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## **Musical Activities in the everyday classroom – 10 ideas to try right now.**

If you're inspired to try something musical with your class tomorrow, here are ten ideas for activities you can do whether you're the most musical person since Mozart, or you feel scared stiff at the thought of anyone making you do music in front of a class (HINT: Nobody is un-musical, they're just out of practice. We're all born musical, including you.) They should require no prior musical knowledge other than the ability to keep a steady beat (don't tell me you don't tap along to music on your favourite radio station...), be able to make a nee-naw sound (like an emergency vehicle), and – if you're feeling brave – attempt something to the tune of Twinkle Twinkle or Happy Birthday. Let us know how you get on!

### **Listening and responding**

- Listen to a piece of music with your class and get them to draw their responses to it.
- Talk about what they have drawn and why. Was the music fast or slow? What emotion did it convey? Did it tell a story? Did it make them think of a colour or a shape?
- Did the piece make them move to the music and if so, in what way? You can use these responses to write a poem or story based on the piece of music or the picture, or both.

### **Creating beat box music**

- Beat-box register: set up a class beat-box by getting them all to whisper “boots and cats and boots and cats and boots and cats and ...etc. etc.”. For the full beat-box effect, once you have ‘boots and cats’ going, remove the vowels and make the consonants as plosive as possible so you have ‘bts n cts n’. Congratulations! You're now sounding like a human drum kit!
- Put a spoken call and response on top of this, sticking to the rhythm of the beat-box. For example: “Hell-o Josh-u-a” in the rhythm ‘slow, slow, quick-quick, slow’, with the response “Hell-o Mr-s Har-per” in the rhythm ‘quick-quick, quick-quick, slow, slow’

## **Singing the register or other 'call to attention' signals**

- Register: Sing your greeting to each child. Use whatever rhythm you like and 'nee-naw' notes (the alternating tones of an emergency vehicle). Ask the children to respond in the same way.
- Whatever you like to do with your register (whether it's saying the child's name and asking them to give a word or colour or shape that describes how they are feeling in response, or whether it's simply greeting good morning/afternoon by name) SING it. "Colours of the Rainbow" tune works well for this.
- Playtime or PE time calls can also be created to give instructions.
- "Join in" is an attention getting device. The teacher hums a note and motions to a child to match it, then another, then another. Eventually all the children are humming quietly, pausing as they draw breath and picking up the note again until you tell them to stop.
- Simple rounds – Frère Jacques, Kookaburra, London's Burning, Row, row, row your boat, etc.

## **Musical number games**

- 1 2 3 4 5 stamp 7 8: Start by chanting the numbers 1-8 in a steady beat. Then introduce a rule that instead of saying "six" you have to stamp instead. Replace more and more numbers with sounds.
- Play musical fizz buzz. Choose two times tables, say the three and five. Children say the numbers 'one, two . . .' Three would normally be 'Fizz' but get them to sing a given note or make a sound instead. Five would be 'buzz' (use a different note or sound) and any multiple of five and three would be 'fizz-buzz'. You can also use the tonic sol fa for this (of 'Do re mi fa so la ti do' fame from *The Sound of Music*). It's a method that assigns a name for each note in the musical scale, so 'three' would be 'mi' and 'five' would be 'so'.

## **Forbidden Rhythm game**

- Establish a clapping pattern that is the forbidden rhythm, for example ‘slow, slow, quick-quick, slow’ which you can say (in your head) to the words “don’t clap this one back”. Then give the children other rhythms to clap (examples below) that they have to copy back to you. However, when you clap the forbidden rhythm, nobody must clap it back and if anyone does they are out.

Examples:

- a. slow, quick-quick, slow, slow
- b. quick-quick, quick-quick, slow, slow
- c. slow, slow, slow, slow
- d. slow, quick-quick, quick-quick, slow

### **Musical times tables**

- Count up and down in multiples (twos, fives, tens etc), to the tune of ‘twinkle twinkle little star’. Number bonds (e.g. “six and four make ten”) work better to ‘Happy Birthday’.
- The ‘Inchworm’ song also works well for this ‘one and one is two, two and two are four, three and three makes six and four and four makes eight, five and five makes ten.’

### **Directions and class tasks**

- Sing commands such as ‘stand up’ (to nee-naw notes, singing the first word on the lower note and the second word on the higher note), and ‘sit down’ (to nee-naw notes singing the first word on the higher note and the second word on the lower note).
- Use the ‘I hear thunder / Frère Jacques’ tune to the words, ‘tidy up time, tidy up time, come along, come along, put away the pencils, put away the pencils, home time soon, home time soon’ or words to suit the occasion.

### **Creative thinking before music, art or writing**

- Watch a minute or two of a film without any sound and get the children to imagine what sounds would be needed to go with it and how they could make those sounds.
- This can be extended into a longer piece of work by then allocating class members to each sound, getting them to make/find the instruments to create the sounds (junk percussion), and performing and/or recording the piece.
- Use the sounds in abstract art: draw what the sound looks like.
- Use the musical piece and or the art to plan or write a story.
- <http://www.literacyshed.com/a-shed-full-of-animations.html> has some good animations, including the award winning 'Rock Paper Scissors'.

### **Re-imagining and rewriting**

Ask the class to write alternative words to a well-known tune (Happy Birthday or Twinkle Twinkle) that summarise what they've learned about their current topic.

For younger classes, you can compose the words to the song yourself and teach them to sing it.

In creative writing, ask children to make up a character song for a character or place they are writing about, to a simple tune (Happy Birthday in this example). "Rivers run to the sea, rivers run to the sea, it rains on the mountains, and rivers run to the sea. / The sun draws up the sea, clouds form over the sea, they rain on the mountains, water runs to the sea." (Water cycle).

### **Musical coding**

Class-piano: split the class into two – five groups and give each group a colour and a pitch or noise to sing/make. Write a 'score' on the whiteboard using the different colours to indicate what sound you want and doing different shapes for different note lengths.

The class then needs to perform the score (with you pointing to each successive action on the whiteboard). You can appoint a conductor (to point to the whiteboard notes) and a composer from amongst the class or take on the roles yourself. This is a musical form of coding and ties into concepts of coding very well.