

NUTS about NOTATION!



Sam Dixon offers a playful way to introduce children to musical notes...

find out more
Sam Dixon has taught class music for 16 years and co-runs 'Big Noise Brighton' music theatre workshops. She is the creative force behind songchest.com, which provides new songs, musicals, videos and lesson suggestions for the primary age.

Foundation Stage music usually kicks off with 'making sounds' then moves towards the theory of learning note values, etc., but notation in nursery can be fun too! Of course, the right approach is critical, and it helps to keep things physical. Using the 'Musical family' is a great way to appeal to young children's imaginations and is an absolute winner as an introduction to reading and writing music.

Meet the family

- 1** Create your own set of the pictured cards and hold them tantalisingly away from the children. Explain that you would like to introduce them to some friends of yours: 'the musical family'.
- 2** Start with Grandpa Semibreve and ask them to repeat his name. Describe his shape as round and fat. Explain that Grandpa is the oldest member of the family and moves very slowly: it takes him a long time before he can take each step. In fact, he has to count to four before he can take another step!
- 3** Mime Grandpa holding his walking stick, bent over, and a little shaky. Count aloud from one to four, stepping only on beat one and waiting until the next beat one before taking another step. The children love this character!
- 4** Ask the children to stand up and move around the room as Grandpa, and make sure they're waiting to step only on beat one of each set of four. (It's helpful to keep the card as visible as possible whilst moving around so that it builds an association between the visual and physical experience.)
- 5** When they're sat down, introduce Daddy Dotted Minim, pointing out that he looks different to Grandpa because he's taller and has a tail.

Ask them to say his name out loud. Explain that Daddy is a little younger than Grandpa, and so he moves a little quicker and only counts to three before he takes another step. He's also a keen ballroom dancer (very topical with *Strictly!*) and his favourite dance is the Waltz. He sways from side to side imagining himself dancing. He claps his hands on number one and counts to three before clapping on the next number one on the opposite side. (The children can remain seated for this.)

6 Next, introduce Mummy Minim (always asking the children to say each name out loud) and point out how she is similar to Daddy. Ask the children how she's different. What's missing? It could be Daddy's briefcase that he carries to work? Mummy is a little fitter than Daddy, so she moves a little quicker again. Explain that Mummy's favourite thing is marching to the shops, but she's wearing high heels so she can't step too quickly. She has to count to two before she takes her next step. You guessed it, this one involves a bit of hip swinging and prancing around the room. (Always step on the first beat and wait until you've counted the second before taking another step.) Ask the children to move around the room as Mummy Minim.

7 Finally, Baby Crotchet appears! He's so tiny, he only lasts for one beat. He doesn't step but makes a sound (I count a series of ones, in a babyish voice, which eventually turns into a "Wah!", and then add a clap at the same time. The children love to join in!
It's amazing how such a silly interpretation of note names and values sticks in young children's minds. Later on, when children are familiar with each character and value, the sporty Cousin Quavers can appear, who jog along hand in hand, counting "one and two and three and four and...", as they jog around the room!
To receive a printable pdf file of musical family cards to use with your children, simply email jake@teachnursery.com

