

Introduction

Music, Drama, and Language Arts in the Classroom

Creative drama, theater elements, and language arts can easily be integrated into the classroom. Many ideas related to characterization and communication of emotion can become part of music lessons.



Drama and music are effectively integrated art forms

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Students' creative imaginations are the result of their play activities. When young children engage in games and songs, they explore, invent, and create new ways to control and organize sounds. Creativity is a direct and immediate means of self-expression and self-discovery in music. The elementary teacher can be an effective guide for stimulating musical growth by designing and shaping activities that enable the expansion of creativity and artistic development of all students through drama.

- Students can learn the stories of programmatic music or operas. The teacher can play the music and discuss with the class how the music portrays or enhances the experience of the story. The teacher could lead the discussion to the use of musical devices as well as theatrical devices for portraying the story.

- The students could create a musical about U.S. history or the history of their state or region. Music and folk dances that students have learned in their music classes could be used. Students could incorporate all the aspects of drama in creating a musical.
- The teacher can select songs that describe characters or tell stories, including story songs from various cultures. The discussion should focus on the characters, their motivations, actions, and how the characters or plot of the poem could change.

Teaching Drama and Language Arts with Musical Concepts

In the early primary grades, the teaching of language arts focuses on learning the low-level skills of reading, grammar, punctuation, printing and writing, and spelling. Because language arts, however, shares common elements with music, music can stimulate students desire to learn these necessary skills.



[Elements of Language Arts](#)

Because people experience music, its integration with drama and language arts are more easily taught through experiences that utilize more than one musical element. Several of the following activities can be implemented to different effect depending on which subject area or musical element the teacher wishes to emphasize.

Rhythm, Melody, Form, and Expression

To increase students' awareness of the beat, the teacher should begin by asking questions such as "Who could find the steady beat in this poem?" Questioning in this manner will help to direct the students' attention to the specific concept and to think more critically about the rhythmic pulse.

The teacher can then draw the students' attention to the music, heightening their awareness that the music has not only beat/pulse but also sound and silence, much like poetry and words. Through instruction to listen, respond physically to the sounds and silence, and to internalize these musical concepts, the student will be able to determine more successfully if the music has a steady beat.

By using chant, students can concentrate on the rhythmic aspects of the music rather than the melodic characteristics as the teacher is demonstrating in this movie.

Teachers should encourage students to respond physically in a variety of ways to heighten the drama and meaning of the words and the underlying pulse. Students can chant words to a steady beat and determine how many sounds occur for each word.



Da - vid

Two beats with one syllable for each note

[↗ Enlarge](#)



Two beats with two syllables on one note and one syllable on another note

 [Enlarge](#)

Guiding the students to chant the words of a familiar rhyme can be followed by more physical actions such as clapping or patsch. Once the pulse is established, the students will feel it even though no words are sung or spoken, strengthening the development of students' audiation abilities. This will also help students to become aware that the pulse is ongoing and that the words have a rhythm that is distinct from the pulse. Observe the students' response in this activity.








How to Create a Rhythmic Chant

Click below for step-by-step instructions for creating rhythmic chants.



[Creating a Rhythmic Chant](#)

The following activities combine drama, language arts, and rhythmic activities in meaningful ways:

| SONG | RHYTHMIC OSTINATO | TRADITIONAL MNEMONICS FOR OSTINATO | WORLD MNEMONICS FOR OSTINATO |
|----------------------|---|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Rain, Rain Go Away |  | ti - ti - ti - ti | pit - ter pat - ter |
| This Old Man |  | ti - ti ta | pad - dy whack |
| Silent Night |  | ta ti | hush now |
| Hickory Dickory Dock |  | ta - i ta - i | tick tock |
| Skip to my Lou |  | 7 ti - ri ta | 7 but - ter - milk |
| Marianne |  | tim - ri ta | co - co - nut |
| The Ashe Grove |  | tri - o - la | grace - ful - ly |

Examples of Elementary Mnemonics

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- Mnemonics or words and phrases can reinforce ostinati.
Mnemonics—rhythm syllables with no semantic meaning—can help establish specific rhythmic durations. When students have difficulty with some of the traditional mnemonics (1-and-2-and or ti-ti-ti-ti) familiar words can be substituted that fit into the rhythmic scheme of the chant or rhyme. Chanting these rhythmic ostinati will help students in developing an inner sense of rhythm by kinesthetically experiencing the concept. The following chart shows a variety of age- and grade-appropriate mnemonics.
- Students also can coordinate with the theme or topic of the song by choosing several rhythmic combinations within each rhythmic category. With a well-known chant or rhyme, have the students create a rhythmic ostinato from some of the words or similar words in that

same topic. Divide the class in half and have one half speak the chant or rhythm while the other half chants the rhythmic ostinato. For example, to the traditional chant, "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Once I caught a fish alive," select specific types of fish as the rhythmic ostinati.

- 2 quarter notes — floun-der
- 1 half note — trout
- 2 eighth notes and a quarter — mor-ay eel

To promote integration and cognitive learning in the study of language arts, drama, and form, students may

- Learn and examine simple nursery rhythms for examples of repetition, relating these to repetition in musical phrases and dramatizing the actions of the rhyme;
- Create rhythmic representations of "sentences" using sounds from found objects or percussion instruments and creating stories that help to interpret the sentences;
- Examine different forms of poetry (Haiku, sonnet, etc.) and interpret these musically and dramatically;
- Learn the vocabulary for musical forms;
- Punctuate sentences using different vocal or instrumental sounds for each type of punctuation mark and dramatize the changes.
- Listen to selected recordings and develop a list of words that describe the music. The teacher will then instruct the students to write a poem or story about the music using the words from the list and dramatize the result;
- Choose a familiar story or a folktale, find songs for each main scene, and, with simple costumes, act out each story. Students can use familiar tunes or compose new ones. They can sing songs without

accompaniment or instruments or they can add taped music. Lead characters can sing their dialog, or some parts may speak theirs; and

- Be introduced to opera (drama and theater with music) using books such as Englander's (1983) *Opera! What's All the Screaming About?*, Price's (1990) *Aida: A Picture Book for All Ages*, or Rosenberg's (1989) *Sing Me a Song: Metropolitan Opera's Book of Opera Stories for Children*, and listen to opera examples.

Literature and Music in the Classroom

A close relationship exists between literature and music. The words of literature have many musical elements—rhythm, pitch, and accent. Onomatopoeic words—thump, crash, crunch, etc.—suggest sounds that can become music. Music is used to tell stories particularly in programmatic works that depict a theme or can be combined with words to tell an actual story, such as Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*.



Most nursery rhymes are also songs

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Song is poetry combined with music. Children's rhymes are simple forms of poetry, as in Baa Baa Black Sheep. An English nursery rhyme dating from about 1731, it is usually sung to a variation of the 1761 French melody *Ah!*

Vous dirai-je, maman, the melody of which was also the basis of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's piano composition *Twelve Variations on "Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman"*, K. 265. Elementary teachers should encourage students to be sensitive to the elements of literature, to notice how words and music connect, and to combine them through creative experiments.

Teaching Music and Literature Concepts

Never has there been more high-quality children's literature available to integrate the arts. There is a plethora of children's literature devoted to music specifically and a variety of genre of music-related children's books (e.g., biographies of musicians).

Children's literature can become the basis for a variety of lessons that integrate music. For example, Ambrus' *Seven Skinny Goats* can be used to dance with music signals and to explore different tempos (students enjoy trying to dance with one foot stuck to the floor). *Charlie Parker Played Be Bop* is a striking picture book appropriate for any age. If it is read while playing a tape or CD of *Night in Tunisia*, it becomes a magical lesson and can lead to discoveries about genre, style, and form.

Biographies are particularly important ways for students to get in-depth and personal accounts of individuals with whom they might identify. Biographies are valuable in both science and social studies to add the human element. For example, Krull's *The Lives of Musicians* gives short biographical pieces with interesting facts and a perspective on the historical period in which the musician lived. Recording artists or Internet searches can help in locating recordings.

The following suggestions are lesson ideas for combining music and literature.

- The music teacher should compile a list of existing children's literature that will connect with music. This list would include books that illustrate songs, tell the stories of program music or operas, or tell the stories of composers and musicians.

- Students can set existing poetry or literature that uses onomatopoeic sounds or particularly strong imagery to music. They can also experiment with the expressive use of the voice in reading the literature aloud and try single and combined voices for different effects.

What would be the possibilities for the following Haiku?

Autumn by Morten Paulsen

An island song

Like a floating river

Rain rain fall fall.

The integration of music with drama, language arts, and literature has the potential for enriching the lives of students and teachers. Using resources and materials from these academic areas will increase student retention of knowledge, build collaboration among students, and help students to discover new skills in themselves creating a richer, more memorable learning experience.