THE WOODWINDS

BACKGROUND: The woodwind family is composed of individuals. Each instrument sounds very different, and contributes its own individual tone color to the sound of the orchestra.

Originally, all woodwinds were made of wood. Today, other materials are used, especially in making flutes; some are even made of gold. The flute's sound is produced by blowing over a hole in the end of an instrument, like blowing over the top of a soda pop bottle.

There are single reed woodwind instruments, such as the clarinet, and double-reed ones such as the oboe and bassoon. Playing a double-reed instrument is not something just anyone can do; it's like pinching one end of a straw and blowing into it to get a sound, only harder.

Each member of the woodwind family has a cousin sitting next to it in the orchestra. The flute has the piccolo, to play high, piercing notes. The clarinet has the bass clarinet, the oboe has the English horn, and the bassoon has the contrabassoon; these all play lower notes than the cousin with the same basic tone color. The clarinet also has a higher cousin, the E-flat clarinet, and there is a lower, more mellow sounding flute called the alto flute. An instrument's tone color is its own characteristic sound, like your own particular voice. The musical term for this is *timbre* (pronounced TAM-ber).

*NOTE TO TEACHERS: You may wish to bring several empty bottles into the classroom. Ask a student to blow gently across the top of a bottle to see what sound this makes. If bottles are filled with different amounts of water, the pitch will vary from low to high. This exercise will help children discover the relationships of size to pitch on various woodwind instruments.

WOODWIND VOCABULARY:

embouchure (om-bo-shur) - a player's lips and mouth technique or position

mouthpiece - the section of the wind instrument that is blown across or into

keys - buttons, rings or pads which the player covers with his or her fingers to change the pitch of the notes

air column - length of air contained in a pipe, which vibrates to make a sound
Woodwind instruments and their respective colors:

- Saxophone: Purple
- Clarinet: Green
- Bassoon: Blue
- Oboe: Pink
- Flute: Orange

Sound Production:

- Woodwind instruments produce their sound by setting into vibration a hollow reed or a column of air.

Fiberglass Reeds:

- Made from plastic, fiberglass reeds are durable and produce a uniform sound.

Woodwind History:

- Over 150 years ago, early wooden instruments were produced using bone or ivory.
- Modern wooden instruments are crafted using high-quality wood.

Woodwind Characteristics:

- Easy to control embouchure
- Clear, bright sound
- Often used in orchestras and bands
- Ideal for beginners and advanced players

Woodwind Comparison:

- Saxophone: Versatile and popular in jazz, rock, and classical music
- Clarinet: Common in classical and jazz ensembles
- Bassoon: Used in orchestra and chamber music
- Oboe: Known for its high register and clear sound
- Flute: Versatile instrument used in various music styles

Woodwind Instruments:

- Saxophone
- Clarinet
- Bassoon
- Oboe
- Flute