Three questions many directors working with children's choirs have are:

1. How do I most effectively introduce part singing at the elementary level?
2. What can I expect in their voices by age? How can I use this information to select music?
3. What are some great resources for literature suggestions for children?

How do I most effectively introduce part singing at the elementary level?
The ages of the children will determine this. These are guidelines only. You may find that your singers are either more advanced or need more support than these guidelines. Other determining factors will include the number of singers in your choir and the individual independence of your singers. These are not intended to be hard and fast rules, but suggestions to help scaffold your decisions.

Unison singing
Singing in unison is always good! Singers learn to unify vowels, sing in tune and listen to each other. It's preferable to sing really well in unison than to sing poorly on parts. Singing unison is actually really hard!! It's totally fine for your children's choirs to sing in unison most of the time. You are building a solid foundation. If you feel like your group is ready for part singing or you would enjoy trying it... here are some tips by age.

Part singing
- Ages 3 to 4
  - I find that part singing with this age group works ONLY if combined with another choir who sings the other part - and sometimes - not even then. Significant portions of your rehearsal are dedicated to learning to sit/stand, be in a circle, follow the leader, walk in a line, etc.
  - Suggested Range - To Some kids may be able to successfully sing higher notes while others may think they need an almost silly high voice. Their voices often will not match pitch below F4 even if they match pitch in general.
Singers at this age need to have a singing voice defined if they don’t have family that sings to them at home. A great tool is to have the students echo you while you demonstrate:

- “This is my whisper voice”
- “This is my speaking voice”
- “This is my singing voice”
- “This is my outside voice” (Don’t do this one more than once or twice or it will become an unpleasant - for you - game)

Singing parts at this age level is tricky. It can be done, but takes considerable repetition and a high level of consistency. Doing things exactly the same way each time is necessary. Your singers may work on the same songs for an entire semester (or year!) and not tire of them. The repetition is essential for their development.

Part singing - I would recommend unison only OR

Partner songs - You could teach this young group of singers one song and then combine them with an older choir for the other section of the partner song. It will take significant repetition for them to maintain their independence. They will follow you, the director, regardless of what you sing...even if they don’t know what you are singing they will try to follow you.

NOTE: Singing WITHOUT vibrato works well for pitch accuracy. This age group does not have the discernment to know your vibrato is natural and will try to manufacture a vibrato in a best case scenario. In a worst case scenario, they won’t be able to find the pitch center and the choir will sound out of tune.

- **Ages 5 - 8 - Grades K - 2**
  - Part singing is slightly easier with this age group. They generally already know how to sit in a circle and walk in a line, so there is less environmental teaching that takes up your rehearsal, but there is still structural re-teaching that is essential.

  - Suggested Range -
    - F4
    - To

  - Some students may be able to successfully sing higher notes while others may still think they need an almost silly high voice. Their voices often will not match pitch below F4 even if they match pitch in general. If they do match pitch on notes lower than F4, they will often begin to experiment with a sound that is more of an “outside voice” (yelling). Encouraging only head voice singing even on the lower notes will lead to a clear child tone.
■ **Canons** - Simple 3 line canons work well after significant repetition (most of a year). Sing only in unison for many rehearsals. Make sure your foundation is solid. When they can perform the unison song without any help from you, they are ready to try a canon. Start slowly. Start by using only 2 lines of the canon.
  
  ● **Rehearsal Tip** - *sing in circles - one circle for each part - demonstrated later*

■ **Partner songs** - simple songs will work well if combined with another choir. Most 5 and 6 year olds will be able to stay on the same part as their familiar choir (the choir they sing with each time they sing) when combined with another choir singing another partner song. This is only after significant repetition - 20 rehearsals is usually when I notice the independence that makes this possible. (Think about how long this will be in time if you see them one or two times per week!!) This works best when the two choirs are of different ages. The older choir can sing their part independently while the younger choir sings with you. They will mimic you and sing/do whatever you sing/do so it will work best for you to sing/do things with them.

■ **NOTE**: Singing **WITHOUT** vibrato works well for pitch accuracy. Again, this age group does not have the discernment to know your vibrato is natural and will try to manufacture a vibrato in a best case scenario. In a worst case scenario, they won’t be able to find the pitch center and the choir will sound out of tune. Think: a first grader trying to sing opera. You can demonstrate vibrato for them, but it’s best if you don’t sing *their* music with vibrato.

● **Ages 9 - 13ish - Grades 3 - 7**
  
  ○ Once you establish your rehearsal routines, the bulk of your rehearsal can be spent on music now at this age level. Developmentally, we see more independence in general from our singers. Some of your singers may develop an airy tone during this age range because of what’s happening physically. Continue to teach good production, breathing, etc and when their muscles grow the airy tone will grow strong again. This happens any time between now and the teenage years and affects both boys and girls (again and again). Normalizing this in how you speak to your choirs is helpful. At this age, singers will be more aware of their singing compared to peers. Establishing healthy relationships and norms is useful. Sometimes at this age, singers begin to correct each other. Those of you seasoned teachers know that it is good to disallow this singer-correction because it can cause kid drama.
Students are likely to be able successfully sing higher notes. Singing those notes in warm ups is very useful for training. The stress of performance can mean that the F5 and G5 are out of tune with 3rd - 6th graders, so use with caution and know your students. 3rd - 6th grade voices are capable of matching pitch at notes lower than D4, but the quality of the sound won’t be what you want in most cases. *Avoid* choosing music that has them sitting at notes below the staff, it’s fine for them to be sung, but having students sing repeating D4’s will produce an undesirable chesty /pushing sound. Be careful with Music K-8. In part singing, have students switch parts often so they learn they can sing their whole range.

Canons - Very simple three line canons work best that have distinct differences in the lyrics and melody between each line. Not recommended for ensembles with less than 10 singers unless singers are very independent. Scaffolding the pitch center in rehearsal repeatedly is useful at this age (use chords, piano, etc) before allowing them to sing a canon acapella. They can lead each other astray pitch wise if they have learned the song without a strong pitch anchor...and sometimes even then.

Partner Songs - These are great for this age! Kids love them!! They sound complex and they can successfully perform a partner song without adding a different choir (or section of the choir that has practiced on another day). Partner songs that have distinctly different sections work best for the younger students in this age set while the older students approaching junior high will enjoy a challenge.

Part Singing - Part singing works at this age and the students can successfully sing two parts in a chordal structure.

- This is best done through significant sectional work until right before a performance with grades 3 and 4.
- For grades 5 -7 you can begin to experiment with 2, 3 and 4 part music. The difficulty you choose will completely depend on the independence and experience of your singers. Using more experienced singers as anchors works very well.
- NOTE: Singing WITHOUT vibrato works well for pitch accuracy but you can begin to demonstrate it on a more regular basis so they can hear it. Some students may begin to develop their own vibrato (after puberty) so modeling natural vibrato is very useful. Do not allow your singers to sing with a manufactured vibrato at this age. It may lead to very chesty singing with a pop sound OR a very nasal and pinched tone.

**General Tips and Tricks for getting students to sing parts**

- It is helpful for you to sing with the students to help them learn parts. This is hot topic and there are lots of opinions. This is only mine. I’m not necessarily right, this is just what I have found works. I do not typically sing along once the parts are learned unless there is something specific I’m not hearing and want to hear to help them hear what I want them to do.

- Learning different parts in circles is very helpful. The singers hear other people singing their part and can build independence while they can still hear the other parts. **Let’s try this one now!! (demo)**

- Alternating who listens to the piano and who matches pitch with a voice helps solidify parts (example: part one, listen to me and part two you sing with the piano). This requires either a proficient accompanist or your own piano skills. Other versions could be that the groups take turns singing with you and without you. **Let’s try this one! (demo)**

- Singing their part acapella alone successfully builds confidence, increases accuracy and fosters independence at this age. A good gauge for the students being ready to sing their part with another part is that they can sing is successfully acapella without your help.

- Use whatever resources you have to scaffold the learning.
  - Find a recording either on a music publishing website, on the composers website or YouTube (use discretion). Have singers sing along to the recording and then go back to acapella or piano accompaniment. Hearing the finished product can help build skills.
  - Use your phone to record the part and upload it to Google Classroom or email it out.

- Utilize people around you. There are many people who are looking for a way to help and volunteer. I’ve had aunts come in to my rehearsals to sing with their relative’s parts, grandmother’s accompany, mom’s come into sing and accompany, family members help build folders, people volunteer to make rehearsal tracks, etc. Building a community around your ensemble with a lot
of active stakeholders is priceless. It takes time on your part to have a job for them and to communicate with them, but the pay-offs are totally worth it.

Literature Suggestions - This is not intended to be an all-inclusive list. These are some of my favorites.

Nursery Rhymes work well for the preschool and kinder age group. Most are placed directly in the sweet spot of their ranges.

These are composers and editors I look to for “sure things” for the developing and child voices:

- Henry Leck
- Doreen Rao
- Linda Spevacek
- Sally Albrecht
- Ruth Elaine Schram
- Jim Papoulis
- Mary Donnelly / George Strid

These composers offer great options. If something is too difficult for your choir you can always simplify and sing only the melody line:

- Victor C. Johnson
- Ed Lojeski
- Ken Berg
- Ola Gjeilo
- Eric Whitacre
- Rollo Dillworth (usually has difficult but awesome piano)
- Andre Thomas (often has difficult but awesome piano)
- Russell Robinson
- Cynthia Gray
- Greg Gilpin
- Z. Randall Stroope
- Mark Hayes (piano will be difficult)

How to search on J.W. Peppr for Quality Literature:
Seasoned directors - you’ll know this, of course. My student teacher this year and my students who come to observe don’t know this.

Editor’s choices are often good resources (on the left search bar of the “Choral Music” page

You can set your own parameters of your search and search by:

- Voicing
Literature mentioned at the session includes:

Watoto Wa Dunia by Albrecht / Althouse in both the 2 part and 3 part versions
Pie Jesu by Victor C. Johnson in both the 2 part and 3 part mixed versions
Kuwa Furaha by Jim Papoulis in the SA version
We live the dream (With Dona Nobis Pacem) by John Jacobson and Emily Crocker 2 part version
Musica Dei by Jerry Estes – 2 part
Come to the Music by Joseph Martin – 2 part, SAB and SATB versions
Inscription of Hope by Z. Randall Stroope – 2 part
Tuimbe by David Waggoner – 2 part, 3 part and SATB
Medieval Gloria by Vijah Singh – 2 part
Red Dragonflies – Dwyer / Nurre – Henry Leck Choral Series – SSA
Happy Winter by Jill Gallina – 2 part
Tiny Little Baby Born in Bethlehem by Cynthia Gray – 2 part

Books:
Get America Singing (Hal Leonard)
Hooray for Singing - Robert De Frece (some with parts) - upper elementary/jr high
Singing Games Children Love - Denise Gagne - pre-k and primary
Canons compiled by John M. Fiererabend - can use to create parts later
Echo Songs compiled by John M. Fiererabend
Partners Around the World by John Jacobsen and Alan Billingsly (sing one line
        Only and can use another group to sing another part… or not!)