

Workshop: Songs and Poetry for Young Learners

Students attend and participate in a workshop to demonstrate the practicalities of teaching songs and poetry to young learners. Through the hands-on practice of a series of songs and poems, the following strategies and practicalities are presented and demonstrated:

1. Using a Randomiser

All of the children want attention – even the shy children want it in a way that keeps them feeling safe. Using a randomiser – such as lottery-type tickets – gives opportunities for every child to have a chance to be picked to participate, without anyone feeling they are being “picked on”.



Give examples of some randomisers you can use in the classroom:

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2. Avoid the Need for Reading Skills

For some children, reading is a chore and they will misbehave (etc.) to avoid having to read, limiting not only their enjoyment (and therefore motivation) but also the possibility of them learning the other important skills and knowledge that is imparted through a Language Arts class. Choose songs and rhymes that can be easily memorised or cued into for each line or verse.



Give examples of some songs that are easy to remember without reading

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3. Be Careful of Safety Issues

If allowing children to use musical instruments or homemade rhythm makers (such as chopsticks) be careful to give children specific safety instructions and watch constantly to make sure they continue to comply with requests. Imagine the worst and prepare against it.



Give an example of a classroom safety rule

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4. Make Sure the Class is Under Control

Don't start an activity or attempt to present content until the children are all paying attention with their eyes looking at the teacher. Using some kind of musical instruments, or playing a guitar, will bring the children instantly to attention. Other routines can be established such as clapping, or an easily-learnt call-and-response, to bring the children quickly to attention.



Give an example of a classroom routine to gain attention

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5. Rhyming Words

Most of the songs and poems include rhyming words which are an important part of learning phonics. Select these songs and rhymes to go with appropriate lesson plans. Sometimes it may be desirable to change or adapt the words to suit the needs of the lesson.



Give examples of rhyming words in songs
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6. Actions

Any kind of physical activity will increase not only the children's enjoyment but also their learning capacity. If the actions are appropriate to the meaning of the words they will help in vocabulary retention. If thinking of suitable actions proves difficult, then rhythmic actions (such as clapping or stepping) are still very worthwhile.



Give examples of songs with actions to aid vocabulary
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7. Movement

As well as actions (arm-waving and clapping), movement can easily be added to a song or chant with children stepping and swaying together. This fun activity promotes a sense of community and sharing, as well as further developing a sense of rhythm.



Give examples of songs which could use movement
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8. Visual Aids and Realia

Pictures, realia, and other visual aids can give added enjoyment and also increase learning capacity when working through a song or poem. Words can also be useful, but if possible (as mentioned above) there should not be a reliance on reading.



Give an example of visual aids you could use with a particular song or poem
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9. Beat and Rhythm

A growing awareness of beat and an ability to sense the patterns in rhythm is essential for children’s educational development. The teacher can enrich almost every language exercise with simple additional activities as well as special gap-fill activities and regular warm-up routines to practice rhythm.



Give an example of a beat and rhythm gap-fill or warm-up activity

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10. Children’s Performance

Learning these songs and rhymes provides opportunities for children to perform - individually, in pairs, and in groups - to one another or to the whole class (and later to parents and school community) in a non-threatening situation. Performing reinforces learning, enhances self-esteem, and improves socialisation skills.



Give an example of a non-threatening performance activity

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11. Sequencing

Learning to sequence items – whether letters in a word, words in a sentence, or incidents in a story – is a vital part of children’s educational growth. Songs and poems with their patterns and rhythms can greatly assist children in learning sequencing while having fun. Some songs contain stories which need to be remembered in order, while other songs have an increasing sequence for every verse.



Give an example of sequencing practice in a song or poem

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