

Preschool Connection

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Enhancing Early Literacy Skills through the use of Music

Whether a child is mastering a language or learning music, the foundation is the same: enjoyment. Just as a young child's first experience with music is not learning to read musical notation, a young child's introduction to literacy with print is not learning to decode words. Although both types of literacy—musical and language—ultimately depend upon reading abstract symbols, both skills ideally begin by immersing the child in the medium . . . Whether young children are learning music or learning a language, they serve an "apprenticeship" that begins by observing competent, enthusiastic role models who take pleasure in story and in song. . . Jalongo/Ribblet, Childhood Education

A rich experience of orality (talking and listening) is an indispensable prelude to literacy. With-

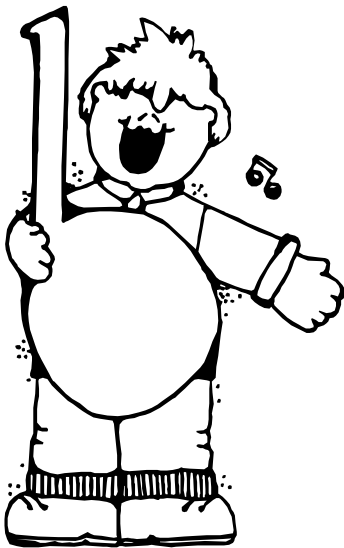
out a full experience of orality a person cannot truly embrace an animating and invigorating literacy. Orality makes social and emotional development possible.

Orality (talking and listening) provides the rhythms, the intonations and pitches, the very feelings that find final expression in writing. Orality thus serves as a preparation—a necessary and powerful foundation—for the construction of what we call literacy. Children need to hear language in order to learn language. The way to literacy does not lie through literacy. . . The teaching of literacy has to be founded on a range of experiences with song, dance, play, and joking, coupled with improvisation and recitation. Children need to hear stories, either made up or read out loud. They need to make them up them-

selves or try to retell them in their own words. Barry Sanders, A is for OX.

It's worth remembering that every time we sing a song, we are playing with sound . . . sounds of letters, sounds of letters combined, sounds of words, sounds of rhythms, sounds of rhymes. Every time! Before it is a seen and read thing, language is a heard and said thing.

Listening skill is the first language skill learned. Hearing and listening are different. Hearing involves a process involving nerves and muscles whereas listening is a learned behavior or a mental process concerning hearing, attending, discriminating, understanding and remembering. Listening can improve with practice.



Take advantage of music's charm

Most people like and respond to music—it is one of the most natural things in the world.

All cultures—primitive and advanced—sing and dance and play instruments. But no one knows exactly why music makes us smile, or why it calms children. It just does.

To relax both you and your children, soft gentle music usually works best. And music also works best for those times when nothing else seems to lower the noise level in a room.

One little suggestion that sometimes works at naptime or bedtime is to tell kids that they don't have to go to sleep right now, but they need to be quiet and listen to the music. In the process of listening, sometimes eyelids just become too heavy.

At other times, music can be a source of great fun with simple games you make up yourself. Kids will love it if you participate too.

♥ **Roll around the clock.** Put on a song with a good strong beat and get down on the floor and roll.

Yes, it sounds silly, and it's even sillier to see a bunch of kids and adults rolling around on the floor. But it's a guaranteed "pleaser" activity with the kids and some people have been known to laugh out loud.

♥ **March to the beat.** Give everybody a hat and a noisemaker (make your own from simple, safe kitchen items) and march to time to the mu-

sic. This is an excellent experience for learning about rhythm and matching movement with sound.

♥ **Line dancing.** Hold hands and teach little ones a few simple steps you can all do together. If you know the words to the song, sing along. Kids LOVE to dance with mom or dad! If the kids aren't walking yet, hold them and move to the music.

♥ **Remember the Bunny Hop?** If you do teach it to the kids.

If you don't ask your parents how it goes. Or make up an energetic song of our own and give it a name.

All of these activities are great fun and a good way to get rid of extra energy (theirs, not yours.) Happy dancing!

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Published by Growing Child, Inc.,
November 2006, Vol. 22 No. 11
P.O. Box 620, Lafayette, IN 47902
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These activities are not a test to see whether your child knows the skills. If your child has trouble, give enough hints so that he or she can be successful. If the activity is too difficult or becomes frustrating, stop that activity and do something else that is fun. The main goal is to spend quality time with your child each day and to help your child be successful!

1

Becoming aware of sound ideas:

Talk about sound - "What's the most beautiful sound you've ever heard? What made the sound?" Etc.

Stand still and listen! Share what you hear

Junk instruments - play fast, slow, loud, soft, to rhythm, etc.

Change voice and hearing - whisper while singing, sing outside, hold hands over mouth, behind ears, in front of ears, over ears, etc.

Use books made from songs - it's a good example of how words are easily transferred to print.

Imagine! Interrupt a song and ask "Can you see it in your head?"

2

Ideas for promoting singing:

Talk about songs - "What songs do we know?" Make a list and add to it.

Make up songs on the spot—they "give voice" to the moment and are likely connected to what's happening in the moment and who's there.

Singing songs is a wonderful way to spend time with kids—driving in the car, going to bed, preparing dinner or a bath, taking a walk, just hanging around!

Listen and pay attention when your child sings!

3

Spontaneous Dancing/Movement

Develop a library of different types of music. Each piece has its own characteristic mood, tempo and rhythm and will suggest a certain type of body movement/mood. Props can be added which will encourage children to move to the music.

Paint/color to Music. Finger painting, easel painting, water coloring and bubble paint while different forms of music are playing.

Shadow dancing. Arrange a bright light to shine so that it casts a shadow on a blank wall. Show your child how your shadow can wave, dance, and fall down. What is your shadow doing now? Let your child perform. Add music and props.

4

Appreciative Listening

What is in My Basket? Fill a large basket with sound making objects. Hide an object and let your child decide which object it is by the sound.

Listen, think, and pretend. What if our room was filled up with some very different things? How would it feel on your body? How will you move to get through? (mashed potatoes, honey, jello, syrup, balloons, water, snow, etc)

Stop, Listen, Go. Children listen to your oral directions and then do the action or a series of actions. Try this to music.

Actions songs/games promote good purposeful listening skills (Simple Simon; Head, Shoulders, Knees, Toes, etc)

Encourage your child to imitate what you say. Vary the pitch and loudness of your voice.