Read with a beat: Developing literacy through music and song
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Music is a language with powerful appeal. Children, especially, are captivated by the music in their environment. They respond freely to a variety of tempos, from drum beating to gentle swaying, and their undivided attention commits to memory verse after verse of popular songs and jingles. The enthusiasm displayed and the eagerness to sing and move with the beat reflect a child’s natural propensity toward music.

The spontaneous disposition children have toward rhythm and melody makes music an ideal tool for assisting them with the interwoven facets of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Through music, children experience the wholeness of language. The ideas and emotions communicated are presented in meaningful context, and the melody and lyrics provide a source for interacting with the thoughts of others. In addition, the emotive quality and the structure of musical composition engage children in fulfilling personal meanings (Harp, 1988).

Music and reading go together because singing is a celebration of language. Children's language naturally has rhythm and melody. Children bring this natural “music” language with them to the task of learning to read, and so using singing to teach reading draws on this natural understanding. (Harp, 1988, p. 454)

A most effective way to teach children to learn and to value language is to provide them with a variety of meaningful experiences that fine-tune their ability to hear rhythm, sounds, and melodies. The skill children gain in listening will then provide a solid framework for successfully attending to language in print (Martin, Brogan, & Archambault, 1990). The singing-reading connection not only helps children learn to read but also fosters a love for reading (Handy, 1989).

Integrating music with reading—Getting started

A first step toward integrating songs into the reading curriculum is simply to sing a song repeatedly until children are comfortable with the tune and the lyrics (Barclay & Walser, 1992; Handy, 1989; Harp, 1988; Renegar, 1990). Picture cards in a pocket chart or on a flannel board may be used to assist children with learning the lyrics (Handy, 1989). Creating motions to act out the song also helps children recall the words (Renegar, 1990). It is helpful to tape-record each song and provide children with a special area where they can listen to the tapes.

Next, the children are ready to see the lyrics in print. When using a song picture book, the teacher should introduce the book to children in the same manner as any picture book, with a discussion of the cover and illustrations, a complete reading of the book, and a sharing time at the end (Handy, 1989; Harp, 1988). Choral and echo reading techniques are also effective ways to help children connect the song to print.

Printing the lyrics on chart paper so that children can participate in a variety of reading experiences will also help promote print awareness. Activities such as pointing to each word as it is sung, locating words that appear in more than one place, and providing children with word cards to match like words are excellent ways to reinforce the link between speech and print (Harp, 1988; Renegar, 1990). The recreation of the song using sentence strips will help children to develop sequencing and to understand the relationship between sentences and the whole composition (Handy, 1989; Renegar, 1990).

After many opportunities to read the song in print, the children are now ready to participate in various activities designed to extend the singing-reading experience.

Book concepts

Shared book experiences. Introduce and read a variety of song picture books such as Farmer in the Dell and Down by the Bay using the shared-book approach (Holdaway, 1979). The initial reading should encourage prediction, promote some discussion, and be followed by later readings from a large chart on which the lyrics of the song have been written.

Book talks. Encourage children to share and discuss song picture books that are of interest. The discussion of rhymes, language patterns, illustrations, favorite parts, characters, and events can lead to grand conversations—all of which help children integrate their understanding of language and books.

Sight vocabulary

Word sorts. Print song lyrics on individual word cards and have students categorize them; then justify and title each category.

Word games. Play word games such as Concentration to help children learn song words by sight. Write the lyrics on pairs of word cards, turn them face down, and then have children take turns turning over and reading the cards until all cards have been matched.

Word banks. After children recognize and read song word cards consistently, deposit them into individual word banks. As each bank grows, sort the words into various word categories.

Reading comprehension

Clue technique. Omit every 10th word or key words from songs. Have children read and fill in the missing
parts. Identify context clues that help children decide upon their answers (Handy, 1989).

Story maps. Use story maps to help children identify and organize the elements of songs such as the song's characters, events, problem, solution, and main idea.

Music response journals. Provide children with individual music journals in which they can write their thoughts and feelings about songs and singing-reading activities (Davenport, 1990).

Fluency
Support reading/singing. Use choral and echo reading and singing activities to help children develop smooth reading.

Chants. Chant a variety of jingles and street rhymes to assist children with the development of phrasing and intonation. Other suggested activities include clapping to the beat, playing rhythm instruments, and choral chanting.

Music and song in an early reading program have great value. As noted, a wide variety of music and singing activities combined with reading instruction can foster beginning reading success. Specifically, they can facilitate the development of book concepts, sight vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency. It is most important to note that because children have a natural love for music and singing, music-integrated reading instruction can help foster a love for lifelong reading. So, the next time it is story time, remember, read with a beat!

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References

Book commercials

Tammy N. Adams
Edward J. Dwyer

"Are you tired of lies, lies, and more lies? It's time you learned the truth. You can learn the true story of the three little pigs as told by me, Alexander T. Wolf. "To get your copy of The True Story of the Three Little Pigs call 1-800-PIGS LIE. All major credit cards accepted. Just $14.95 plus $3.00 for shipping and handling. Call now for your copy of The True Story of the Three Little Pigs. Call 1-800-PIGS LIE."

TV commercials are a part of nearly every child's life. Our students like to write their own commercials for books and authors they like. They draft commercials, share them with other students, edit, and then prepare a final script. Though it is not required in the commercial, most students thoroughly enjoy the challenge of determining a fitting 800 number (e.g., 1-800-RED FERN). The finished script can be included in their language arts portfolios.

The next activity is the actual presentation of the commercial. Students create a variety of interesting ways to sell the book they have chosen. They often imitate the style of advertisers they have seen on TV. Local automobile dealers, for example, are good models for the quick, high-impact sales pitch. Our students sometimes do commercials collaboratively in pairs and/or small groups.

The cliffhanger commercial is very popular. In this format, the advertiser promotes a book by enthusiastically presenting information concerning an exciting part of a book but leaves the audience hanging. "To find out what happens . . ."

The author commercial is another highly worthwhile variation. In this for-