

# Teaching Young Children to Sing

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I don't sing because I'm happy; I'm happy because I sing. ~William James

As a music teacher of young children I believe that perhaps my most important job is to teach them to sing. Anyone can learn to sing; for some it may take a little longer but with the proper support it will happen. Singing should be a joyful experience! Especially for children, singing should be fun, part of their natural enthusiasm for expression and play.

## Setting the Tone

- Be a great example, singing musically and accurately. Take singing lessons to improve your skills.
- Recognize that the repertoire you choose can greatly influence the success your students will have in developing their voices and singing well.
- Help children to see that singing is a valuable skill for a well-rounded life.
- Be sure that every student understands that you care about them and you will help them to learn to sing.
- Be positive and encouraging always – children will adopt your attitude.

## Warm-ups

- *Speech warm-ups*  
high/medium/low voice  
speaking/whispering/shouting/  
singing voice  
“A,B,C, in conversation”  
“Hello, Hello, Hello Sir”  
“Mr. Turkey and Mrs. Duck”

- *Pitched warm-ups*  
Sirens – voice, voice with hand  
gestures, voice with pictures  
Greeting echoes – “Hello Brady, Hello  
Mrs. K”  
Solfege – pitches with hand signs and staff  
reading

## Singing Games

- *Group singing*  
“Walk to School”  
“Bow, Wow, Wow”  
“Quaker Quaker”  
“Dinosaur”  
“Here Comes a Bluebird”

- *Echo singing*  
Ball game (so-mi - Hello Mary, Hello  
Mrs. K)  
“Charlie Over the Ocean”  
“Mailman”  
“Doggie Where’s Your Bone”

## Repertoire

- *Canons*  
Make New Friends  
Sing, Sing Together  
All Things Shall Perish  
Viva la musica

- Jubilate Deo  
If You Dance  
Calypso  
Every Morning

- *Choral Repertoire*

Look for beautiful melodies, interesting harmony, expressive texts.  
Be careful of the range of the melody – generally not lower than D.

Assess the challenges in the piece and choose an appropriate level of difficulty.  
Don't ignore the oldies; some great tunes and wonderful lyrics.  
Don't save all the choral arrangements for the choir. Allow all of your music students to enjoy singing some really well-crafted music.  
Use a variety of musical styles.  
Choose music you love.

- *Some Favourites*

Bessie the Black Cat – Peter Jenkyns, Elkin 12 0110  
Mrs. Jenny Wren – Arthur Baynon, Boosey & Hawkes M-060-01264-8  
Sugar-plum Tree – Eleanor Daley, Alliance AMP 653  
I Am a Small Part of the World – Albrecht & Althouse, Alfred 4744  
Skylark and Nightingale – Snyder, Belwin SV9218  
The Mending Song – Lobel & Kallman, Mark Foster (Hal Leonard) YS0203  
The North Wind – E. Markham Lee, Leslie Music #77  
The Ghost Ship from “Reflections of a Lad at Sea” – Besig & Price, Shawnee E0267  
A Pirate Song – Wm. R. Smith, Banks & Son, YS 1471

- *Reading music*

Give the children real music to hold in their hands.  
Teach them how to track the melody and recognize signs and symbols.

#### Artistry

Every moment can be magical! Teach artistry in singing in every music class as well as the choir rehearsal. Expect attention to breathing, vowel shape, consonants, phrasing, tone and so on from every student.  
Use movement to help to internalize style and phrasing.  
Speak texts poetically for meaning and expression.  
Speak texts rhythmically for rhythmic accuracy.  
Sing a capella in rehearsals.  
Practice your conducting.  
Use the best accompanist you can find.  
Perform often for an appreciative audience.

#### Assessment

Celebrate every success!  
Create a safe place for students to risk singing in front of their peers.  
Develop a system for quick, clear notation of your assessment.  
Be truthful with each child always keeping in mind that it's very important to be kind and gentle when it comes to judging a child's singing voice.

Work thoughtfully, be creative in your approach, and be joyful with your students as you help them learn to sing!

A bird does not sing because it has an answer.  
It sings because it has a song.

~Chinese Proverb