

Start With a Song

The Teacher begins singing with the class on the first day of school

Do not wait to begin the opera to introduce singing.

Objectives: The students will be able to sing in tune, with a natural voice free from strain. They will be able to sing a variety of simple songs and chants with confidence. They will be able to differentiate and identify the terms “speaking voice” and “singing voice”.

Approximate lesson length: 5-10 minutes

Materials needed: CD player or piano but mostly just you.

Cross-curricular objectives: Music



Background Information: Singing is a very important first step to preparing the children to compose and perform their operas. The classes who sing daily are the most successful in the opera process. Even a few minutes a day will make an enormous difference to the children. Start with simple songs, such as folk songs, which have ranges and rhythms natural for young children to sing well and master. Mastering a song gives children confidence in their ability to sing, and may make the difference in a lifetime of singing enjoyment. If a child decides they can't sing, this will almost always carry through their lives. It is vital that children are given constant positive reinforcement and praise about their singing skills, because, for many children, this is a very personal and frightening skill to demonstrate.

Range and Register: Perhaps the most important concept when teaching songs to children is to ensure the song is in the natural range for children to sing. One octave, from middle C to C in the staff, is a generally good guide. Occasionally notes a bit higher or lower are fine, but the bulk of the song should be in this range. It is important that children are singing in their “head voice” or “register”. The head register is higher and lighter and may not be as loud, but is the most natural for singing. The “chest voice” or “chest register” is lower, louder and a more difficult range for children to sing in tune.



In-Tune Singing: If children are encouraged to sing in their head register within their natural range they will most often naturally sing in tune. Children with problems singing in tune most often will be singing too low for their voices. Every child can learn to sing in tune, given ample opportunity to sing in a high, clear, unrestricted voice.

Modeling: Adults are more likely to sing in their chest register, so it is important that teachers sing in a high and light voice for the children. A good rule of thumb is, if it seems a bit too high for an adult to sing naturally, it's probably about right for children. If it seems like the children are struggling to sing in tune, the song is most likely pitched too low. Children will have a more difficult time singing with a male voice as it is not in their same register, but if men model a song in a light tenor voice, children can usually adapt.

Allow the children to be independent of you when singing. Let them sing alone **MOST OF THE TIME**. This will allow them to gain self confidence, and it will be much easier for them when they perform their opera, *when you will not be there to guide them along*.

Sample Activities:

Proper Singing Techniques: Many children have been taught to sing loudly and therefore they may shout instead of singing. Children have naturally quiet voices and forcing their voice by singing very loudly or shouting can damage tender vocal chords.

Yawn! **Process:** Encourage children to sing high and clearly, but not to sing *loudly*. Tell them you like to hear them, but they must always sing “musically”. Use words like “strong” and “full” rather than “loud”. Have them take in a nice deep breath from their diaphragm before singing. It will feel like yawning. They can put their hands on their stomachs and feel the diaphragm expand as they breathe.

Differentiating Between Singing and Speaking: Many children have difficulty differentiating between their speaking voice and their singing voice. If they are singing every day in class it will help a lot. It also helps to point out the differences between speaking and singing.

**Speaking,
Whispering
and
Shouting
versus
Singing**

Process: Ask the children if you are speaking or singing. Now speak rhythmically like a chant and ask them again. Many children assume that chanting is the same as singing. Now sing on so mi or any pitches you choose, “Am I singing now?” Teach the children the following poem, speaking, whispering and shouting, singing the last line on so and mi or other pitches you choose.

I like my speaking voice; I use it all the time.
I like my whisper voice; it’s quiet soft and fine.
I like my shouting voice for when I run and climb,
I like my singing voice; I like it ‘cause it’s mine.

Point out that the singing voice is higher and lighter than the speaking voice. Choose a song the children know and have them sing.



Vocalization: Vocalizing is a great way to help children get into their head register when they sing. This helps them explore and develop the full range of their voices.

Singing Games **Process:** Have the children pretend to be ocean waves with their hands and with their voices. Have them slide their voices up and down with the waves. Have them make small waves first then increasingly higher waves with their hands and voices. They can also form a yawn and slide their voices down from high to low, like a yawn. These activities help them warm up their voices as well as explore their range.

Story: Pete and Repeat. Hold up your thumbs and tell them one is named Pete and the other is Repeat. They can go on lots of adventures together, like the park or zoo or amusement park. Let the children decide where they should go. The main goal of the story should be to give children opportunities to do vocalizations up and down. For instance: Pete can go up the hills and down the hills in his car to Repeat’s house to pick him up. Pete always speaks in a high voice and Repeat always speaks in a

low voice and most often just says, “Okay”. They can go to the park and go on the swings, slides and merry-go-round, always using their voice to illustrate the story.

Finally: Sing with the children every day something simple, free and fun. Sing during stressful times-before a test, for instance. Sing while waiting for the lunch bell. Sing after recess. Singing is one of the most relaxing and natural things a child can do. It is a proven technique for releasing tension. Never force children to sit absolutely still when singing, they can walk around the room, swing their arms, pick up trash, erase the board, walk to the bus line and numerous other activities during the day.

Remember, the children will do as you do. Show them that you love to sing, too!



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Evaluation: Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Are the children singing in their natural range, without shouting and free from strain?
2. Am I (the teacher) being a good singing model, singing in a high, light, free voice?
3. Am I allowing the children to sing independently?
4. Can the children differentiate between their speaking voice and their singing voice?
5. Are the children able to vocalize to find their head voice and explore their range?

USOE Core Objectives - Singing

Standard 1, Objective 1

The students will develop the voice and body as instruments of musical expression.

Standard 1, Objective 3

Students will discover how songs, singing games and dances relate to the various cultures in the community. (see related Social Studies core)

