical changes they need a place to feel safe and welcome. They also need a place where they can sing without the pressures of girls, athletics, life, and all the other unknown baggage they carry. At this age it is most important that they feel a part of some group.

YOU SNOOZE, WE MIGHT LOSE THEM:

- **The battle for men in choral music is typically waged in the middle school choir room.**
- **Singing through adolescence and the voice change impacts the rate of vocal development of the adult singer.**
- **What we work to accomplish at the middle level is VITAL!! Just ask any director who has tried to build a program at a High School with no feeder program to speak of.**

THIS IS A BOYS BRAIN:

The Wonder of Boys – Michael Gurian

- **Boys' brains are inclined more toward spatial-mechanical strengths, whereas girls' brains are more inclined toward verbal-emotive processing.**
- **Boys have less impulse control than girls, because of the hardwiring of their brains, which may explain why it is more common for girls to sit without fidgeting and learn to read and write at an earlier age than boys.**
- **Boys' brains need more rest periods when learning. They “zone out” much quicker than girls, and require rest or play before reengaging in learning.**

THIS IS A BOYS BRAIN:

- **Boys are more predisposed to focus on a single task, whereas the hardwiring of girls' brains shows a strength in what some may call multitasking. Thus, transitions are more difficult for boys because of this brain lateralization, the phenomenon where a person's brain processes are "taken over" by one hemisphere or the other.**
- **Boys brains have less oxytocin, which explains their predisposition toward physical play.**
- **Boys tend to be movement driven, and prefer to learn kinesthetically and with hands-on instruction.**

I THINK MY VOICE IS BROKEN:

- **Explain to the girls what is happening vocally with the boys. Create an environment where the females in the chorus are supportive, but not patronizing.**
- **Most importantly explain to the boys what is happening. Take away the mystery!**
- **The first signs of the changing voice are often missed, but include increase in waist and shoe size, though not height.**

WORKING THROUGH THE ADOLESCENT VOICE CHANGE:

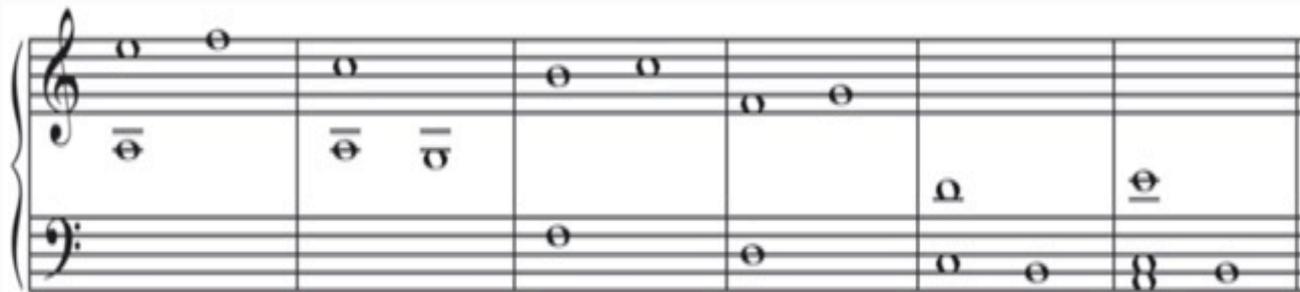
- **Physiology**

- Larynx gets bigger.
- Vocal folds elongate (longer chords = lower notes).
 - Male vocal folds are 40 to 60 % longer than female folds.
 - The piano string analogy
- Sometimes this happens slowly and sometimes this happens incredibly quickly.
- Requires relearning muscle coordination.
- Life is definitely NOT fair when it comes to voice changes!

WORKING THROUGH THE ADOLESCENT VOICE CHANGE:

- **You are not alone!**
 - Boys do not like to be embarrassed. It only takes one embarrassing moment to shut them off for a long time.
 - Encourage the girls to be supportive and the boys to “go for it” and reassure them that its okay for voices to crack as long as they are trying.
 - Have a ZERO-TOLERANCE policy on put-downs and constantly reassurance when you do hear cracking or searching for notes in developing singers.
 - The voice change is not a one size fits all event in their life.

JOHN COOKSEY ADOLESCENT MALE VOICE RANGES:



Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3, 3A	Stage 4	Stage 5
Boy Soprano	Midvoice 1	Midvoice 2	New Baritone	"Settled" Baritone
1-2 years	3-9 months	3-12 months	1-2 years	

Figure 6. Cooksey Adolescent Male Voice Ranges.

STAGE 1: UNCHANGED VOICE

Characteristics:

- Light speaking voice
- Full, soprano-like quality
- Great resonance
- Flexibility

Repertoire:

- Unison to 4 parts
- A3 – F5
- Able to sing SA parts with wide range

STAGE 2: MIDVOICE I

Characteristics:

- Breathy lighter speaking voice
- Loss of tonal clarity and richness in high pitches
- Not as flexible due to increase in size of vocal folds

Repertoire:

- Choose music with some parts below C5
- Narrow range melodies (5-7 notes)
- Simple or repetitive lower harmonies helps develop confidence in new range

STAGE 3: MIDVOICE II

Characteristics:

- Huskier, thicker, and sometimes breathier speaking tone
- Decreased projection and agility
- Falsetto emerges
- Alto too high, tenor too low

Repertoire:

- Find strong melodies between F4 – F5 that can be doubled at the octave.
- Seek SATB with strong upper tenor parts and bass line that can be doubled.
- Avoid awkward leaps. Stepwise is best

STAGE 4: MIDVOICE IIA

Characteristics:

- Speaking voice is huskier and thicker than Midvoice II
- Most insecure time
- Apparent register breaks
- Difficulties matching pitch/intonation
- Voice is weaker and less flexible

Repertoire:

- Need vocal rest (not singing every note the entire song)
- Music that pairs ST and AB or alternates SA with TB
- Avoid parts with many sustained pitches and extremely long phrases

STAGE 5: NEW BARITONE

Characteristics:

- Speaking voice is lower but has a thin quality
- Firm and clear, yet immature
- Lacks agility but becomes heavy at loud dynamics

Repertoire:

- Fully capable of SATB or TTB music
- SAB of 3 Part Mixed is too high for baritones and too low for tenors
- Improved balance with treble voices returns
- Voices still require rest within the song

STAGE 6: SETTLED BARITONE

Characteristics:

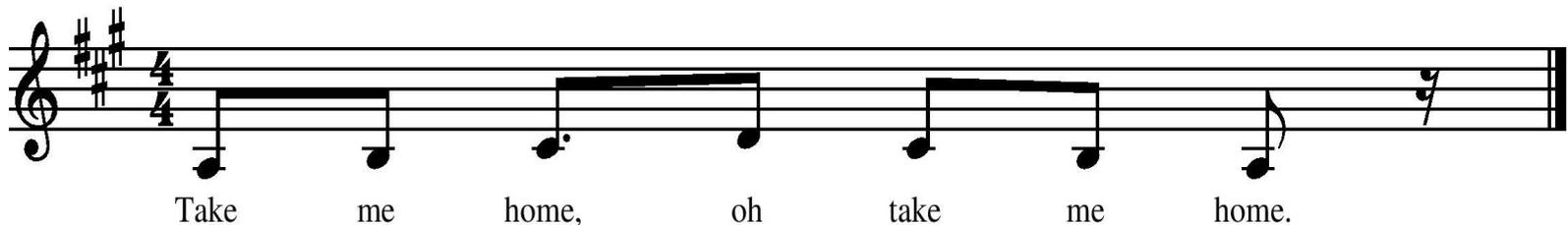
- Thicker, heavier speaking voice
- More consistency in voice production
- Clear and focused sound, but still lacking adult quality
- More flexible in upper range and in transition to falsetto

Repertoire:

- Fully capable of SATB or TTB music
- The world is their oyster

BE A MAD SCIENTIST:

- **Collect all the data.**
- **Voice checks should happen at least 3 times a year and can be done in 30 seconds**
- **Celebrate the milestones**
- **This can be done with vocalizes or simple melodies.**



VOICE CHECK TRACKING

My Vocal Range

Name: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____ Date: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____ Date: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____ Date: _____

John Cooksey's Mean Ranges and Tessituras for the Voice Change Stages

a. Unchanged

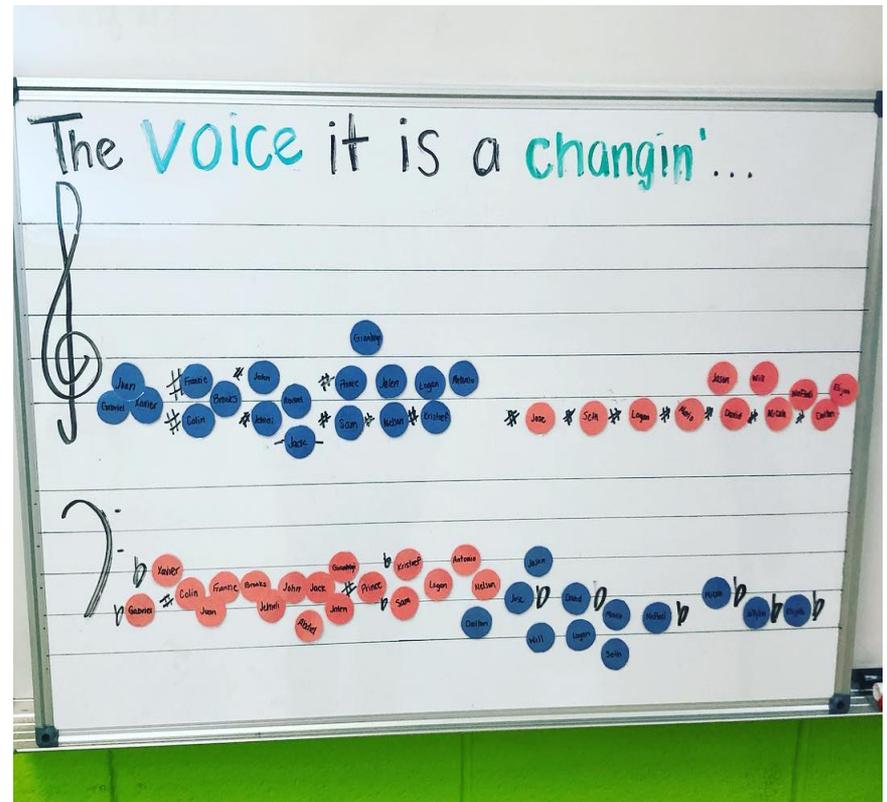
b. Stage I
Midvoice I

c. Stage II
Midvoice II

d. Stage III
Midvoice IIA

d. Stage IV
New Baritone

d. Stage V
Developing Baritone



HOW DO I GET THEM TO JOIN CHORUS?

- Recruitment is the lifeline of any choral program.
- What image does your program convey?
- What about your program makes kids want to be a part of it?
- Can you relate to them where they are? Do you know what it is they are listening to and why they love it? **CONNECTION IS KEY!**
- Middle school singers may not know Bach and Mozart, but we need to get them in the doors so that they can be exposed to all types of choral music.

HOW DO I GET THEM TO JOIN CHORUS?

- **Recruitment Concerts**
- **Posters and Publications**
- **Chorus Commercials**
 - [Sixth Grade Chorus Commercial](#)
 - [High School Chorus Commercial Example](#)
- **Meet and Greet**
- **T-Shirts**
- **Special Events**
- **Use Your SECRET WEAPON**

WORKING WITH THE “Y’ALL COME” MIDDLE SCHOOL CHOIR:

- **Be realistic with your singers, but create a safe environment.**
 - For the singers struggling through the vocal changes keep assuring them that they are **NORMAL**. Let them know the initial “sounds of chaos” are a necessary part of the journey.
- **Keys of E, Eb, F, F#, and G are the most friendly for this age. The same rings true for warm-ups. The key of C may fit better in your fingers, but not their voices.**
- **Avoid associating gender with parts**
- **Utilize rote partner songs and rounds to give them success before you ever put an octavo in their hands.**
 - **SUCCESS** early on is vital to keeping them engaged
- **Folk songs and African songs that utilize percussion are also very handy for instant success.**

WORKING WITH THE “Y’ALL COME” MIDDLE SCHOOL CHOIR:

- **Helpful Musical Elements in Repertoire for Changing Voices:**
 - Limited range within some parts (6th)
 - Melodies that can be doubled in octaves
 - Closed chord harmonies
 - Repetitive/ostinato patterns within contrapuntal harmony
 - Melodies shared by more than one part
 - Motives that are easy to hear, sing, and remember
 - Phrases with descending minor thirds
 - Staggered entrances
 - Paired parts: SA/TB or ST/AB
- **Less parts does not equal easy and more parts does not equal harder. It equals comfort.**

WORKING WITH THE “Y’ALL COME” MIDDLE SCHOOL CHOIR:

- **Check daily progress. Show of hands who could sing more notes than yesterday? Which song was easier than the last time you sang it?**
- **Crack is cool! It is just the voice releasing to a more comfortable range.**
 - The vibrations stop for a fraction of a second.
- **Build in as much kinesthetic movement as possible.**
 - Solfege symbols are easy for this along with shaping the phrase.
- **Overly structure your rehearsals. They will say they hate it, but they live for it. Take the mystery out of the rehearsal process.**

Noise Level

1

Whisper

18

Days until THE LION KING

- Warm-Ups
- Rhythmic Reading
- Melodic Reading
- Breathe Soft Ye Winds
 - pg. 6 2nd verse
 - vowels on word "love"
- Announcements
- Gaudeamus
 - Slow tempo on clapping
 - B section on p 4

THE ZONE OUT:

- **Move quickly in rehearsals.**
- **Only try rehearsing a section for between 6 - 12 minutes.**
 - Adjust this time for your own singers ability to stay on task and your personality.
- **If they are zoning out, retreat and move on. Be aware of the pacing.**
- **Plan short breaks for them to recharge**
 - Any transitional device such as changing rows, shifting seats, etc.
 - Tell a story or joke
- **Transitions are hard, so when break time is over, reengage the music with an attention sequence.**
 - Pink Panther, We Are Farmers, Jingles, etc.

THE THREE BEST THINGS YOU CAN DO FOR THEM:

Work From The Top Down

- Make them sing in head voice (falsetto) every day. A descending scale, echo singing, or familiar tunes in an upper octave are great options. Allow/expect the crack and squeaks but always let them know the goal is to make a smooth transition through the registers. By the end of the semester, you'll be shocked.

THE THREE BEST THINGS YOU CAN DO FOR THEM:

Be Insistent

- Don't let the voice change be an excuse for lack-luster singing. They *want* to be pushed and challenged. They *want* to be better! You **WILL** want to give up some days....but remember its always darkest before the dawn. There will be a breakthrough if you are persistent and ENCOURAGING.
- They enjoy being challenged. Set a weekly goal and have them check in each day where they are on the way to the goal.

RACE TO THE DOUBLE BAR:

HMS CHORUS PROGRESS CHART

	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
Six - One					
Six - Two					
Seven - One					
Seven - Two					
Eight - One					
Eight - Two					

THE THREE BEST THINGS YOU CAN DO FOR THEM:

Be Real

- Adolescent males can smell a fake from a mile away. You don't have to have all the answers. You just need to have their best interests in mind and be diligent to help them achieve their very best. Give sincere compliments. Do NOT patronize.

LET'S HEAR IT FROM THE BOYS:

- **Chorus Is.....**
 - “The Time if day (besides P.E.) when I really get to have fun.” ~8th Grader
 - “Pretty cool, does not matter if you are boy or girl or you any race or smart or dumb. Just matters what’s in your spirit.” ~8th Grader
 - “The best part of my day.” ~7th Grader

LET'S HEAR IT FROM THE BOYS:

- **What does chorus mean to you?**
 - “It means I am singing as a guy and not a lot of them do that because they think singing is for girls. But yet most famous artists nowadays are male singers.” ~8th Grader
 - “It means everything to me. If I were not in it I don't think I would like school that much. Everyday I wait and wait until I get to go to the best class and have fun. I love this class and I want to take chorus in high school and keep having fun.” ~ 8th Grader

LET'S HEAR IT FROM THE BOYS:

- **What does chorus mean to you?**
 - “Chorus means a lot to me because it’s the only time when I actually start to open up and break the barrier. I’m quiet for most of the day, so being able to sing is great.” ~7th Grader

LET'S HEAR IT FROM THE BOYS:

- **What makes an excellent Chorus teacher?**
 - “I think an excellent chorus teacher is a teacher that will not get very upset with you if you make a mistake.” ~7th Grader
 - “Doesn't give us impossible assignments and songs.” ~8th Grader
 - “Someone who believes in us.” ~8th Grader

FINAL THOUGHTS

- **Be real.**
- **Be honest.**
- **Laugh with them everyday.**
- **Rejoice in the baby steps.**
- **Don't give false praise, but acknowledge their progress.**
- **When it's good don't forget to smile. That will do more for them then you can possibly imagine.**
- **Be Creative**

A special thank you to Andrea Ramsey for a lot of inspiring ideas from her session “Boys to Men”

A big thank you to the other fabulous teachers I have observed inspiring young male singers!

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