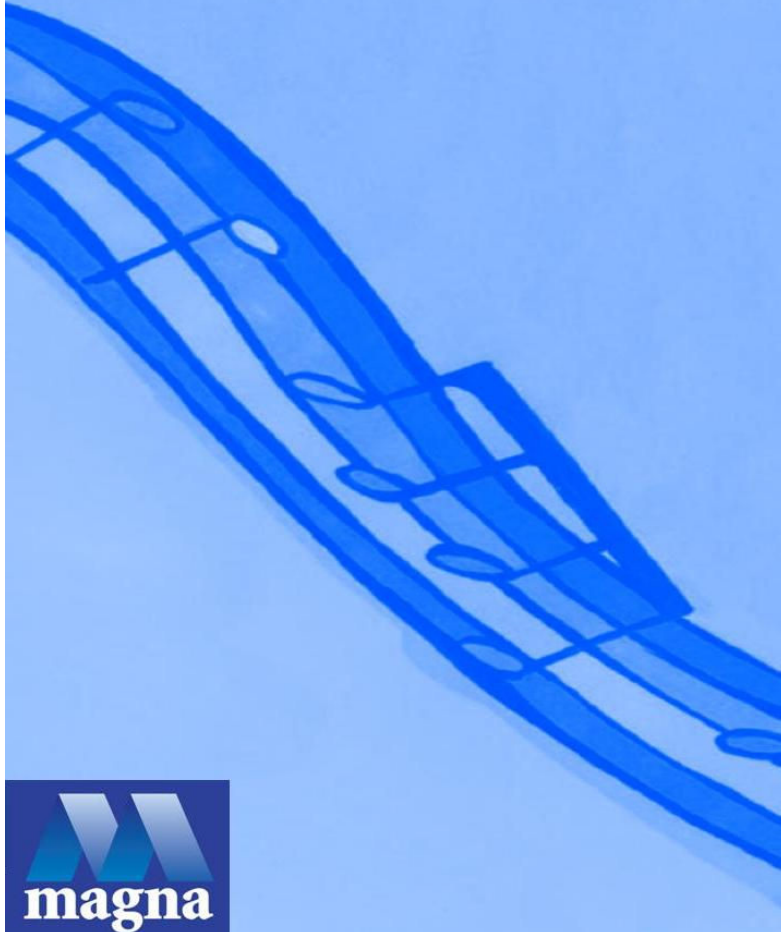


Singing And Songs



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The guide

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SUMMARY

“On top of old pizza, all covered with cheese, I lost my poor meatball ...”

“Now it’s time to clean our toys, clean our toys, clean our toys. Now it’s time to clean our toys, so early in the morning ...”

“What I remember most when I come back to visit my kindergarten teacher is the songs we used to sing with her.”

All teachers can learn to use the most basic musical instrument – the human voice – to accomplish instructional objectives. They can use songs to instruct, even if they are not accomplished musicians. This program shows teachers successfully using singing in classroom activities for pre-school, kindergarten, and other early-year classes. It also explores why the combination of lyrics and melody work as a teaching modality. *Singing and Songs* demonstrates and explains how any teacher can incorporate these skills into everyday classroom activities.

Explore:

- Who can use singing in the classroom.
- What songs are the most popular with teachers and children.
- When songs work well during transitions between various activities.
- Where singing and songs can fit within state-mandated curriculum standards.
- Why singing works, on the most basic level.
- How you can use songs to teach language, social skills, and math concepts, even if you think you can’t carry a tune.
- How to make up songs to common melodies.
- How to get children involved with making up their own songs.
- How to use the Internet and other resources to find songs for the classroom.
- How songs help children with disabilities.
- How to adapt songs other teachers use in their classrooms.

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Singing comes naturally to some teachers. It's more difficult for others, who may be shy or unaccustomed to singing in front of other people. But **young children are the most forgiving audience** an aspiring vocalist will ever encounter. They don't expect their teacher to have perfect pitch or even care whether the song is being sung the "right" way. They're not judgmental. All they care about is the music – and their definition of "music" is quite inclusive. So teachers, relax and sing away – because it's fun to sing, and because **your students will learn better if you put your lessons to song.**

Many teachers who have not had music lessons actively fear involvement with music. They think it's an activity beyond their talents, they don't understand how to "make it work", they can't play an instrument...and so on. But in truth, anybody can bring musical concepts into the classroom. And one doesn't have to be a practicing musician to get points across. There are many musically-related games and activities for children which don't require a master pianist, or a trained singer.

The first instrument any teacher should consider using is his or her voice. Your singing voice is with you all the time. It's an instrument you carry around with you. Some of the teachers who are anxious about teaching music in the classroom – admit it – sing in the shower, and sing in the house, and sing in the car and all over the place. And yet they fear singing in front of children. But children don't judge. They simply enjoy coming together as a community, making music together. Teachers who take a chance and sing or play music with their students will be more than amply rewarded, and so will their protégés.

Singing together seems to be especially effective in reaching children who otherwise have trouble focusing in the classroom. Both anecdotal evidence and formal research support the observation that very young children with disabilities, language barriers and other learning challenges respond especially well to teachers when songs are used to communicate basic instructions in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Singing also helps advanced learners reinforce what they are learning through other instruction methods and to just simply have FUN!

REACHING ALL CHILDREN

As all teachers know, sometimes a verbal command isn't enough, and sometimes children need to have their attention caught in another way. In some cases, if a song does nothing more than simply get a child to look at the teacher, it's already served its purpose. Singing instructions such as "clean up!", "stand up!", even "line up!", especially when accompanied with gestures, can lead a child when nothing else seems to.

Children learn in many different ways, and **different children may have entirely different learning styles.** But music bridges these differences. Children who don't respond well to simple spoken directives, or even those who don't speak English at all, will respond to a tune. And it's not just the music itself, but the community that music creates among those making it and those responding to it, which speaks to

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children. A child who is confused can look around, see how the other children are responding to the music, and feel reassured.

Particularly in schools today, which serve all kinds of children from all kinds of backgrounds and environments, music has a place. Children can focus on music, and enjoy their own participation, even if they're not verbally or socially skilled.

SINGING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

For many teachers, **using songs to teach music seems a natural way to teach language skills**, and they're right. Songs can also be used to teach in other areas found in the early childhood curriculum, such as environmental awareness or basic mathematical concepts.

Say one child in the singing circle has a wonderful aptitude for math. That child will ask for the "How Many Monkeys Jumping on the Bed?" song over and over again. He knows the answers before the teacher says them. "How many monkeys are there on the bed now? Two!" This child loves that feeling of already knowing there will only be two monkeys. And the same song might affect another child in a completely different way: she may one day become a zoologist because she's so fascinated by the monkeys in the song. Yet another child may grow up to become the doctor called in to check up on the monkeys who fell off the bed. Songs touch children – and adults – in all kinds of different and unexpected ways, and they can highlight and nurture a child's natural talents and special skills.

Instructors that are active, engaged and willing to put themselves out artistically in front of their class will find their students eager to follow in a way that stern directions simply can't compel. Children respond to creativity, in part because they long to develop their own creative sides.

FAVORITE SONGS

Just as the Billboard Charts have a "Top 40 Favorite Hit Songs of All Time", preschool and kindergarten teachers also have a list of favorite songs and melodies. Some of these tunes are so universal, they've jumped boundaries from state to state, nation to nation, and even continent to continent ... with a grand oral tradition handed down across many generations, from teacher to teacher. Songs like "You Are My Sunshine" or "On Top of Spaghetti" are always popular.

For those seeking new song ideas, **the Internet is always a good resource**. Take a look at websites for preschools, daycares, and kindergartens. These may list songs popular among their students.

Tip:

Teachers who can't read music might consider buying popular children's CDs (or borrowing them from their library) and listening to them to learn the "hot new tunes".

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Even those children who don't seem to enjoy singing along with the teacher in the classroom learn when the teacher uses music to teach. The melody underscores the lesson, and teachers often find that the extra effort has paid off even with children who appear uninterested. Particularly for children with minimal language skills, the impact can be dramatic. Parents will report back that their children are singing this song or that at home, even if it's one the child wouldn't sing in class – or even if it's in a language the children or parents themselves barely know (as might be found in a home where English is the second language).

ADAPTING LYRICS TO MELODIES

One of the most effective ways to teach a young child is to **use easily recognizable melodies with new words**. Perhaps we'll never know which clever teacher or child first used the melody to "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" to help teach children the alphabet, but the adaptation was so effective, nearly every child in America has developed his or her foundation of literacy with the tune. Certain combinations of musical intervals seem to resonate with almost every child. In fact, the powerful refrain for "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" was actually written by a young Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, at the age of five; he clearly understood the musical tastes of his peers.

Teachers should feel free to make up their own song lyrics. Consider using the names of students in the class; kids enjoy hearing their own name. This can be more difficult in larger groups, but works very well for small ones.

Another fun exercise, appropriate for elementary school-age children, is to make up a blues song. The blues is a very simple form, with three basic chords. A classic blues song follows the pattern A A B; that is, say a line, repeat the line, and then sing a third line which rhymes with the first two.

For example:

Woke up this morning, stepped out of bed
Well, I Woke in the morning and I stepped out of bed
I didn't see my cat, tripped on her and fell on my head

Another variation is to have one child make up the first couple of lines and have another child answer the last line in response. And in activity as simple as this, children are learning concepts of words and lines. They're also learning history, because the blues form was one of the earliest forms of that style called jazz.

When teachers involve the children in making up songs, they help spark the creative side for their students. It is an excellent way for children to practice their language, rhythm, and melodic skills. Don't feel constrained to using music which has already been written by someone else. Give children an opportunity to create their own music. This frees them from the burden of "right" or "wrong". Their music is their property, expressing what they wish to say in the manner they want to say it. Children, whose lives are often necessarily restricted, will enjoy this freedom and be inspired by it.

INCLUSION

Music brings with it acceptance. Let children know their contributions are valued – and indeed, do value them. A pitch-perfect voice, a flawless sense of rhythm, an “ear” for music – these things aren't necessary to make music worthwhile in the classroom. The teacher's participation, and the inclusion of all the students, is what makes music invaluable in the classroom and to the learning process.

Perhaps the most important thing about using music in learning is that it's fun. Kids enjoy it. It's a way for them to learn letters and numbers and all kinds of things that make them want to come to school each day.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are you comfortable singing in public? Do you sing with your family and close friends? Or do you only sing when you're alone in the shower or the car? Or do you consider yourself someone who doesn't sing at all?
2. What do you sing? Do you sing songs you learned as a child in school, or from your parents? Do you sing rock songs or opera arias or themes from musicals? What about jingles from commercials or television shows? Where do you think you "pick up" most of the songs you sing?
3. If you were to compose your own song right now, what would it be about? Would it be about a person you know, a pet, a place? Or something more intangible, like a feeling or a philosophy? Would it be upbeat, slow, or sentimental?
4. What do you consider to be your favorite type of music? Classical? Alternative? Techno?
5. How would you describe your own musical taste? Do you think describing your musical taste to others helps them to better "understand" you? If so, why?
6. Have you ever taught a child a song, or watched a group of children sing or make music? What did you observe?

ACTIVITY #1: CREATING YOUR OWN SONG LIST

When thinking about ways to bring music into your classroom, one way to increase your own comfort level is to have a ready 'stock' of songs at your disposal. In small groups of 2 – 4 people, brainstorm some good songs for your students to sing, dance and learn to.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

ACTIVITY #2: DEVISING A LESSON PLAN

In pairs or small groups, discuss ways you can use music in daily lesson plans. Propose a lesson plan in each of the following categories, and describe the song or type of song which would make a good accompaniment to the lesson or concept being taught. Which styles seem to fit with which subjects?

1. Math or Counting

2. Colors

3. Cooperation

4. History

5. Memorization (e.g., dates, formulas, the digits of Pi)

6. Science

ACTIVITY #3: COMPOSE YOUR OWN SONG

Use the space below to write lyrics to your own song. It could be bluesy, operatic, in the style of Rod Stewart or Britney Spears or Peter, Paul and Mary, whatever appeals to you. Teach your classmates your song – and, for bonus points, add hand or other body motions!

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

BOOKS & ARTICLES

Miche, Mary. (2002). *Weaving Music Into Young Minds with Education*. Albany, NY: Delmar Learning.

Pugh, Aelwyn and Lesley. (1998). *Music in the Early Years: Teaching and Learning in the First Three Years of School*. London: Routledge.

Storms, Jerry and Anne Griffiths, trans. (1995). *101 Music Games for Children: Fun and Learning with Rhythm and Song*. Alameda, CA: Hunter House, Inc.

Traugh, Steven and Susan. (2005). *Mother Goose Brain Boost: Using Music and Movement to Teach Cognitive Skills (Early Learning)*. Huntington Beach, CA: Creative Teaching Press.

Young, Susan and Joanna Glover. (1998). *Music in the Early Years*. Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis, Inc.

LINKS

America's Story (The Library of Congress): Children's Songs	http://www.americasstory.com/ cgi-bin/page.cgi/sh/kidsongs
Early Childhood Music and Movement Association (ECMMA)	http://www.ecmma.org/
Early Learning: Songs, Stories, and Poems	http://www.netrox.net/~labush/colpres.htm#song
Head Start: Songs for Children	http://www.head-start.lane.or.us/education/ activities/music/
Music Together	http://www.musictogether.com/
The National Association for Music Education	http://www.menc.org/information/prek12/echild.html
Preschool Education: Music and Songs	http://www.preschooleducation.com/song.shtml
Songs for Teaching	http://www.songsforteaching.com/ preschoolkindergarten.htm
The Teacher's Guide: Children's Songs	http://www.theteachersguide.com/ChildrensSongs.htm
UpToTen.com: Songs	http://www.boowakwala.com/preschool/ preschool-songs.html