

CREATIVE WAYS TO COMBINE MUSIC AND STORIES with Barb Tilsen

(this material also available on barbtilsen.com in the “Hand Outs” section of The Music Cabinet)

In this musical workshop we’ll explore creative ways to combine music and stories for the preschool classroom. We’ll learn how to create a musical soundscape for the actions, characters or events of a story. We’ll identify the elements of a story that can be adapted into a song or choral voice to add an interactive experience that children of all ages can enjoy.

Our objectives:

- 1) To collect four examples of stories or poems that combine well with music
- 2) To identify four techniques to combine music with stories or poems:
adding songs, rhythm, musical instruments, choral voices
- 3) To apply these techniques to a musical story or poem in the workshop

Techniques to create a “musical telling” of a poem or story:

- create soundscapes for the characters, place or action of the story with drums, winds and percussion instruments
- add songs that are companions or complements to the themes of the story
- add a singing voice or a spoken choral voice to a story
- add a rhythmic beat with drums and/or rhythm instruments to a story or book

CREATING A SOUNDSCAPE: “WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND?”

Rhythm instruments are a great way to add special sounds for a character, event or scene of a story or poem (drums, shakers, cabasa, guiro, rainsticks, thunder tubes, etc.). Also “Found Sounds” can be fun: crinkling paper for the rustling of leaves, lids to cooking pots for gongs, empty water jugs for drums, blow into a bottle for the sound of the wind. Use your imagination!

Using the Pentatonic Scale in a soundscape: A scale is a progression of notes in a specific order, most of us are familiar with this 8-note major scale: *do re mi fa so la ti do*. The Pentatonic Scale is a major scale without the 4th and 7th degrees (fa, ti): *do re mi sol la do*. Notes in the pentatonic scale can be played in any order and still sound beautiful. You can improvise—play them in different patterns and explore. It is a fun way to create melodies and patterns for a soft background of pleasing sound to add to a story. The black keys of the piano keyboard form a pentatonic scale. You can also set up a Chimealong, xylophone or resonator bars with removable notes or octave bells by taking out the 4th and 7th pieces to play notes on the pentatonic scale.

Start with one instrument and layer in the sounds—wind, leaves, rain, thunder, gentle melody

WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND? — Christina Rossetti

Who has seen the wind?

Neither I nor you

But when the leaves hang trembling

The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind?

Neither you nor I

But when the leaves bow down their heads

The wind is passing by.

TECHNIQUES TO COMBINE MUSIC AND STORIES

Questions to consider when you look at a book or story:

1. For rhymed verses, does the rhythm of the words fit into any traditional tunes you know? Try singing the words in the book to a familiar tune to see if they fit, e.g. *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, *Skip to My Lou*, *Hush Little Baby*, *She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain*. Does the rhythm of the words fit into a steady beat? Try out with the beat of a drum.
2. For a narrated story, is there an instrumental sound or rhythmic beat (drum, “improvisation on the pentatonic scale,” rhythm instruments, recorded instrumental music, all or part of a familiar song —e.g. the chorus) that helps create the mood for the story? Experiment with your ideas to see what will add fun musical elements to the story.
3. Can you see parts of the story that you can have the children say? For example, the spoken line of a character or one repeated part of the story that the children can say or sing either individually or as a group chorus?
4. Before you start the story, teach the group parts to the children so they are familiar with what to do as the story is told.

SAMPLE STORY: MAMA DON'T ALLOW

We'll add the song “Mama Don't Allow,” a soundscape, and spoken choral voices for interactive storytelling fun! **BOOK:** *Mama Don't Allow*, by Thacher Hurd, Harper Trophy, ISBN 0-06-443078-2

MAMA DON'T ALLOW by Thacher Hurd

An interactive musical telling by Barb Tilsen

Miles got a saxophone for his birthday. Mama said,

MAMA: How nice!

Miles practice and practiced until his mama and papa couldn't stand it anymore, and his mama said,

MAMA: Why don't you practice outside, dear?

And so he did, as loud as could be.

SONG: MAMA DON'T ALLOW

*Mama don't allow no music playing around here
Mama don't allow no music playing around here
I don't care what Mama don't allow
Gonna play that music anyhow
Mama don't allow no music playing around here*

CRITTER CHORUS:

The mouse said: Dreadful!

The pelican said: What a racket!

The dogs said: Yuck! Terrible! Harumph!

The frog said: Unbearable!

Miles met a drummer named Al, a guitarist named Bert and a trumpet player named Doc. They formed the Swamp Band and played as loud as they could.

Soon the whole town cried out:

CRITTER CHORUS: Swamp Bands play in the swamp!

Down in the swamp.....

SWAMPY SOUNDSCAPE: *mosquito buzz, bird calls, swamp noises...*

...the sharp-toothed, long-tailed, yellow-eyed alligators said:

CRITTER CHORUS: How lovely! We love that Swamp Band Music! Come and play for the Alligator Ball!

At the ball, the Swamp Band played their favorite song

SONG: MAMA DON'T ALLOW

They played far into the night. When the music was over the band was hungry. So were the alligators. Miles asked, What's for dinner?

The alligators said:

CRITTER CHORUS: Something tender! Something juicy! We're gonna make Swamp Band Soup!

Miles said, "Wait, how about one more song before dinner?" And the Swamp Band sang "A Lullaby of Swampland."

SONG: LULLABY OF SWAMPLAND (*sing softly and slowly to the tune of "She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain" and then keep humming...*)

*When the moon is rising and the moss hangs low
When the swamp is quiet and the waters move slow
That's the time to sing softly and lay your head awfully
Far down in the gooey, damp mud*

The alligators fell fast asleep.

CRITTER CHORUS: *Zzzzzzzzzzz.....*

Miles piloted the riverboat back to Swampville. The Swamp Band tiptoed home playing that lullaby as quiet as could be.

And Mama said,

MAMA: How nice!

FINALE: MAMA DON'T ALLOW (once more so all can dance at the Swampland Ball)

STORY-WEAVING with Finger Plays and Songs

Finger plays and songs can be a musical springboard for improvisational storytelling. I call it story-weaving—creating a musical framework to imagine a story with the whole group or combining individual stories by each child. I use a group process to improvise and create stories with young children with a question “What happens next?” or “What did that feel like?” or “What did you see?” Our story might take turns with each child’s answer advancing the story or we might do collective group brainstorming to create the story together. You can also teach this song and finger play and have the children do their own drawings to create their own stories.

Pūpū Hinuhinu/Five Little Sea Shells story-weaving with shells, scarves, ocean drums and improvisation

Pūpū Hinuhinu by Nona Beamer

Pūpū Hinuhinu
Pūpū Hinuhinu e
O ke kahakai
Kahakai e
Pūpū Hinuhinu e

*Poetic Translation:
My shell so shiny,
My shiny little shell
I found you by the seashore
My shell, shiny shell*

You can find a video of this song with the shell rhythms and hand motions on youtube: [Pupu Hinuhinu - YouTube](#) (or go to youtube and search for Pūpū Hinuhinu, choose the recording that is posted by hanahouhula, www.chicagohulaproductions.com; the singer is Tia Carrere.

FIVE LITTLE SEA SHELLS *(traditional finger play)*

Five little seashells sitting on the shore
Swish went the waves, and then there were four
Four little seashells sitting by the sea
Swish went the waves, and then there were three
Three little seashells ‘neath a sky so blue
Swish went the waves and then there were two
Two little seashells sitting in the sun
Swish went the waves and then there was one
One little seashell sitting all alone
I picked it up and brought it home!

Once upon a time, swish! went the waves carrying the seashells far out to sea on each of their own very big adventures. What happened to the first little shell...

SAMPLE STORY-WEAVING: *Five Little Seashells* story created by 4-5 year olds with Barb Tilsen in her “Singing Stories” class at the Minneapolis Children’s Theatre (2011).

Once upon a time there were...

Five little seashells sitting on the shore, “Swish!” went the waves...carrying one sea shell far off to the other side of ocean to the arctic where it was really, really cold!

Four little seashells sitting by the sea, “Swish!” went the waves...carrying the next little seashell far, far away. It got eaten by a monster and got swallowed up!

Three little seashells ‘neath the sky so blue, “Swish!” went the waves...carrying the next little seashell far across the ocean and it got stuck in the sand. A little girl found it and took it home.

Two little seashells sitting in the sun, “Swish!” went the waves...carrying the fourth little seashell to the deepest ocean ever and it went to the bottom of the sea and then a hermit crab picked it up and made a home in the shell.

One little seashell sitting all alone, “Swish!” went the waves...carrying the last little seashell into a locked cage and it went over the Pacific Ocean and a little girl found it and she had they key to unlock the cage so she got it out and took it home!

Pūpū Hinuhinu: our story ends with this beautiful song.

CLIMBING UP THE APPLE TREE—poem by Ruth Dowell, melody by Barb Tilsen (on the recording “Take the Seed” CD by Barb Tilsen. Also available to download at www.barbtilsen.com in the Workshop Hand Outs section of the Music Cabinet

Climbing up the apple tree
Swinging on a limb
If I hear a robin
I may sing along with him ‘Tra la la’
Robin if you fly away
Here’s what I think I’ll do
I’ll wish a pair of sparrow wings
And fly away with you
Once upon a time Robin and I flew far away...

You can sing this song in a call and response style having the children sing back each line. Or you could create a musical soundscape of the sound of rustling trees, the breeze, and a pentatonic improvisational background melody and recite the words to the poem.

Ask questions to create the story together: “Where did you go?” “What did you see?” “What did it feel like?” “What happens next?”

SINGING STORY BOOK AND SONG LIST: IDEAS

The Cajun Cornbread Boy by Dianne de Las Casas, illustrated by Marita Gentry, Pelican Publishing, ISBN 9781589802247. Add choral voices to tell the story and try the tune of “Shoo Fly, Don’t Bother Me” for the repeated lines “Run, chère, run as fast as you can! You can’t catch me—I’m full of cayenne.”

Click, Clack, Moo, Cows That Type, by Doreen Cronin, pictures by Betsy Lewin, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, ISBN0-689-83213-3. Combine this book with “Old MacDonald Had a Farm,” or “Down on Grandpa’s Farm,” add a typing rhythm with percussion

Earthsong, Over in the Endangered Meadow, Words by Sally Rogers. Melissa Bay Mathis, illus. Dutton Children’s Books. ISBN 0-525-45873-5. New words to traditional tune “Over in the Meadow.” Beautifully written and illustrated book about endangered species. Song sheet included on book jacket. You can brainstorm a little story with the children about each animal.

Five Little Monkeys, by Barb Tilsen, on CD “Make a Circle Like the Sun” www.barbtilsen.com, you can also find it in the Peace Songbook, in the Song Library of The Children’s Music Network www.cmnonline.org Add choral voices and rhythms.

Gigantic Sweet Potato, by Dianne de Las Casas, illustrated by Marita Gentry, Pelican Publishing Company, ISBN 9781589807556. Add choral voices for each of the ‘helpers,’ and a rhythm or a tune for “Heave ho! Heave ho! I’ll pull this sweet potato, just a little more to go.”

Hey, Little Ant, by Phillip and Hannah Hoose, illustrations by Debbie Tilley, Tricycle Press, ISBN 1-883672-54-6. Wonderful lyrics set to a traditional tune about peaceful choices and bullying. www.philliphoose.com.

Little Rabbit & Red Bird, by Barb Tilsen, on CD “Make a Circle Like the Sun” www.barbtilsen.com. You can also find it in the Peace Songbook, in the Song Library of The Children’s Music Network www.cmnonline.org. Add choral voices and rhythms

Mama Don’t Allow, by Thacher Hurd, Harper Trophy, ISBN 0-06-443078-2

Owl Moon, by Jane Yolan, illustrated by John Schoenherr, Philomel Books, ISBN 0-399-21457-7; *Song: Owl Moon* by Bruce O’Brien on his cd “Love is In the Middle”

Swimmy, by Leo Lionni, Alfred A. Knopf, ISBN 0-394-81713-3 *Song: Swimmy by Two of a Kind*, on “Connections” by *Two of a Kind*, *Magillacutty Music* www.twoofakind.com

The Very Quiet Cricket, by Eric Carle, Philomel Books, ISBN 0-399-21885-8, *add instruments for each creature and dancing scarves for the luna moth!*