

How do I know what part SHE sings?

The changing female voice

Female singers experience a much smaller voice adjustment during junior high and early high school than do male singers. Their voices will start sounding different in about 7th or 8th grade. As younger singers, most females sing in a high, light voice, sometimes called **treble** or **soprano**. As they go through puberty, female voices usually become slightly husky or breathy. They will be able to sing a little lower and their speaking voice will be a bit lower than when they were in 4th and 5th grade.

Female voice categories:

Most female voices can sing high and low equally well, they just prefer one over the other or are more emotionally comfortable singing one over the other. Often, singing high is seen as “scary” or hard to do without squeaking. Instruction in breathing, relaxing and how to use the voice helps most singers to discover higher notes than they thought they could sing beautifully. **It is important to remind students that soprano and alto are not permanent designations, but one option to sing.** With that in mind, there are two parts given to females to sing.

Soprano-The higher female voice part also sounds lighter or clearer. Females who are most comfortable singing soprano might also talk a little higher and have trouble singing as low as the other girls.

Alto-The lower female voice part usually sounds more mellow or rich. Females who are most comfortable singing alto may talk a little lower than other girls. They may also sing louder in the middle part of their voice until they try to sing high and it is suddenly soft.

Selecting a part to sing

First, ask the girl some questions and just listen to her talk for a little while. Does she talk higher or lower than her friends? Ask her whether she likes singing higher or lower. That may be an indication as well. It is a good idea to have girls sing together if they are a little shy about singing in front of people because they will sing out more. However, be careful, because a soprano may think she wants to sing alto because her friend sings alto, even if she should be singing higher.

Lastly, you can ask the student to sing a familiar song such as Amazing Grace or Jesus Loves Me in a couple different keys and see if a higher one or a lower one is comfortable. If you are unfamiliar with how to start a student in different keys you can have them sing for you a siren sound from what they feel like is their lowest note to their highest note and back down. This can help to determine whether their strength lies in a high range or a low one. As their voice slides from low to high listen both to how high they can sing and also to how strong their voice

is in the high vs. the low register. Make sure they are really trying before you make your decision.

What if he/she sings off tune?

Finally, realize that occasionally, some boys and girls will have a very hard time singing in tune while their voice changes. Be patient. Unless the child has a diagnosed hearing problem, he/she is probably not tone-deaf. PLEASE DON'T TELL THE CHILD "YOU'RE TONE DEAF" OR "YOU CAN'T SING!" With practice and music lessons, anyone (who does not have physical ear problems) can learn to sing in tune! Tell people (privately) when they are not singing the same notes that they're hearing. Most kids will be able to tell when they're off key. If they can't, tell them if they are above or below the note and they will learn to tell the difference.

For an off-key singer, surround him/her with strong singers who sing his/her part and encourage soft singing, deep breathing, and careful listening to the people around him/her. Let the Music Festival Coordinator know that this child struggles so some strong singers can be placed next to him/her.

Finally, encourage the child to take piano lessons or some other instrument lessons. The more he/she hears music, the more the ears will begin to work together with the voice. Be patient!