

The art of teaching a Song

Sing it for them

- Know your song well-every word and every note.
- Sing it at least four times for them before they sing.
- Sing it without any accompaniment or recording.
- Talk as little as possible.
- Do not let them sing with you.
- Give them something to do while they are listening.
- Let them sing it alone. Do not sing with them!



Let them move it

- While listening: have them keep the beat on their bodies; sway; or walk to the music
- Teach them motions or sign language to the song
- Give them choreographed movements
- Teach them a dance that goes with the song
- Let them create their own movements



Develop it further

- Listen to the song at least 4 times, and move
- Sing the song
- Use snaps, pats, stomps, and claps to accompany
- Use percussion instruments to accompany
- Create their own movements or dance
- Arrange the song in sections
- Perform the song for an audience or camera



Song Teaching Tips

Listen First!

Children must hear a song in their head in order to be able to sing it well. Let them listen to you sing it with the right tune, with a steady beat, with a beautiful tone, and with expression. They will learn it better if there is no accompaniment or recording to distract from your voice. They should hear it at least 4 times before trying to sing it themselves. This does not need to be boring! Have them listen for something in the song and raise their hand when they hear it. Have them pat the steady beat, sway, or move around the room quietly while they listen.

Magic Microphone

Introduce the magic microphone. This should be a toy that resembles a microphone. I often use a xylophone mallet or stick. The magic microphone gives permission to sing. If it is pointed at me, I am the only one allowed to sing. If it's pointed at the children, only they may sing, and I must be silent. We are trying to foster children who can sing confidently and independently without us.

Move, Move, Move!

Children need to feel the music in their bodies. Giving them opportunities to move to the music helps develop their sense of beat, expression, dynamics, tempo, and mood. Put a lot of boundaries around their movement. This is where they will be tempted towards chaos. Teach them not to bump into their neighbor. Ask them to sit out, if they do. Let them move when listening and learning the song. Also let them move once they have learned the song. After they get a good feel for it, they can use scarves or other props to move artfully in the spirit of the song.

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Keep Building

Once children have learned a song. There is a temptation to move on to a new song. Don't do it! Once they have learned to sing the song, the real fun can begin. Think of each lesson as a new opportunity to build on what they have already learned. If you only ever build to the first floor (learning to sing), you'll have many strip malls so to speak. However, if you keep building onto what they have learned through movement, body percussion, instruments, and arranging, you can build a skyscraper worth performing for any audience.

Body Percussion

Body percussion is a fancy way of saying 'using your body to make cool sounds.' It includes but is not limited to: stomps, pats, claps, and snaps.

Think of the lower movements on your body as being the lower notes and the higher movements on your body being the higher notes. Design an accompaniment to your song based on the age and skill level of the children. For example, snaps are very difficult for younger children. Opt for claps instead. Use the ostinato section below and assign body percussion.

Ostinatos

An ostinato is a short rhythm pattern that repeats over and over. It makes a great accompaniment for a song because it's easy for children to remember. Create a simple ostinato by

1. choosing a complimentary rhythm (quarter, eighth eighth)
2. assigning words related to the song (straw ber-ry)
3. assigning body percussion or instruments to the words
(pat on 'straw', clap clap on 'berry')

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Instrument accompaniment

Instruments are magical to children. The most shy singers will likely have no difficulty at all hitting a drum or shaking an egg shaker. Instrument accompaniments add color, build a sense of beat, and make for a stunning performance. It can be difficult put an instrument in the hands of every child you are working with, but it's worth it. Here are some tips:

1. Egg shakers, boomwhackers, and recorders are very inexpensive and simple options if you have a large group.
2. Make your own shakers or drums during a craft time and use them for your song. Turn over some tupperware for a drum if need be.
3. Frame drums or hand drums come in a range of moderate prices.
4. Borrow hand bells or hand chimes from your church.
5. Orff instruments: xylophones, metalophones, and glockenspiels are absolutely my favorite. I dream of playing these when I'm away from a classroom full of them. Downside is- they are pricey. You can buy them used on eBay for around \$200 and put two kids to an instrument, but this will be an investment you will want to have a plan for using in the future.

Arrange and Perform

Create different sections of your song and alternate them. Make sure everyone knows the form, and practice it until it's ready for a performance. Even a performance in front of your camera will feel meaningful to the children. Here's an example of a simple arrangement:

- A everyone sings the song and plays their instrument accompaniment
- B everyone hums the melody while a small group of children moves
- A everyone sings the song and plays their instrument accompaniment
- C everyone does a body percussion ostinato with or without words
- A everyone sings the song and plays their instrument accompaniment