Using Children’s Literature to Teach Melodic Literacy

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The Kodály Concept

Kodály training is a complete and comprehensive approach to music education. The goal is to train basic musical skills and teach the reading and writing of music. The development of musical skills begins very early with simple tasks. As knowledge grows, skills are developed further in a sequential manner through a process of preparation-presentation-practice.

In addition to music reading and writing, children develop skill in part-singing, part-hearing, improvisation, intonation, listening, memory, phrasing, and understanding of form. This session will focus on music reading...specifically melodic reading for young children.

SOLFEGE

The moveable do system, highly developed in English choral training, was advocated by Kodály as a tool for teaching musical literacy. Solfege is considered the best tool for developing the inner ear. It is an invaluable aid in building musical skills:

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<td>Perceiving form</td>
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SEQUENCE (K-3)

sol-mi
sol-la
mi-la turn
sol-mi-do
do-re-mi

do-re-mi-sol-la
low la and sol

Millions of Cats
Brown Bear, Brown Bear
The Elves and the Shoemaker
It’s Raining, It’s Pouring
Roll Over
Mortimer
A Turkey for Thanksgiving
Listen to the Rain

Choosing Excellent Literature

1. Is the book well-written?
2. Does the book have depth?
3. Does the book have an element of surprise?
4. Will the children be able to relate to the subject matter or the characters in the book?
5. What role will be book play in the musical training of my students?
6. Is this book one that I want my students to remember for the rest of their lives?
Millions of Cats

Book by Wanda Ga’g
Lesson Plan by Darla Meek

CONCEPTS: introduction to barred instruments, sol-mi interval

MATERIALS: text visual, barred instruments, cat sound cue cards or power point

1. Introduce the story.
“Once upon a time there was a very old man and a very old woman. They were very lonely and wished they had a cat. One day the very old man went looking for one. He went up the high hilltops (pretend to play a barred instrument moving upwards) and down through the low valleys (pretend to play moving downwards). Can you do that with me?” (Repeat.)

2. Teach the song.
• “He did finally reach a place that had lots and lots of cats.” Display text visual and sing melody for “Cats here, cats there...”

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Cats here, cats there, Cats and kittens everywhere.} \\
\text{Hundeds of cats, thousands of cats, Milions and billions and trilions of cats!}
\end{align*}
\]

• Have students sing the melody, patting the steady beat on their laps.

3. Introduce the barred instruments.
• “We have the perfect instruments to play sounds for the old man walking up and down the hills, AND to accompany our singing! These instruments are called barred instruments. They are in the percussion family. We play them with mallets. Let’s learn how to use our mallets first.”
• Distribute mallets. (Rhythm sticks, popsicle sticks, or chopsticks could also be used.) Have students place them on the floor in front of them. Instruct them to mirror you. Lead them through a pantomime showing how to grasp the mallets (and how NOT to!), where to place the fingers, the position of the arms, and how to bounce them lightly. Also include “ready position” and “mallets at rest.”
• Hold one glockenspiel vertically, low side down. “Do you see how this instrument looks kind of like a mountain or a hill? The large end is where the ground is, and the small end
is where the sun is.” Ask one child to “walk up the hill” with his/her fingers. Encourage the child to play in the center of the bars, and to bounce fingers lightly on each bar.

- Place the instrument on the floor in front of the child and have him/her play again. Reinforce which direction is UP and which is DOWN.
- Display a large visual of a barred instrument and have all children “air play” (pretend to play) the instrument, moving upward and downward.
- Now, have children move to the barred instruments to practice.
- Have children play the steady beat on C1 and G1 as they sing the song.

4. Display iconic notation for each of the featured cats:

- The students will create short motifs for the featured cats that depict the notation. The students will play each motif as the cats are introduced in the story.
- On “chosen them all,” everyone picks one motif to play, so that all motifs are being played at the same time. This also will happen when the cats get into a fight.

4. Assign vocal sound effects.

- On “Mew, mew!” everyone meows.
- On “each cat took a sip of water,” everyone slurps.
- On “each cat ate a mouthful of grass,” everyone nibbles.

5. Perform.

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Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?
Book by Bill Martin Jr, illustrated by Eric Carle
Lesson Plan by Darla Meek

CONCEPT: singing/improvising sol-la-sol-mi patterns

MATERIALS: small puppets, stuffed animals, or pictures of common animals, one for each child

Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see? I see a red bird looking at me.

• Sing the book to the students.
• Distribute stuffed animals or pictures of animals. Discuss each.
• Play a game that assesses sequencing! The teacher sings, “Brown Bear, Brown Bear, what do you see?” and the student who is holding the brown bear answers, “I see a red bird looking at me.”
• Create additional verses with other animals. The game continues until all children have had a turn to sing about the animals they are holding.
• To make the game more challenging, have the answering student ask the next question.
• Turn this activity into a name game! “Charlie, Charlie, who do you see?” “I see Amy looking at me!” etc. This game can be used for lining the students up in an orderly fashion, for taking turns, etc.

Darla Meek Collection, 2007
CONCEPTS: composing melodies with la-sol-mi; composing rhythm patterns with eighth notes, quarter notes, and half notes; simple chord drone on macrobeat; German folk dance

MATERIALS: barred instruments; temple blocks; simple costumes, if desired

1. Introduce the character of the shoemaker.
   - Discuss shoemakers and the tools they use. List some of the sounds you would hear coming out of a shoemaker’s shop: snipping of scissors, tapping of the tiny hammers, pulling of thread, whirring of a machine, winding of the bobbin, etc.
   - Sing “Wind the Bobbin”:
     - Have students find a partner and show how they could together wind the bobbin, pull the thread, and tap five times.
     - Have half the students share, then the other half.
     - Take some of the students’ ideas to create movements for the A section. Sing and perform these movements.
     - Have students skip through the “cobbler’s workshop” for 16 beats and find a new partner while singing the B section (“La, la, la...”).

2. Introduce the story.
   - Tell the first half of the story.
• Insert the POEM “Cobbler, Cobbler” and the sounds of the elves working at appropriate times. You will have to alter the text of the book slightly:

“That night, from the workshop came the sounds of...

snip snip snip snip
tap-a tap-a tap-a tap-a
puuuuuull-- puuuuuull--
puuuuull-- puuuuuull—“

3. Create a melody for the poem.
• Ask the students if they would be able to create a melody for the poem using the two pitches sol and mi. Have the students improvise vocally until they come up with one idea.
• Have students go to barred instruments and remove B’s and F’s to reveal the C pentatonic scale.
• Have the students work in pairs to figure out how to play their melody on the barred instruments.
• If the children are ready, have them create a mi-sol-la melody for the poem on the barred instruments. Share their compositions.
• Have the students choose one of the melodies to be the “class composition.” They will probably choose one that is like the melody printed below. Have all the students play the class composition. Notate it together.
• Add a drone on the macrobeat.

4. Create workshop sounds.
• Display the following visuals:
• Chant each pattern twice.
• Put four strips in a row and have the students chant the patterns. Repeat, having a student arrange the four strips into a pattern of his/her own choice.
• As you repeat this several times, have the children experiment with ways to make cutting, hammering, and pulling motions.
• Put students in groups of two or four. They will work together to use the patterns they made up to create the workshop sounds. They can add movement. They will be performing four measures of four beats.
• Share with the large group, then have all the groups perform together.
• **Options for more experienced students:** Tell the students they have four beats with which to create a pattern using **tap-a, snip, and pull**—.
• Go around the circle, having each student chant his pattern twice.
• Divide into partners (or even groups of four) to create four measures of four beats each. They can add movement or unpitched percussion.
• They may put the patterns in any form they like. It would be fun to make their movements relate to each other—like a machine.

### 5. Perform story with song and sound effects.

- Have some children play the drone while singing the class composition, and some perform the workshop sounds.
- Dramatize the story.
- Have one student improvise on the glockenspiel when the elves move.
- Use “Shoemaker’s Dance” for the beginning and the end of the story.
Roll Over, a Counting Book!

Book by Merle Peek
Lesson Plan by Darla Meek

CONCEPT: preparing, presenting, or practicing sol-mi-do

MATERIALS:
- barred instruments or equivalent
- hand puppets made of garden gloves, if desired

1. Teach the song.
- Sing the song for the children. You may choose to read/sing Roll Over by Merle Peek.
- It is fun to create hand puppets out of garden gloves for this song. You can find tiny babies or animals to glue to the fingertips of the gloves at novelty stores.
- Ask the children if they recognized the melodic pattern sol-mi-do.
- Read/sing the book again, having children sign the sol-mi-do pattern when they hear it.

2. Dramatize the song.
- Line up ten children to dramatize the song! They lie on the floor, rolling over one time on cue, as the children sing each verse. The last person goes to his/her seat.

3. Play sol-mi-do on barred instruments.
- Line up several barred instruments in a row. Remove bars so that the G-B-D bars are easily accessible.
- Choose one child to play sol-mi-do on the first instrument as the children sing the first verse. Choose a new child to take his place as he moves to the second instrument. Continue rotating until all children have had a chance to play each barred instrument.

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Mortimer

by Robert Munsch, illustrated by Michael Martchenko
Lesson plan by Darla Meek

CONCEPTS: simple chord drone, do-re-mi-sol
vocal improvisation (if desired)

MATERIALS: barred instruments, props (if desired)

1. Introduce the story and teach the song.
   • “This is a story about a little boy who never wanted to go to bed. Every night his family would tell him very severely. ‘Mortimer, be quiet!’ but it did no good. Perhaps his family didn’t say it severely enough. Let’s see if you can do better. All together, let’s say, ‘Mortimer, be quiet!’” Practice.
   • “Pretend you are Mortimer’s mother. Can you say, ‘Mortimer, be quiet!’ in a motherly voice?” Practice as a father, children, and a police officer.
   • “Now, I’m sure you are wondering what Mortimer did to get himself in such trouble. After he was tucked into bed, he would sing, like this.” Teach the song with the children patting the steady beat on their laps.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sheet Music</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Clang, clang, rat-tle, bing, bang, gon-na make my noise all day!&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Clang, clang, rat-tle, bing, bang, gon-na make my noise all day!&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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2. **Accompany the song with a simple drone on barred instruments.**
   - Instruct the students to go to barred instruments and remove B’s and E’s to reveal the F pentatonic scale. Discuss the pentatonic scale and its use.
   - Play the steady beat on F and C, and explain that this is called a *drone*, or *bordun*, which is based on the tonic and dominant. Sing Mortimer’s song while they play.
   - Because the rhythm of the drone and the rhythm of the song are often parallel, guide the students to find a better choice for a drone. It is fun to play a drone with a rhythmic pattern. Sing the song and explore some options. Which options complement the song and are easy for children to play? At this stage, the best choices are two half notes or one half and two quarters.
   - Sing the song *a cappella*, adding a snap on the rests at the end of each phrase. Transfer to a cluster chord on any two notes next to each other. (This part is for the glockenspiels.)

3. **Add vocal improvisation on la-sol-mi.**
   - Warm up voices, echo *la-sol-mi* patterns.
   - Have students pick one of the patterns we practiced and sing it four times.
   - Have the students pick another one of the patterns we practiced, OR make up their own, and practice it four times.
   - Have students use those two patterns, arranged in a form of their choice, to create a little melody.
   - Repeat, with a different form.
   - Sing song with drone, then perform vocal improvisations for the same length as the song (16 beats), as if they were Mortimer singing in bed.
   - If students are feeling adventurous, they can explore with rhythm as they sing!

4. **Add sound effects and perform.**
   - “When Mortimer would make all that racket, his family would walk up the stairs to check on him.” Review walking up and down the “stairs.”
   - Perform the story with all speaking parts, song, and sound effects.
   - Have some students dramatize the story with a pillow and blankey, and other props.

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A Turkey for Thanksgiving
Book by Eve Bunting, illustrated by Diane deGroat
Lesson Plan by Darla Meek

CONCEPTS:       *drmsl*, simple drone, unpitched technique

MATERIALS:      unpitched percussion instruments of choice

1. **Introduce the characters and the story.**
   - “One Thanksgiving morning, Mr. and Mrs. Moose were busy making special preparations for dinner with their friends.” Read the first two pages of the book.
   - Teach the following song:

   ![Musical Staff Image]
   “Almost time for dinner!” Moose did say.

   ![Musical Staff Image]
   “I will find a turkey for Thanksgiving Day!”

   If desired, have the students play a simple drone on the macrobeat as they sing the song.

2. **Add sound effects.**
   - Display a variety of instruments and review the name, sound, and technique for playing each.
   - Guide the students to choose sound effects for the story, including one sound to represent each of the characters. Some ideas:

   Moose: drum
   Goat: guiro
   Sheep: shaker
   Rabbit: temple blocks
   Turkey: flexitone
   Porcupine: triangle

3. **Practice and perform while reading the story.** Have the students exchange responsibilities and perform again!

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CONCEPTS:  low sol and la, crescendo/descrescendo, form, composition (if desired)

MATERIALS:  barred instruments, wind chime, rain stick, scarves, text of the poem displayed

Rainy days are lovely days, each drop is soft and light.
The rain perfumes the city air, and glistens in the night.
1. Introduce the concept.
   • “Don’t you just love rainy days? Bill Martin, Jr. wrote a book about the sounds of rain called *Listen to the Rain*. Today we get to create a thunderstorm together.
   • “When there’s a thunderstorm, does it usually start suddenly, or gradually? Usually it starts with a little pitter-patter (fingertips on lap), and then a little more water (pat lap), and then the rain comes in torrents and lightning flashes (claps for lightning). Then it starts to die down….and finally the storm is gone.” Practice this with the students.
   • “So musically, the sound starts softly and gradually gets louder, then gradually gets softer again. Here are the symbols that represent that: crescendo and decrescendo.”
   • Read the book to the students, inserting the song (or poem only) at intervals.

2. OPTION: Guide students to create a melody for the poem.
   • Pat the rhythm of the poem, first with words, then without.
   • Have the students improvise with the rhythm of the poem in F pentatonic (take off their “bacon” and “eggs”).
   • Tell the students that they are going to create an *abac* melody in do pentatonic on F. Have them come up with a melody for *a*.
   • Have several students share their ideas. Pick three and have those students play their melodies again. Label them 1, 2, and 3.
   • Have the rest of the students close their eyes and hold up their fingers showing the number of the melody they prefer. Teach the most favored melody to the class.
   • Continue with *b* and *c*. Play the entire melody. Tweak as desired.

3. Teach the bass part.
   • “Let’s start with some drip drops.” (Alternate pats on your lap.)
   • Students pat the pattern and sing.
   • Transfer to instruments

4. Teach the metallophone part.
   • “I love to splash in puddles! What happens to the water when you stick your foot in it? The water ripples like this: Splaaash…”
   • “Can you count how many beats my splash lasts?” (4)
   • Sing the song, adding a clap on the word “rain.”
   • Have students perform the clap with you as they sing, then without help.
   • Transfer to instruments—remove B’s and E’s. Play any two notes that are next-door neighbors.
   • Play and sing.

5. Teach the glockenspiel part.
   • Instruct students to snap five times. Demonstrate snapping five times (the SG part) as you sing the song.
   • “When you watch raindrops landing on the window, it might look like this: ‘Rain is falling down.’” (lsmrm)
   • Students sing and practice with hands snapping while moving downward.
• Transfer to instruments. Start with la and walk downward. Then change the last note to mi.
• Add mi-sol-mi, then play and sing together.

6. Add movement.
• Explain: “A scientific word for rainstorm is precipitation. Precipitation is one of the four parts of what scientists call the WATER CYCLE. Have you ever wondered where the water comes from? Let’s explore the water cycle with our bodies. You are now a drop of water in the ocean.”
• Students lie on the floor as if a body of water. The instructor leads them through the stages of the water cycle:
  • **Evaporation** occurs when the sun heats up water in rivers or lakes or the ocean and turns it into vapor or steam. The water vapor or steam rises into the atmosphere. (Students rise slowly, lifting lightly as high as they can reach.)
  • **Condensation** occurs when water vapor in the air gets cold and changes back into liquid, forming clouds. (Students gather together into a group.)
  • **Precipitation** occurs when so much water has condensed that the air cannot hold it anymore. The clouds get heavy and water falls back to the earth in the form of rain, hail, sleet, or snow. (Students fall gracefully back to the ground.)
  • **Collection**: When water falls back to earth as precipitation, it may fall back in the oceans, lakes or rivers or it may end up on land. When it ends up on land, it will either soak into the earth and become part of the “ground water” that plants and animals use to drink, or it may run over the soil and collect in the oceans, lakes, or rivers where the cycle starts all over again.
• Distribute scarves. “I need several people to create a visual rainstorm. Think about the form of our rain piece: poem-song-poem-song-poem-song-poem. You will create a short dance to go with the song. Create movement for the poem that reflects the four stages of the water cycle. Pretend that you are a single drop of water. How will you show the four stages?”
• Guide students to create a visual rainstorm, following the form of the piece.

7. Add sound effects.
• Add rainstick or wadded up newspaper throughout.
• Add thunder with timpani, shaking a piece of poster board.
• It is also fun to turn the lights off and on quickly for lightning!
• Add windchime for a rainbow at the end.

8. Read the book, adding the orchestration and movement throughout as desired.

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