

Introduction



Singing is an important means of self-expression

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Each culture has songs and chants for young children that are engaging and enjoyable to sing. While a song may be published in a text or series, it is important for the teacher to be able to determine whether the music is appropriate for the specific age and capabilities of the students. Any song selected for the classroom should be worth learning, worth teaching, and musically valid. When selecting songs for younger students to sing, teachers should take into consideration several elements. These elements include the range, rhythm, melody, length, text, and subject matter of the song.

Range



The Best Range for Students in Pre-School through First Grade is indicated in the Bracket

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The octave from middle C to the C above middle C is the best range for the young child. The best range for students in pre-school through first grade is a grouping of five notes, from D above middle C upward to A on the piano keyboard. As a general principle, the range should expand upward for each grade. When selecting vocal material for elementary students, it is equally important to evaluate the tessitura to determine that most of the notes are within an appropriate range for the student.

Rhythm

The teacher must also consider the rhythmic difficulty in selecting vocal literature. The rhythmic complexity should correspond with the age-appropriate introduction of rhythmic elements. For example, through the first grade, songs with quarter notes and eighth notes and their corresponding rests should dominate the repertoire.

Melody

Is the melody conjunct or disjunct? Songs with notes moving in a conjunct, stepwise manner are easier for the younger student than songs with frequent leaps of wide intervals.

CONJUNCT



Conjunct melody

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DISJUNCT



Disjunct melody

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Length

A general principle to follow is that the younger the student, the shorter the song.

Text and Subject Matter

Students should be able to read or, for the pre-reading students, understand the text of the song. Additionally, the subject matter should be of interest to the students. The world is small for the younger student. Through first grade, students enjoy songs about everyday tasks, family, animals, and

familiar things. As students grow, their world expands to include interest in emotions, foreign lands, and languages.

Song Selection Checklist

This song selection checklist may help evaluate and select an appropriate repertoire for students.



[Song Selection Checklist](#)

A Process for Teaching a Song: Step One

Step One: Preparation

Preparation is important in teaching and leading singing to help students focus on the upcoming activity. Teachers can accomplish this by:

- Leading the students through engaging vocal warm-ups
- Creating a meaningful introduction to the song or activity
- Personalizing the lesson

Vocal Warm-Up

Vocal warm-ups are necessary for any singing activity. Students need to explore their voices and become familiar with how to control the voice by learning to sing through the entire range, singing at different dynamic levels, and matching pitch. Warm-ups often include techniques for relaxation and the development of good posture. In this movie clip, the teacher helps students prepare to sing.

Vocal warm-ups help to prepare the students for the lesson as well as help to prepare them to focus on singing well. Vocal warm-ups can also help the students learn to use and control the full range of their voices.

In another example of a vocal warm-up, notice how the teacher engages the students by using her hands. The gestures help show the students pitch direction and help students learn to use and control the full range of their voices.

Meaningful Introduction

A meaningful introduction is important to bring students into the song or lesson. Teachers can make music more meaningful by calling attention to the construction of the music, the melodic character of the song, or other pertinent elements of the activity or song.

Relating to past learning helps tie the lesson to previous activities or concepts by putting the new material in context. Prompts might include questions such as "Do you remember the game we played yesterday?"

Personalizing the Lesson

Teachers can make a song meaningful by personalizing the lesson. Personalization helps make the vocal experience more engaging for the students. A teacher can incorporate students' names, actions, ideas, or novel words to help the students relate to the lesson. These teachers are personalizing the lessons that follow.

A Process for Teaching a Song: Step Two

Step Two: Lead the Students

All teachers need to lead students effectively in singing. They can accomplish this by establishing a song-starting procedure.

Teachers should:

- Exhibit behaviors that help students to focus on the music
- Establish a specific pitch
- Conduct with a preparatory gesture

The students need to hear the piece performed in its entirety. In most cases, the teacher performs the song. This is known as modeling. The teacher, regardless of gender, should sing the song on the pitch and range that the students will sing. The teacher also needs to give the students the starting pitch and make certain that the students are matching the tonality. A male teacher needs to be careful when providing a pitch for the students. If he does not use falsetto to sing in the students' range, then he needs to teach the students to sing in their own appropriate range so that they will not strain their voices.

Playing the starting pitch on a piano, keyboard, song bells, or even a recorder will help the students to focus on the song and hear the first pitch. The teacher can reinforce this by giving students a verbal cue and by taking a preparatory stance. The teacher in this movie clip is helping students to focus on the upcoming song.

A short phrase such as "Eyes here," or singing "Here's Your Starting Pitch" can draw the students' attention to the teacher and pique their expectation of singing a song. A preparatory stance should accompany the verbal cue. The preparatory stance is similar to the posture a conductor adopts before starting the ensemble. The teacher stands still and straight, looks directly at the students, and raises his or her hands. The teacher's look and posture of anticipation helps to give focus to the students' attention and send the message that the activity is about to begin. The students will then be ready to sing.

Gesture

The teacher's head and hand gestures or motions let a group know when to begin singing. Most common motions are a head nod, a hand gesture, or the first step or movement of activity. It is also natural to inhale in coordination just prior to singing the first note of the song. If given confidently, these gestures will help students to begin together and with confidence. Without a visual cue or gesture, students will tend to start randomly and hesitantly since they must wait for the teacher to begin singing before they will be able to join the song.

After a slight pause following the pitch, the teacher should signal preparation for the downbeat with a gentle breath, lifted head, and hands in a conducting-like position. The teacher's head and hands should fall on the downbeat. All preliminary gestures should be in the same tempo as the music that follows. All teachers should practice this process until confident with all the steps before trying it with the students.

If the song begins with an anacrusis, the teacher should sing the word or words that are assigned to the anacrusis as the hands and head are lifted just prior to the downbeat. Also, caution should be taken about modeling tension in the breath and gesture. The teacher should help students appreciate the sense of ensemble that results when all members of a group know at what point and how they are to begin and end a piece of music together.

Establishing the Pitch

The importance of establishing a song's initial pitch with students cannot be underestimated. Although students should learn to match the teacher's pitch within the students' range first, students need to know on which pitch a song begins. A fixed pitched instrument (bells, glockenspiel, piano, recorder, etc.) should be used to establish the initial pitch so that the song can be consistently sung in the appropriate range, pitch, and key. And the teacher should reinforce the correct pitch by frequently returning to the instrument.

A Process for Teaching a Song: Step Three

Step Three: Break the Song Down into Chunks

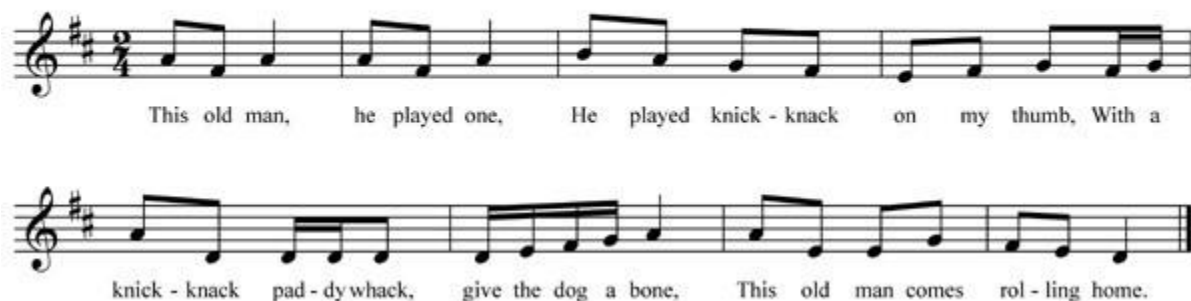
In the elementary classroom, the most common method used to teach songs is by rote because students have not acquired the ability to read and interpret written music. When teaching by rote, the teacher must give a clear visual indication as to when the students should begin to sing, having the students "echo" the teacher's modeling of the musical phrase.

Part of this process is accomplished by breaking the music down into smaller segments or "chunks." These segments are taught by rote using an echo approach in which the teacher sings a phrase followed by the students. Another term for teaching by rote is "lining out." When teaching by rote, the teacher must:

- Divide the song into segments or "chunks" for teaching
- Use gestures to indicate when the class should listen and when the class should sing
- Maintain the correct pitch throughout the echo process

The teacher must decide how to break a song into manageable and logical portions for the students. This is usually done according to the song's phrase structure. Sometimes the melodic structure dictates the division of the song. In each case, the teacher needs to decide before the teaching process begins as to how long each phrase or "chunk" should be. After students have learned the phrases, the teacher must combine the small "chunks" into larger sections. These larger sections also should be taught by rote. The process of combining phrases must repeat until the students learn the entire piece of music. Can you find the "chunks" in this song?

This Old Man



This old man, he played one, He played knick - knack on my thumb, With a
knick - knack pad - dywhack, give the dog a bone, This old man comes rol - ling home.

This Old Man

 Enlarge

Effective implementation of this approach would be to include a gesture indicating when the teacher should sing and when the students should sing, such as moving the teacher's hand from his or her shoulders outward to the students for their turn to echo the teacher. They must do this in an authoritative manner so that students are not confused as to when they should sing. Effective gestures will eliminate the need for unnecessary verbal directions and commentary.

As part of the teaching process, teachers model for students how they should perform specific skills or actions. Because the teacher is emphasizing imitation through the modeling example, students will mirror exactly what they see or hear. If the rhythm is wrong, or the melody is sung on the wrong pitches, students imitate exactly what they see and hear, therefore, it is important for the teacher to know the music well.

A Process for Teaching a Song: Step Four, Five, and Six

Step Four: Maintain Student Interest

All teachers want students to listen during a lesson. To help keep student attention, the teacher should challenge them to listen for a limited number of tasks during singing activities. Some of the following challenges are good examples for maintaining student interest and sharpening perception:

- "Listen to the song I'm going to sing and tell me how many times you hear the word 'ball.'"
- "I'm going to sing this song five times and on the first time, you may not sing with me; on the next three you can sing with me if you feel confident, but on the fifth time, you must sing with me."
- "Count how many times you hear the first melody as I sing this song."

Step Five: Listen to the students

It is important for the teacher to listen to the students as they sing. A teacher who sings along loudly cannot hear what the students are doing. Nor can a teacher listen to the students effectively when playing a recorded accompaniment too loudly. A teacher who listens to the students can detect mistakes in the students' singing.

Step Six: Bring the song to closure

After singing a song, the teacher should bring the lesson to a close. They can accomplish this by:

- Singing the song through in its entirety so that students leave the class with a feeling of accomplishment
- Reviewing what was learned in the lesson

Tell the students what will happen in the next lesson. This is often referred to as an advanced organizer.

Teaching by Rote

Gesture for Teaching Rote

When teaching by rote, the teacher must give a clear visual sign as to when the students should begin to sing. Note this teacher's use of gesture in using the echo approach.

Pitch

In every singing experience, the students must have the beginning pitch prior to singing. When teaching by rote, this is more complex when the final pitch of the teacher's phrase is different from the students beginning pitch. This is particularly noticeable in phrase divisions when echo teaching. When this situation occurs, the teacher must maintain the correct pitch and

tonality throughout the song. It may be necessary to have a fixed pitch instrument available to reinforce and check the pitch.

This checklist could be used to evaluate the teacher who is teaching a song by rote.



[Checklist for assessing and teaching a song by rote or echo-teaching](#)

Leading a Song with Accompaniment

The teacher may use an accompaniment for performance, or to help support the students' voices. Whether the teacher chooses classroom instruments such as an autoharp, guitar, ukulele, dulcimer, or piano, or selects a pre-recorded accompaniment, the students must be prepared to sing the words, sing on pitch, and follow the teacher's cues. Effective implementation would include a gesture indicating when the teacher should sing. An authoritative manner will ensure that students are not confused as to when they should sing. Effective gestures will eliminate the need for unnecessary verbal directions and commentary.

As with all singing, the teacher should provide the text of the song for the students to follow. Even younger children that do not have a complete facility in reading text benefit from seeing the words. When using an accompaniment, the notes and rhythms could also assist students in the performance.

When using instruments, the teacher must decide whether to play the accompaniment personally or have selected students perform the accompaniment. If the teacher chooses to have the students supply the accompaniment, it is more efficient and effective to have only one or two students, or a small group, perform the accompaniment. Too many accompanists will blur the rhythm and create chaos.

When the teacher leads singing with a recorded or instrumental accompaniment, the guidelines for leading singing are similar to the guidelines for leading unaccompanied singing. The accompaniment should include an introduction that establishes the tonal center. The teacher should sing or emphasize the starting pitch and indicate when the class should begin to sing by counting off on the starting pitch and by providing a welcoming gesture. The accompaniment should be performed with correct notes and rhythms and with no stops and re-starts. As with unaccompanied singing, the teacher should continue to have eye contact with the singers.

Teachers must consider other factors when accompanying singing with a recording. The teacher needs to be familiar with audio equipment. The recording should be ready for playing, cued to the beginning of the selection. Cueing is much easier with CD recordings since each track is labeled clearly.

When using a recorded accompaniment, students need to learn the music first. All music should be taught without the recording to make certain that the singing is melodically and rhythmically accurate. After the music has been taught, then the accompaniment will provide a foundation for the students' singing.

The teacher must monitor the accompaniment volume. If they play the recording too loudly, the students will tend to sing less accurately, and their voices will not be audible. If the volume is too soft and the students are not completely familiar with the music, they will be reluctant to project their voices. The students should keep a good, non-forced singing style throughout the performance.

The Use of Recorded or Instrumental Accompaniment

Throughout the performance with recorded accompaniment, the teacher should keep eye contact with the class and conduct or participate in the activity.

This checklist may be used to help evaluate teachers using a recorded accompaniment with students.



[Checklist for teaching a song with accompaniment](#)

Technology for Teaching and Learning Songs

- PowerPoint™ presentations created by teachers or students to use as listening maps for songs.
- PowerPoint™ presentations created by teachers or students to provide background information for songs.
- Digital movies of song performances.