

Using Favorite Songs and Poems with Young Learners

Songs and poems are a natural part of early childhood education in the United States. Native English-speaking children in all regions of the United States are taught a wide variety of songs and poems either by their family members or their teachers. Even teachers and parents who are not musically inclined share songs and poems with young learners. Many teachers working with children learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) also know the value of children's verse in the young learner classroom.

Experienced teachers know that songs and poems are an excellent way to begin or end a lesson. At the beginning of a lesson they can help children make the transition from their native language into English as the lesson warm-up. Whenever possible it is best to select a piece of verse that is directly related to the content of the lesson. For example, if you are teaching body parts, you could easily begin the class by doing the chant, "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes." At the end of the lesson, a good way to dismiss the children is by singing or chanting a

piece of verse. This may even be done while children are lining up to leave or while they are waiting at the door for the dismissal bell to ring.

There are a number of different ways that songs and poems can be presented to children. Often the first step is to introduce any key vocabulary that may be unfamiliar. Props, such as real objects or pictures of objects, can be used to present the key vocabulary for a song or poem. Actions can also help children learn unfamiliar vocabulary. The props or actions not only help children remember the words and meanings of new words but also help children remember the context or situation depicted in the piece of verse.


Once the key vocabulary has been presented, teachers find it useful to introduce young learners to pieces of verse one line at a time. The teacher says one line of the song or poem using the props or actions that illustrate it, and then the children repeat the line. This procedure continues until all the lines of the targeted piece of verse have been said and repeated.

Next the learners repeat the entire selection of verse using props or

actions to help them remember the words. In addition, teachers may have children clap out the syllables of a piece of verse as a way to keep young learners actively involved.

Using actions to accompany songs and poems

Children love to move as they chant or sing poems and songs. It is easy to make up actions to accompany many pieces of verse. The actions can be as simple as moving a hand or fingers. For example, the following poem can be transformed into a fun action rhyme by adding simple movements (as indicated).



Here is the Beehive

Here is the beehive; where are the bees?
(Fold your fingers into a fist.)

Hidden away where nobody sees.
(Hold up your fist.)

Watch and you'll see them come out of the hive.
(Wave your fist.)

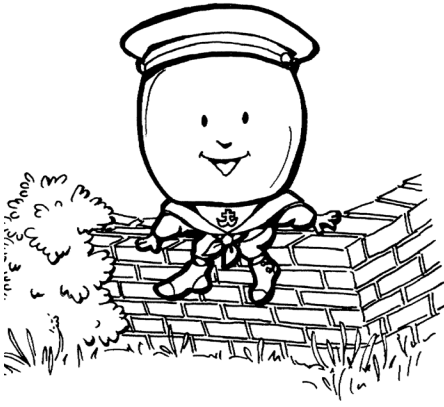
One, two, three, four, five.
(Open up fist, one finger at a time.)

Bzzzzzzz.....
(Wave fingers in the air.)

Other songs and poems can be made more interesting with the addition of whole body motions. It is best to start by standing, if at all possible, away from desks, tables, and chairs when reciting pieces of verse with accompanying whole body motions. See the box in the next column for the types of actions that could accompany the verse “Humpty Dumpty.”

Children may want to make up their own actions to accompany different pieces of verse.

If a digital camera is available, learners may want to take pictures of the learner-created actions for each song or poem. If a digital camera is not available, learners and/or teachers may draw pictures of the learner-created actions.



Humpty Dumpty

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
(Pantomime sitting on a wall by squatting.)

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
(Pantomime falling down.)

All the king's horses and all the king's men
(Pantomime looking sad, weary, and unable to get up.)

Couldn't put Humpty together again.
(Turn and stagger away.)


Puppets

Children enjoy puppets and often will talk to a puppet more freely than to a teacher. Puppets work well with many songs, such as “The Farmer in the Dell.” Puppets can be made by cutting out the pictures provided with this article and mounting the pictures on chopsticks or popsicle sticks. Hold up the appropriate puppet as the song is chanted or sung. Once children are familiar with the song, they can assume different roles, and each child can hold the puppet that matches his/her role.

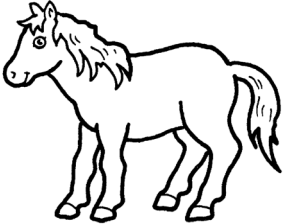
Innovations

Children can create innovations for their favorite songs and poems. Innovations are different versions of pieces of verse created by substituting individual words for some of the original words. When children create their own

innovations, they substitute words in the verse with their own words. The number and types of words substituted will vary depending upon the song or poem. Look at the example below.



Original
Around the Garden
Round and round the garden,
Goes the little mouse.
Up, up, up he creeps,
Up into his house.



Innovation of
Around the Garden
Round and round the farmyard,
Goes the little horse.
'Round, 'round, 'round he struts,
'Round into his barn.

Personal songbooks

Children can make their own personal songbooks by copying the texts from the board or using photocopies of the texts. Learners can also be provided with pictures, such as the ones provided with this article, or they can draw their own pictures. If learners have created their own innovations for songs, they should make sure they put them into their songbooks, complete with illustrations.

Sources for songs

Two very good sources for children's songs are available on the Internet. These websites have been set up primarily for native English speakers and their teachers and family members who may have difficulty remembering the words to favorite songs. The first site: www.busongs.com was designed to help adults remember the words to the songs that they wanted to

pass on to their children. The second site, www.songsforteaching.com, was designed to help teachers use music across the curriculum to teach a wide variety of concepts and skills.

On pages 43 to 45 are some songs that have delighted native English-speaking children in the United States for a long, long time. You and your students are likely to enjoy them just as much!

Song and poem charts

Song and poem charts can be created for different pieces of verse. Song and poem charts are large posters containing different pieces of verse. In some cases, all of the words are printed on the poster with a few illustrations to provide context. In other cases, some words and some rebus pictures, with a couple of illustrations, constitute the chart. Rebus pictures are small pictures that are used in place of words that are unfamiliar or that children cannot read. Whenever possible, try to include on the chart illustrations like the ones provided with this article.

Two examples of song charts follow this article. The first example of "Home on the Range" shows a song chart with the text and a photo. Note that the photo can be used to teach two of the key vocabulary items, *range* (a large area of open land where livestock wander and graze) and *buffalo*. More than anything, the photo serves as decoration to make the song chart more attractive.

The second song chart shows "Home on the Range" with rebus pictures. Song charts can also be created with the musical scores for learners who have learned how to read music. Note how the rebus pictures are put into the chart in place of the written nouns. Rebus pictures are used to help native English-speaking children ease into reading. In the foreign language classroom, rebus pictures help learners use a visual picture cue to remind them of the word and the meaning of the word.

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Home on the Range

Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam,

Where the deer and the antelope play,

Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,

And the skies are not cloudy all day.

Home, home on the range,

Where the deer and the antelope play,

Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,

And the skies are not cloudy all day.



on the Range

Oh, give me a  where the  roam,

Where the  and the  play,

Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,

And the  are not  all day.

 ,  on the range,

Where the  and the  play,

Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,

And the  are not  all day.