

Music in the Elementary Classroom

This article explores music's definition and educational significance, highlighting its role as a form of art and cultural expression. Emphasizing its benefits in academic achievement, social-emotional development, and cognitive function, the article provides practical strategies for integrating music into elementary classroom instruction, empowering educators to create dynamic and enriching student learning experiences.

What is Music?

Music is a form of art and cultural expression. It is characterized by organized sound patterns created through melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre, often conveyed through instruments, vocals, or electronic means. It serves various purposes, including entertainment, communication, emotional expression, and cultural identity.

What was your last musical experience? Was it driving in the car? Singing a lullaby to a child? Listening to a symphony? Maybe the radio that was playing at a store?

Maybe the rhapsodic rhythm of the wind in the trees? The beat of your car blinker or the soft humming of a student in your classroom? Music is everywhere!

What is your background with music, and what is music to you?

Why Music in the Classroom?

Music in the classroom has many benefits, including the following:

- Impact students' academic achievement
- Encourage social and emotional development
- Strengthen memory and learning retention
- Influence motor development and physical maturation
- Enhance the connection between the body and mind
- Boost confidence and acquire 21st-century skills



Elements and Concepts of Music

Pitch

PITCH: sounds occurring at a certain frequency that can be described as high or low

1. Pitches go up or down or repeat
2. Pitches may be represented by symbols
3. Pitches move up or down by step or skip

SCALE: pitches that are arranged in a specific order of whole and half steps. Scales determine tonality; different cultures and different periods in time use different scales.

MELODY: a succession of sounds (pitches)

- A melody may be based on a scale
- A melody has a range (low to high)
- A melody may move by steps, skips or remain the same
- A melody may have shape (melodic contour) moving up, down or remaining the same

CHORD: three or more pitches sounded simultaneously

HARMONY: the simultaneous sounding of two or more pitches; the vertical structure of music moving through time and supporting the melody. Harmony may be homophonic and polyphonic.

- Monophonic: one melody that everyone sings or plays in unison without accompaniment
- Homophonic: single melody supported by an accompaniment (e.g., a hymn)
- Polyphonic: more than one melody performed simultaneously (e.g., "Row Your Boat" sung in a round)

TEXTURE: the interaction of melody and harmony. Two or more melodic or rhythmic lines may occur at the same time, resulting in a "thick" or "thin" texture or density of sound.

Duration

DURATION: lengths of sounds and silences that occur in music, as well as the organization of these sounds and silences in time

BEAT: the underlying pulse that may be sounded or silent

- Sounds may be organized into steady beats, and music may or may not have a steady beat
- Silent beats are called rests

METER: the pattern of beats by which a piece of music is measured

- Beats may be organized into patterns of strong and weak
- These beats may create patterns of 2 or 3, or any combination of 2, 3, or 4

RHYTHM: the organization of sounds and silences in time

- Combinations of sounds may be of equal and unequal length
- More than one sound may occur during the time of a beat
- Long/short sounds and silences may be organized into rhythmic patterns
- Rhythmic patterns may be represented by symbols

Timbre

TIMBRE: characteristic sound (tone, color, or quality) of a voice or instrument (*pronounced tam-ber*)

Sounds are made by vibrating materials. The vibrating materials determine the quality and "color" of the sound. These may have a pleasant or unpleasant quality. One instrument may make many different sounds; different cultures use different kinds of instruments. Sounds may be organized into categories according to the vibrating material:

AEROPHONE: vibrating air (e.g., flute)

CHORDOPHONE: vibrating strings (e.g., guitar)

MEMBRANOPHONES: vibrating membrane (e.g., bongo drums)

IDIOPHONES: vibrator and resonator are the same (e.g., triangle)

DIFFERENT SOUND SOURCES:

- Vocal: man, woman, child
- Instrumental: woodwind, brass, percussion, strings
- Environmental: sounds found in the environment

BODY PERCUSSION: examples include clapping, snapping, patting, stomping, etc.

Form

FORM: overall structural organization of a musical composition; the way music is organized in a structure, plan or pattern

PHRASE: a series of notes that creates a complete musical thought or idea

- Phrases may repeat or contrast
- Songs may be made up of several phrases
- Phrases may be the same or different length

CADENCE: a sequence of notes or chords that concludes a phrase, section, or piece of music

SECTION: a piece of music may be organized into sections that are the same or different. Examples include:

- Verse/Refrain
- Call and Response
- Theme and Variations
- AB, ABA, AABA, etc.
- Rondo (ABACADA)

Expressive Qualities

EXPRESSIVE QUALITIES: qualities (dynamics, tempo articulation) that when combined with other musical elements help to make a piece of music more interesting

ARTICULATION: the way a single note or musical passage is played or sung for expressive effect

- Music ideas may be made more interesting with various articulation
- Articulation ideas may be represented by symbols
- Melodies may be smooth and connected (legato) or short and detached (staccato)
- Sounds may be emphasized with an accent

DYNAMICS: the perceived loudness or softness of the music

- Sounds may be loud or soft
- Sounds may get louder (crescendo) or softer (decrescendo) to help express an idea
- Loud and soft sounds may be represented by symbols
- Music ideas may be made more interesting with dynamic variation

COMMON DYNAMIC MARKINGS

f = *forte* = loud

mf = *mezzo forte* = moderately loud

p = *piano* = soft

< = *crescendo* = gradually getting louder

> = *decrescendo* = gradually getting softer

THREE COMMON TEMPOS

measured in beats per minute (BPM)

allegro = fast (120-168 BPM)

andante = walking pace (76-108 BPM)

adagio = slow (66-76 BPM)

TEMPO: the speed of the beat

- Beats are steady but may be fast or slow
- The beat may get faster (*accelerando*) or slower (*ritardando*) increasing or decreasing the tempo of the music

How Do I Use Music in the Classroom?

How to Teach a Song

Teach your kids a song! Don't know how? We can help. Teachers often wonder if there's a specific sequence to follow to teach songs to children effectively. They want to know the best strategies for introducing songs, breaking down lyrics and melodies into manageable parts, and incorporating activities to reinforce learning. We cover all this and more in the blog article linked below.

[Click here to read "How to Teach a Song to Children."](#)

Vocal Warm-Ups

Vocal warm-ups can prevent vocal strain and injury while improving vocal quality, range, and confidence. The article below offers various warm-up exercises suitable for the classroom setting, including breathing techniques, and vocalizations.

Vocal warm-ups enhance focus, collaboration, and overall well-being among students. Try integrating vocal warm-ups into daily classroom routines to promote vocal health, skill development, and a positive learning environment. Playing and experimenting with their voices can help young students improve their auditory processing skills. A great benefit for emerging readers!

[Click here to read "Vocal Warm-Ups for the Classroom."](#)

Engage Students With Beat and Rhythm

Rhythm is one of the greatest organizers. It's a great way to capture student attention and nurture focus and flow. The blog article linked below provides several games or activities you can use in your classroom to explore beat and rhythm, and use beat and rhythm to explore the content you're presenting in your classroom.

[Click here to read "Beat and Rhythm Music Games."](#)

Teach a Folk Song

Folk songs are ubiquitous and easy to learn and remember. They can be used to integrate music with learning in many subject areas. The blog linked below provides dozens of strategies for leveraging folk songs for learning in the classroom.

[Click here to read "What Can I Do With a Folk Song?"](#)

Additional Resources

- [Arts Toolbox](#): This ebook includes 16 music activities and video links for the classroom.
- [Arts Playbook](#): This ebook includes music activities that support learning readiness and child development.
- [Music Lesson Plans](#): Find lesson plans integrating music with literacy, science, math, and social studies
- [Music blogs](#): find more music blogs on our website!



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