

LITERACY THROUGH MUSIC

6 LEARNING ABOUT THE WORLD

Over the course of eight articles **Maria Kay** highlights the close relationship between music and literacy in the early years, and suggests simple activities to help you develop children's skills...

Children need to learn about the world and their environment, and music can help them do just that.

It can be used to deliver information: there are songs about the planets, months, weather, transport, animals, feelings and many activities, which can support a child's learning and memory. For example, Thiessen and Saffran (in 'How the melody facilitates the message and vice versa, in infant learning and memory', *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 2009) found that infants learned lyrics more easily when paired with melody and vice versa.

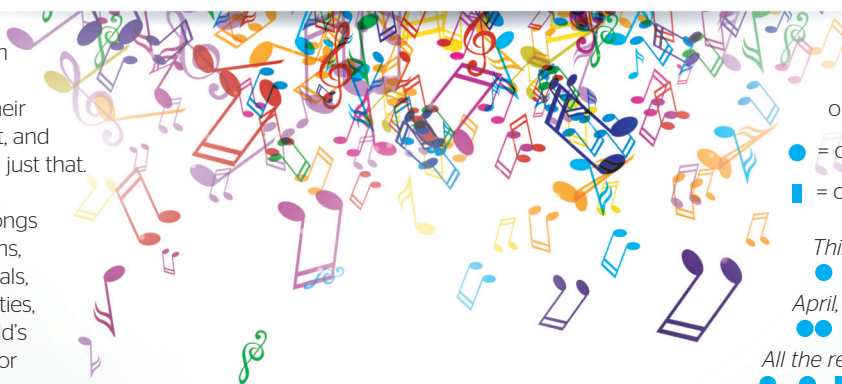
Music can also be inspirational and it can fuel imagination. Although children learn that they cannot fly, they may be able to imagine how it might feel if they could. Children need time to be creative and to use their imaginations. They can do this through movement, story-telling, music and the use of art materials. Combining activities further enriches a child's experience.

Musical activities

Below is a song I have written to help children to learn the days of the week. In addition to helping children to learn the names of the weekdays, it also helps them to learn the correct sequence - the topic investigated in my previous article (available now on Teachnursery.com). To accompany this song I use British Sign Language signs for each day of the week. Movement, in addition to melody, further helps to embed learning and aids memory recall.

Days of the Week

*Monday, Monday, Monday starts the week
Tuesday, Tuesday, let's play hide and seek.
Wednesday, Wednesday, the week is half way done.
Thursday and Friday, time to have some fun.
Saturday starts the weekend, time for us to play.
Hooray for Sunday, I can sleep all day!*



Each shape is positioned below a syllable and represents one clap:

- = clap both hands on thighs.
- = clap against partner's hands.

*Thirty days hath September
April, June and November
All the rest have thirty one*

*But when February is done
(Quicken the rhythm for February)*

*It has twenty-eight days clear
Twenty-nine in each leap year*

Varying the clapping movement helps children to concentrate; the chanting and clapping help to stimulate the brain. A further skill that could be built with this activity is when you clap with your partner: use one hand and clap across diagonally, so that your right hand claps their right hand and left to left. This necessitates 'crossing the midline'. By reaching across the middle of the body, children are practising bilateral coordination - the ability to use both sides of the body, one supporting the other. This skill is required when reading, in order to track words from one side of the page to the other and in writing, to write across the page. Use clapping rhymes to help to further develop bilateral coordination.

As you can see many of the musical activities described in these articles help to develop a range of skills.

The next article will examine how music may help to promote fluency of speech.

The song, like many, has rhyming endings to each line of the lyrics. An awareness of rhyme further helps the development of literacy skills.

Creepy Crawly Caterpillar

This is another song I have written - one to help children learn the process of transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly. The lyrics are set to the tune of 'Incy Wincy Spider'.

*Creepy, crawly caterpillar shed his stripy skin.
He became a chrysalis, a home to live within.
Out came a butterfly, beautiful and bright.
Off he flew into the garden, out into the light.*

I use a caterpillar puppet that turns inside out to become a butterfly to accompany this song.

Thirty Days Hath September

This traditional rhyme has long been used to help children and adults to remember the number of days in each month. I have changed it slightly here so that each line rhymes. It can also be used as a chant and clapping rhyme. The maintaining of the rhythm further helps children to develop skills of syllabification and fluency of speech.

Maria Kay is the author of *Alphabet Book & More* - an introduction to the letters of the alphabet, with a musical twist. Available from Amazon, it includes advice on the teaching of reading skills; offers an aid to syllabification, and shows children how to draw the letter shapes.

