

# Singing Breathing Techniques in 2nd-Grade Primary School Music: A Study Using “The Sea”

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**Abstract:** Under the guidance of the new curriculum standards, teachers should facilitate second-grade students’ music learning by enabling them to engage with and experience music more effectively during class. Singing constitutes a vital component of the curriculum at this academic stage, allowing students to experience the aesthetic value of music through active participation in singing activities. However, when second-grade students perform and sing songs they are more proficient in, they tend to express the music by shouting. When a teacher advises controlling the volume, students may inadvertently breathe too shallowly. This can lead to shorter note durations and a lack of coherence in phrasing, thereby hindering the ability to fully express the music and personally experience its beauty. Therefore, this article selects the piece “The Sea” from the second-grade lower-semester curriculum as an example for analysis. It integrates the teaching of singing respiration into the second-grade music classroom and applies it to this work, thereby enhancing students’ musical aesthetic sensibility and expressive capabilities, enabling a more profound interpretation of the piece, and allowing students to derive joy from their musical experiences.

**Keywords:** Second-grade primary school music; Singing breathing techniques

**Online publication:** June 5, 2025

## 1. Introduction

In first-grade music education, the majority of students are able to identify and sing basic musical notes, comprehend simple rhythmic patterns. In second-grade music education, in addition to reinforcing the aforementioned learning content, students’ understanding of music and the emotions derived from it becomes more profound compared to those in the first grade. Compared to the prior inclination toward overly harsh vocal expressions when performing familiar pieces, students at this stage demonstrate a greater tendency to adopt more aesthetically pleasing modes of expression. These include dynamic contrasts of strength and weakness, smooth phrasing, and coherent melodic lines. Through refined and comfortable musical articulation, they can achieve a more profound and beautiful musical experience. The New Art Curriculum Standards stipulate that

second-grade primary school students should sing with a natural voice, infusing their performances with rich <sup>[1]</sup>.

However, students at this stage have not been exposed to systematic and basic vocal training. Due to their developmental stage, they tend to have insufficient breath during singing, which affects their performance of songs and the expression of emotions. For instance, they need to take a breath in the middle when facing long and coherent sentences, cannot reach high notes, and their voices are scattered and weak when handling weak notes, and they shout when handling strong notes.

It is important that proper breath management techniques be utilized when discussing the pathway to healthy, sustainable singing <sup>[2]</sup>. Therefore, the researcher believes that in the music classroom teaching of the second grade, in addition to closely adhering to the requirements and goals of the new curriculum standards, it is also necessary to integrate the teaching of singing and breathing into the classroom in combination with the curriculum standards.

## **2. A concise exploration of breathing techniques in singing and their application in classroom instruction**

The production of sound arises from the vibration of the vocal folds during exhalation. This vibration induces resonant oscillations throughout the vocal apparatus, which collectively form the sound generated by the human voice—a unique “instrument” in its own right <sup>[3]</sup>. Therefore, in music singing performances, breathing is extremely important. The author will respectively explain the significance of breathing in singing through the “inhalation” and “exhalation” of breathing, and closely follow the point in the new curriculum standards that “second-grade students learn music while enjoying themselves”, transforming professional learning into interesting learning.

### **2.1. The role of inhalation and its integration into the new curriculum standards teaching**

During the inhalation stage, the students inhale air into their bodies and exhale it to vibrate the vocal cords. Therefore, whether the amount of inhalation is large or small directly affects students’ singing state. The ways of inhaling are generally divided into three types: nasal inhalation, oral inhalation, and inhalation through both the mouth and nose. Nasal inhalation makes it easier to obtain a large amount of breath, but the inhalation speed is relatively slow. It is suitable for use when sentences are connected for a long time. Mouth inhalation can obtain breath within a short period of time, but it may cause insufficient breath volume when dealing with long sentences. Inhaling through the mouth and nose combines the above two advantages and can obtain a considerable amount of breath in a relatively short time, but it requires a high level of proficiency. Before the training of inhalation, second-grade students do not pay much attention to their inhalation state, do not care about the amount of air they need to inhale into the work, and due to their physiological age, the amount of air they inhale each time is relatively small, resulting in insufficient energy supply when exhaling and causing certain singing problems. Therefore, through systematic inhalation training, the problem of breath volume in singing can be fundamentally changed. In accordance with the requirements of the new curriculum standards and in combination with the characteristics of the second grade stage, the author has set up the following methods to train students’ inhalation ability.

#### **2.1.1. Smell smell fragrance**

Prepare flowers with a certain light fragrance or create a virtual situation filled with floral scents, guiding

students to take a deep breath through their noses. While feeling the fragrance of the flowers, they can also experience the state of their bodies when taking a deep breath. During the training, ask the students where they will be expanded after taking a deep breath, and then guide them to focus their inhalation on the abdomen, feeling the expansion of the waist and abdomen after inhalation.

### **2.1.2. Big big surprised**

Create a scenario where a startling event is unfolding in the classroom. When the teacher utters suggestive words such as “wow”, the student reacts with shock by opening his mouth wide, taking a deep breath, and freezing momentarily. The student remains unable to exhale or take another breath until the teacher provides further instructions.

This training can enhance students’ ability to inhale through the mouth. As there is a certain breath-holding process involved, students still need to increase their breath volume to a certain extent when inhaling through the mouth, thereby obtaining exercise.

The above two methods are carried out through situational modes. Besides enriching the classroom’s interest, attracting students’ curiosity, and making them more focused, they can also strengthen students’ inhalation ability and exercise, and improve the inhalation ability of students at this stage in singing.

## **2.2. The role of exhalation and its integration into the teaching of the new curriculum standards**

During the singing process, the activity of exhaling directly affects the vibration of the vocal cords to produce sound. The density and intensity of the breath during exhalation will directly affect the vibration of the vocal cords. Most students in the second grade or singers who have never received music singing training are in a passive process of breathing when performing because they have never paid attention to the activity of exhaling. During this process, the closure of the vocal cords and sound production are more reliant on the contraction of laryngeal muscle groups. Prolonged maintenance of this state may readily result in excessive fatigue of the throat or vocal cords, potentially leading to pathological conditions. Furthermore, the sound generated through excessive reliance on laryngeal muscle tension tends to be dry and hoarse, lacking resonance, which makes it challenging to achieve musical aesthetics.

The scientific method of exhalation is an essential component in musical singing. It involves the coordinated functioning of bodily mechanisms such as the abdomen and diaphragm, which expel the inhaled air from the body, thereby causing the vocal cords to vibrate and produce sound during exhalation. The state of exhalation not only influences the quality of the sound produced during vocal cord vibration but also plays a crucial role in shaping articulation during singing, the strength of notes and phrases, as well as the expression of emotions.

A good way of exhaling can not only reduce vocal cord damage and improve the bad habit of students in this grade who like to shout while singing, but also encourage them to process music in a more diverse form, making the music have a contrast between strong and weak and smooth lines.

Therefore, this study contends that in the training of music singing, incorporating exhalation training can foster students’ awareness of active breathing during singing, mitigate vocal cord damage caused by singing to some extent, and enhance the aesthetic appeal of musical works. In line with the requirements of the new curriculum standards and considering the characteristics of the second-grade stage, the author has devised the

following methods to cultivate students' exhalation abilities.

### **2.2.1. Naughty puppy**

The teacher plays instruments or plays music with leaps. In the music, students imitate the panting sound of a puppy and make “hah, hah” sounds. In this exercise, the teacher needs to guide the students to exhale by forcefully bouncing their abdomens, and always pay attention to whether the students' conditions meet the requirements and whether their bodies are relaxed.

This exercise can enhance students' diaphragmatic jumping ability, allowing them to actively release their breath without resistance. It enables students to experience the functional state of their bodily mechanisms during exhalation and fosters the development of good breathing habits.

### **2.2.2. Exhalation challenge**

The teacher plays an instrument or plays two or three melodies. The time depends on the specific situation. Before the music starts, students take a deep breath and emit a soft and even “sizzle” sound when the music begins, stopping along with the music. Each melody allows students to take a short break.

When practicing, students should stand upright with their hands on their hips, feel the tension between their abdomen and diaphragm, and deliberately control the exhalation to be soft and even. Teachers need to constantly remind and correct students to prevent them from emptying their breath all at once or exhaling unevenly, which would render the practice ineffective. The duration of exhalation is relatively long. Therefore, when inhaling, remind students to use deep inhalation to accumulate breath.

This exercise mainly trains and strengthens students' ability to exhale evenly and control the amount of exhalation, so that they can independently and freely control their breath during singing and better complete the work.

In singing, both inhalation and exhalation are crucial steps. They complement each other and neither can be dispensed with. Therefore, it is very important to incorporate the training of singing and breathing into classroom training.

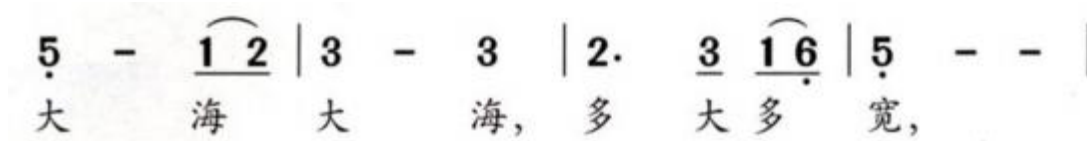
## **3. A concise analysis of the application of breathing techniques in singing: A case study of “The Sea”**

The vocal work “The Sea” (excerpted from Lesson 9, Flower City Edition Music Textbook for Grade 2, China) is a lyrical composition in F major with a 3/4 meter. Its tessitura spans a ninth interval ( $c^1-d^2$ ), structured in two-bar subphrases and four-bar phrases. Characterized by a moderato tempo and cantabile style, this piece serves as an exemplary pedagogical material for vocal training. This chapter conducts a case study of this work to systematically analyze the application of respiratory techniques in art song performance.

As shown in **Figure 1**, although this sentence is divided into two small lines and can take a break in the middle, to sing out the major lines of the sentence and the smoothness of the music, this sentence should be sung in one go. For this reason, the training “Smell Smell Fragrance” set up in the courses mentioned above enables students to inhale sufficient breath volume before singing the sentence to support them in completing the singing of the sentence. The melodic development of this musical phrase progresses from low to high and then descends back to low. When performed vocally, the sound is sustained and seamless, evoking the ebb and flow of ocean waves. Additionally, this phrase serves as the opening of the composition. When instructing

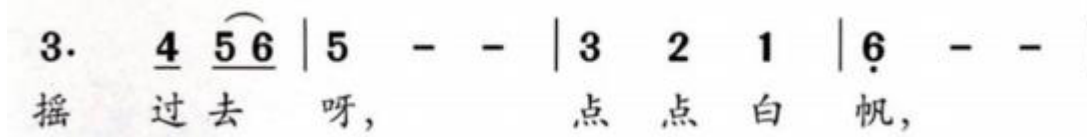


students in their performance, it is important to emphasize that the volume should remain moderate, and the breath support must be steady to achieve a richer and more expansive musical expression.



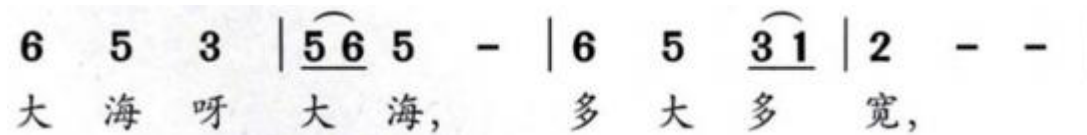
**Figure 1.** Bars 1–4 of “The Sea” (F major, 3/4 time) from Lesson 9 of the Flower City Edition Music Textbook for Grade 2

As illustrated in **Figure 2**, the first occurrence of the highest pitch d2 in this work appears in this measure, and it notably occurs on a weak beat. When singing, the teacher should emphasize to the students that the physical strength utilized during singing originates from the core muscles of the waist and abdomen, rather than exerting pressure on the throat. As students inhale, their waist and abdominal areas should expand, focusing on engaging these core muscles. This approach facilitates a transition from relying on throat tension to utilizing the strength of the waist and abdomen during singing. Consequently, this technique not only minimizes potential damage to the vocal cords but also enhances the aesthetic quality of the music and improves singing efficiency.



**Figure 2.** Bars 9–12 of “The Sea” (F major, 3/4 time) from Lesson 9 of the Flower City Edition Music Textbook for Grade 2

As shown in **Figure 3**, this phrase represents the climax of the piece, featuring the three highest notes (d<sup>2</sup>) while constituting a complete four-bar musical phrase. Given its extended length and moderate technical difficulty, it poses a challenge for second-year students. Prior to vocal execution, instructors should guide students to adopt diaphragmatic breathing techniques, ensuring adequate respiratory support for sustained phonation.



**Figure 3.** Bars 17–20 of “The Sea” (F major, 3/4 time) from Lesson 9 of the Flower City Edition Music Textbook for Grade 2

In conclusion, the systematic integration of respiratory techniques in vocal pedagogy, particularly through contextualizing breath management within the performance of *The Sea*, achieves multidimensional pedagogical efficacy. This approach not only resolves technical challenges inherent in the work (e.g., extended phrase sustainment across nine-degree tessitura) but also enhances emotional articulation through dynamic breath modulation, which simultaneously cultivates students’ vocal competency, aesthetic discernment, and holistic musicianship.

## 4. Conclusion

Second-grade students are lively in behavior and active in thinking, and they are very willing to express what they have learned and can do. In singing, they are also prone to a series of minor singing problems, which prevent them from better expressing the emotions of the music through singing or from completely singing musical works that are relatively difficult for second-grade students.

The breathing state forms used by second-grade students in singing studied in this article are vivid and interesting, which makes it convenient for students to understand and use. It is integrated and analyzed with the musical work “The Sea”, combining the simple method with singing into one, so that the work can be better expressed.

Overall, for second-grade students in music classes, apart from learning to sing the melodies of music, they still need to master certain singing techniques and incorporate these techniques into their singing, laying a more solid foundation for subsequent learning and singing.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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