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Using Predictable Songs in Beginning Reading Activities

Sandra L. Renegar

One of the universal languages of humankind is music, a source of rhythms for toe-tapping, melodies for humming, and lyrics for remembering. Like nursery rhymes, many simple songs contain repetitive and/or predictable language which can serve as a means for teaching sight vocabulary to beginning readers (Bridge, Winograd, and Haley, 1983). Predictable text is characterized by the repetitive pattern of the author and concepts familiar to children (Rhodes, 1981). This repetition may be evident in the rhyme and rhythm of the language and/or the cumulative pattern in stories or songs. By introducing beginning reading vocabulary through music, the children's psychological involvement in the experience is intensified and the range of clues on which they can rely is multiplied (Kuhmerker, 1969). This article describes a procedure for providing children with multiple opportunities to recognize high frequency words in dependable musical contexts.

Song selection is an important step because the lyrics form the focus for the beginning reading activities. A short song with a simple melody which can be sung easily by young children is ideal. The lyrics should be repetitious, containing high frequency words which will have utility in the

children's independent reading. Examples of patterns found in songs include a repetitive-cumulative pattern in which a word, phrase, or sentence is repeated and another is added in each succeeding verse as in "Old McDonald Had A Farm" or a pattern based on familiar cultural sequences (cardinal and ordinal numbers, alphabet, months of the year, days of the week, etc.) as in the Alphabet Song.

After selecting the song, the teacher introduces it by singing it to the students several times. The children may join the singing at will. Songs with simple actions or movements are especially useful for encouraging participation.

Next, the song lyrics are placed on a chart where the children can see the words easily. The teacher now models finger-point reading for the children by pointing to each word while singing the song. The music of the song will automatically provide a sense of rhythm to the language.

After singing through the song several times with the teacher pointing to the words while the children join in the singing, individual children may take their turn at pointing to the words during the singing. Occasionally the lyrics can be chanted in rhythm without following the melodic line of the song to place more focus on language.

Interaction with the song continues by giving the students strips with lines from the song which are placed under the corresponding line on the chart. Next, students receive individual word cards to be placed under the matching words in the chart. Children are asked to identify individual words in the song chart when the teacher points to the words in random order. Students again sing the whole song. The teacher may hold up a word card and instruct the

children to signal or do some motion each time that word is sung.

This series of activities serves a variety of purposes. Not only do the children develop a memory of the text and see a model of the reading process, just as they would from a predictable book (Morris, 1981), but the teacher can also assess the development of concept of word in beginning readers. Do the children point to each word correctly as they sing through the song? If they mismatch a spoken (sung) word to a written word, do they self-correct without teacher assistance and continue with the singing? Can they identify individual words immediately or must they use contextual support by repeating an entire line or even the entire song?

The language of the children themselves can be used by having them suggest words which can be substituted into the song. They may change individual words or entire phrases. After recording the words or phrases on cards or strips which are used to cover the parallel song lyrics, the "new song" can be sung. The highly structured pattern of the song provides a simple framework for the children to express themselves.

Predictable songs are a rich resource for beginning reading activities from which multiple benefits accrue. Through high involvement, students have the opportunity to acquire sight vocabulary, to develop positive feelings about reading, and to express themselves. The teacher is able to assess the development of concept of word, sight vocabulary and positive attitude toward reading. Because it can provide vivid learning experiences, music is a potential tool for helping build successful readers.

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. . . . Expanding Horizons

Picture Books in the Middle School

*This teaching idea is shared by Jean Porath,
who teaches at Cassopolis Middle School, in Cassopolis, Michigan.*

We're never too old for a good book. In my seventh and eighth grade Literature classes I often use picture books to present new terms and ideas or to review them. These books are short and to the point; they enable me to segue into more complicated pieces of literature — and they have other appealing characteristics: great illustrations, humor, and memories.

To review story grammar before reading complex short stories or novels I often use *The Little Mouse*, *the Red Ripe Strawberry*, and *the Big Hungry Bear* by Don and Audrey Wood. The solution to the problem it presents creates the theme, which is sharing. The story, told in less than 150 words, is complete with characters, setting, conflict and strong plot. My students enjoy the book and discussing the concepts.

Often I ask them if they'd like to work in pairs to create a picture book and no one has said no yet. I leave the picture books in the room all year for silent reading and personal enjoyment, and the students have learned to appreciate the picture book as a form of literature which is not just for young children.

