

**National Science Teachers Association**

**Listening to a Continent Sing  
by Donald Kroodsma**

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336 pp.

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Grade Level: **9-College**

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*Listening to a Continent Sing: Birdsong by Bicycle from the Atlantic to the Pacific* is a stream of consciousness read. Not your typical trade book in that it likely would not appeal to younger readers, or even those in the middle grades. However, the creative high school or college level instructor who selects passages with an eye to supporting the teaching of classes ranging from biology to geography to creative writing and even history will find a wealth of information to support their teaching.

Donald Kroodsma, a well-known author and world-renowned birdsong expert, along with his adult son, takes a ten-week, ten-state bicycle trip of 5,000 miles from the Atlantic to the Pacific. On remote roads and across the United States he records, takes notes, and shares knowledge across a wide range of subjects, always coming back to his love of birds. The 287 page narrative is supported by notes, references, and an index section along with delicate pen and ink illustrations of birds and scenes encountered. Additionally, the book is chock-full of QR codes which reveal recordings of birds and their songs that were encountered on the journey. Before the table of contents Kroodsma devotes a page to describing how to best use a QR code reader (such as an app on a smart phone) to access the songs of each bird. The QR codes in the book are each numbered and accompanied by a brief description of what can be heard and the duration of the recording. The reader can use the QR code reader throughout the book for all 381 sounds, or alternatively listen on the internet by navigating around the website [ListeningToAContinentSing.com](http://ListeningToAContinentSing.com). At this site additional information is provided for listening to bird songs and sounds.

Using trade books like *Listening to a Continent Sing* within content areas allows teachers and students to learn in a meaningful and more personal way. Educators might select passages for use

as background reading, within planned units of study, as resource material for teaching, and in supporting literacy within the content area. When reading, students may use the book for research purposes and even for reading enjoyment and enrichment. An additional benefit to students is their recognition of how the information contained in trade books compliments and supports what they learn in school.

This book is one that would be equally useful to a wide variety of educators at the secondary and post-secondary level. It is hoped by this reviewer that innovative educators will develop ancillary materials and recommendations on approaches for using *Listening to a Continent Sing* in a number of subject areas. Lesson plans or outlines with review or discussion questions, lists of discussion topics, and even a test bank of possible exam questions ranging from multiple choice to essay would be helpful in implementation. The inclusion of numerous QR codes with recordings make the reading come alive. Coupling these codes with the website to supply reader support makes this book truly one of a kind. Innovative educators will enjoy the challenge of deciding exactly how to use *Listening to a Continent Sing* in their teaching.