Make a Straw Oboe

The first wind instruments were probably hollow reeds picked and played by shepherds in the field. You can make music with a straw.

What to do: Pinch flat 1/2 inch to 3/4 inch (12 mm to 19 mm) at one end of the straw. Cut off little triangles from the corners to form wedges, or reeds. Put the straw far enough into your mouth so your lips don’t touch the corners. Don’t pucker your lips, but blow hard. Cut three small slits along the length of the straw about 1 inch (2.5 cm) apart. Separate the slits so they form small round holes. Cover one of them and blow. Then cover two, then three, blowing each time.

What happens: Each time you blow, you hear a different sound. You can play simple tunes by covering and uncovering the holes.

Why: As in a real oboe, the two wedges, the reeds, opening and closing at high speed, first allow air to flow into the straw and then stop the flow. Vibrating air creates the sound. As you cover and uncover the holes, you regulate the length of the air column and that determines the pitch. The shorter the air column, the faster it vibrates and the higher the note.