When I was new to teaching I encountered a young student who was being very difficult in my class. I took him aside for a private conversation and he told me he hated my class because "music makes me feel things." I knew about his tough home life and we discussed how music does have that power both for happiness and sadness.

Years later I came across the Skye Boat Song which seemed like a perfect addition to my transportation themed concert. I liked the song and was pleasantly surprised by how much my students took to it. They loved the story of a prince escaping his country by disguising himself as a woman (a bonnie). They loved the melody and most of all, it made them feel things. This piece was harder to play on the recorder than anything we had done as a class and I had assumed that only a select few would play it by the concert. I quickly realized how much the song spoke to my students and that it would be their motivation to push themselves. I decided I needed a plan to make it playable for all levels of recorder players.

The first step to playing this song was to play along with only the first note of every other measure. I showed them these notes as letter names (see image for FIRST STEP) but also highlighted them in the printed music on the board. This enabled students who were pre-readers to play along right away. Then I would add the first beat of every measure (see SECOND STEP). Eventually we'd move to the full notation. This layering would allow all students to play along no matter where they were in the process. Students at level 1 could play along successfully with students who knew the whole song.

In the end we had a beautiful piece for our program where we sang and then played the recorders. Through the process of layering increasingly difficult steps to play this piece, my students pushed themselves to become better recorder players.

FIRST STEP

A section

D	A
B	D
D	A
B	G

B section

B	A
G	E
B	A
G	E

SECOND STEP

A section

D	G	A	D'
B	E	D	D
D	G	A	D'
B	E	G	G

B section

B	B	A	A
G	E	E	E
B	B	A	A
G	E	E	D

Skye Boat Song

arr. D. Navin

Soprano Recorder

Speed Bon-nie boat, like a bird on the wing

On - ward the sail - ors cry

Car - ry the lad that's born to be king

ov - er the sea to skye

Loud the winds cry, loud the waves roar

Thun - der claps rend the air

Baff - led our foes, Stand by the shore

Fol - low they will not dare