Spectrogram Analysis Lesson Plan

Investigative Question: In what ways are the songs of different bird species distinct from others?

Goal: Use a spectrogram to analyze and identify birdsongs.

Objectives
Knowledge: Demonstrate knowledge of graphical reading and adding and subtracting decimals by identifying the duration (in tenths of a second) of birdsongs using a spectrogram. Sound (frequency/pitch and amplitude/loudness) can be represented graphically. Comparing graphs of birdsong can help match bird species to song.

Skills: Adding and subtracting decimals, reading time on graph, and translating auditory data to visual and back again.

Value: Students recognize that math aids in scientific and sound analysis, even in observational studies.

Virginia SOL:
SCIENCE 5.1g, 5.2b
MATHEMATICS 5.1, 5.2, 5.5

Materials
- rulers or other straight edge
- wet or dry erase markers and ways to clean
- Spectrogram Analysis Datasheet
- pencils
- smartboard & computer with sound
- Spectrograms Adapted from Bird Song Hero

Special Safety
- Be aware of any students with auditory challenges and accommodate accordingly.

Set Up:
1. Familiarize yourself with the Bird Song Hero game
2. Overview: Bird Song Hero: Using a projector and speakers (smartboard, or other way for all students to see and hear the game) the full class plays one round of “Bird Song Hero”, predicting which spectrogram best matches the sounds they hear. This introduces students to the skills of reading a spectrogram.
   a. Inform students they will be playing a game in which they have to match a visual sound graph with a birdsong in order to identify the bird.
   b. Suggest they use their hands to “map” or “shape” the sound. Practice by raising and lowering your hand and have them raise and lower their pitch in echo of your hand movement (high hand= high pitch).
   c. Play each song as often as needed. Have students vote for the most likely graphical match to the sound, then select that response.
3. Graphical Analysis: Transform the game into analysis of a spectrogram.
   a. Briefly go over the parts of a spectrogram. The “height” (y-axis) is how high or low the sound is (pitch), while across the x-axis are time increments (tenths of a second). Point out that there are three frequency ranges, low (blue), medium (green), and high (red). Use a vertical line (like a yardstick) to help students identify when songs are in each range, and if there is sound or silence.
b. Using the datasheet to guide their analysis, students work in pairs to determine
   i. the full length of the song
   ii. how many seconds of song are in each frequency range
   iii. the number of notes and the number of silences
   iv. the total length of time the bird is singing or silent during the song.

   c. Depending on time, each team may do more than one song.

4. **Compare Songs:**
   a. Have students locate the total length of the bird song on their datasheet, and then without talking, figure out how to arrange themselves in numerical order according to the length of their bird song. Ask: What was the shortest song? The longest? Most of our human radio songs are around 3 minutes long. Do bird songs come close to that? Why do you think bird songs are just a few seconds long?
   b. If time allows, make other comparisons. Why would bird species have songs of different pitch/length/pattern? How do you recognize the voice of your friend or family? Is there a habitat component - do birds of similar frequencies occupy different habitats?

5. **Close:** Another round of Bird Song Hero (Optional) – either replay the Bird Song Hero game, or move on to the more advanced level so that students can apply their spectrogram reading skills.

**Possible Extensions:** (optional)

1. Demonstrate comprehension of time and frequency with attempts to recreate the songs with the [Chrome Music Lab Spectrogram](https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/chromemusicalab/aampkckfjgdpkknkpmnbiggbkhpdnocf)
2. Visually compare spectrograms. Do some songs “look” similar? (Example, Common Potoo and Mourning Dove). Do birds with similar songs live in the same habitat? (Some information is on the back of the spectrograms, but additional research can be conducted.)
Spectrogram Analysis Datasheet

Bird Song Scientist names: ____________________________________________

Bird Species: ______________________________________________________

- How many seconds is the bird song?
- From the first note to the last note, how many seconds long is the bird song?
- How many seconds of singing are in each frequency range (low, medium, high)?
- How many silences are in the song?
- How many notes are in the song?
Spectrograms Adapted from Bird Song Hero

- High Frequency
- Medium Frequency
- Low Frequency
American Redstarts like open wooded habitats (not too much understory).

They prefer deciduous trees (not evergreens).
Habitat:
The black-bellied plover breeds on the Arctic tundra. It winters on coastal estuaries, beaches, mudflats, the shores of ponds and lakes, grassy meadows, and flooded fields.
Habitat
Forested areas or city and neighborhood yards or parks with large trees.
Habitat

These birds love to move low through tangled understory; like backyard brush piles and areas choked with vines and bushes.
Habitat:
Open woodland/grassland habitats, but also scrubland and crop fields. In general it prefers mixed habitat which offers densely vegetated hiding places – ideally forest – for the day, as well as open landscape – perhaps even rivers or wetlands – to hunt at night.
Habitat

Yellowthroats live in open areas with thick, low vegetation, ranging from marsh to grassland to open pine forest.
Habitat
Look for Eastern Towhees in brush, tangles, thickets, and along forest edges where there’s plenty of leaf litter for the birds to search for food.
Golden-crowned Sparrows nest in the north, in low, shrubby areas of tundra or at the edges of boreal forests.
You can see Mourning Doves nearly anywhere except the deep woods.

Look for them in fields or patches of bare ground, or on high perches like telephone wires.
Habitat

Look for Northern Cardinals in inhabited areas such as backyards, parks, woodlots, and shrubby forest edges.

Northern Cardinals nest in dense tangles of shrubs and vines.
Pyrrhuloxias live in desert regions. They love scrub, dry grasslands, open mesquite forest, and cactus gardens for nesting.
Habitat
Look for Song Sparrows in nearly any open habitat, including marsh edges, overgrown fields, backyards, desert washes, and forest edges.
Tufted Titmouse
*Baeolophus bicolor*

You’ll find Tufted Titmice in most eastern woodlands below 2,000 feet elevation, including deciduous and evergreen forests.
Upland Sandpipers live in native prairie and other open grassy areas (like the Great Plains) in North America.
The Wood Thrush lives in deciduous and mixed (deciduous and evergreen) forests in the eastern US.

They need large trees, some understory, shade, and lots of leaf litter for foraging.