

CI with Music: How to Teach a Song

Music is Language; Language is Music

Music and language are a perfect pairing. The entire brain lights up with activity when listening to music. The brain activity is even more intensive when a person makes the music by singing or playing an instrument. All the brain's connections are strengthened with musical experiences. In this way, music facilitates all kinds of thinking. When music is paired with language, it's like using super glue to put the information into the brain. Once a song is in the brain, the challenge may be to get the song out of your head rather than trying to remember it!

A song tells a story or states a message in the lyrics. A song may also refer to a story of a past event that led the composer to write the song. A song is sometimes a poem set to music. Historically, troubadours traveled from village to village to spread news stories through song.

Steps to Teaching a Song

Teach the language/message of the song so students understand what they are singing. The brain will keep that language repeating in the learners' heads. When they understand the recording they have in their brains, they can access these chunks of language when needed for real time communication.

For each section of the song (chorus, verse):

1. Teach lyrics one line at a time.

Use backward buildup to help learners sing all the words in unison. Starting with a chunk of language at the end of the line. The teacher says or chants the words and students repeat. Then, add another chunk of language and repeat the previously practiced phrase. Keep doing this until the students can chant the entire line.

Example: The cow jumped over the moon.

Teacher: *Listen. The cow jumped over the moon. Repeat after me 'the moon'.*

Students: *the moon*

Teacher: *over the moon*

Students: *over the moon*

Teacher: *jumped over the moon*

Students: *jumped over the moon*

Teacher: *The cow jumped over the moon.*

Students: *The cow jumped over the moon.*



2. The teacher slowly sings the line. Then students then sing the line along the teacher.

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3. The teacher sings the line up to tempo. Then students sing the line along with the teacher.
4. Continue for each line of the verse or chorus you are working on.
5. Sing just two or three lines together. Singing a short segment helps students to hear, feel, and sing the transitions between lines.
6. Sing the whole verse together.

Tips for Teaching Songs

Chanting: Chant the rhythm of the line rather than how the line sounds when speaking the words. This helps to make the transition from chanting slowly to singing up to tempo while keeping the melody.

Rhythm: The teacher may clap the beat, tap a drum or use another percussion instrument to help the students hear and keep the rhythm of the melody.

No leader: Ask the group to sing the song without the teacher leading the group. They need to be able to do this successfully before they can sing in a round or add more complex singing parts (harmonies).

Length of lesson: Too much time spent on the same activity can take the joy out of it. A lesson that drags out too long kills student enthusiasm. End any activity when students would still like to keep going. That way, when the activity is reintroduced, the last taste in their mouth was sweet, not bitter. They will recall, "I wanted to do this some more."

Segments: Teaching a song in segments over a few class periods may be more effective (and joyful) than attempting to teach the whole song in one class. If there is a chorus to the song, teach it first. That way, after learning a new verse in subsequent classes, the song session ends with a return to the familiar chorus that they know well. Whenever you hear a large group sing, people usually sing the chorus with more confidence and gusto.

Quality & Confidence: The first day that a group learns a segment of a song, they may not sing it well. Instead of continuing to repeat it over and over, it may be best to just stop at that point and come back to the song during another class. Even without practice, students will sing more confidently after their brain has had some time to process the song. The next time they sing, they'll be singing something familiar rather than something new. If your students don't sing well the first time, try again instead of giving up.

Choral Reading: Any song can also be practiced and performed as a choral reading. Teachers who are not comfortable singing can still tap into the super glue power and joy of music by doing a whole class choral reading. Supply copies or project the lyrics/poem to the students. Each line, parts of a line, or segment of the lyrics, is marked to denote a subgroup of students that chants that part. Subgroups could be all the boys, all the girls, all the students, just the teacher, the left/right side of class, etc. Part of the choral reading may use a varied tempo (slower, quicker) or volume (a shouted or whispered word).