



Fun ideas for the Classroom

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Magic Sound

Children sit in a circle. One holds a large ball or other object to pass (make it interesting to see and hold). The teacher improvises on recorder (or voice, or other pitched instrument). When the "magic sound" is heard (so-mi-so-mi), the ball is passed to the next student.

If the children are not used to this aural discrimination, start vocally using solfège syllables. Eventually transfer to neutral syllables (loo, la, etc.) and then to instruments. Start by playing the pattern in predictable spots, like the ends of phrases. Also, at first play only other pitches when the magic sound is not present. Gradually make the placement less predictable, and challenge the listeners to pass the ball only when they hear the complete pattern. Kids should eventually become leaders. This can be used for any pitch or rhythm patterns, and is great for aural discrimination and building listening skills. It provides a great opportunity for you to model improvisation, and to build understanding of phrase

Home base

This is a variation on the old game of 'musical chairs'. You can use it to teach rhythm or pitch recognition, or to reinforce a variety of music theory concepts. You will need a number of A4 sheets (probably 4 or 5). On each sheet write down a rhythmic pattern (a 4-beat pattern for easy challenge or an 8-beat pattern for a harder challenge). Lay the sheets around the room. It works well with one sheet in each corner of the room and one in the middle. If classroom space is a restriction, consider playing this game outside.

Next, you will need something to provide music, such as a CD player, a percussion instrument or you can sing a well-known folk song. While music is being played, students walk around the room on the beat. When the music stops, students must run to the closest card and stand in that area. The teacher then performs one of the rhythm patterns from the card. Any students who are standing in the proximity of the card are eliminated and must sit down. Play continues until a winner is found.

There are so many possible variations on this game. To make it really challenging, simply make the rhythms very similar except for one or two beats. Instead of rhythm patterns you could use melodic fragments and write them on the cards using stick notation and solfa or write them in stave notation. Alternatively, you could use theoretical symbols—such as different types of notes (crotchet, quaver, minim). Another suggestion would be to use particular chord sequences/progressions or cadences. The point is that this simple game can be easily adapted to suit any age group and any ability. Another way to make this game interesting is to change the process of elimination. Instead of it being hit and miss, you could perform the musical pattern after the music stops and then students need to choose the right card and run to home base.

Freeze

Before beginning this game the teacher must explain the signal to freeze. This signal may be any melodic pattern (such as so-la-so-mi) or any rhythmic pattern (such as ta ti-ti ti-ti ta) that the class may be working on at the time. It's often best to write the pattern on the board or you could introduce a challenge by making students memorise the pattern. Students walk freely around the room while teacher sings or improvises on the recorder. Teacher should disguise the signal to freeze within the performance. On hearing the signal, students stand completely still. Teacher continues to play/sing and students must remain "frozen" until they hear the signal again.



Who has the Penny?

You will need a collection of inexpensive objects which are small enough to be hidden in the palm of the hand. Make a list of these and place the objects in a box. Pass the box around the room and the students are told to quickly choose one object from the box.

The teacher chooses objects randomly from the list and sings, "Who has the yellow marble?" improvising on *so mi-la so mi*. The student who has the object in possession replies by singing, "I have the yellow marble!" also improvising on the *so mi-la so mi* toneset. The student then places the object back into the box. The process is repeated until all objects are located.

Forbidden Rhythm

This game requires little time for setting up and no props. It can be used to fill extra minutes at the end of the class period. This game is a spiced up version of the "echo clapping" activities that are common in the classroom. The teacher announces that there is to be a forbidden rhythm and claps a 4 beat (8 beat) rhythm pattern. To make it easy, the rhythm pattern could be written on the board. To make it more challenging, students could be asked to memorise the rhythm pattern.

The teacher now performs various rhythm patterns, which the class are asked to "echo" or clap back. If the teacher performs the 'forbidden pattern' students should stay still and not echo the pattern. Any student who claps the forbidden rhythm is eliminated. Keep a watch for those who are not clapping any of the rhythms.

Steal the Bacon

To prepare for this game, you will need a set of flashcards. Each card should contain various 4-beat or 8-beat rhythmic or melodic patterns. The class is divided into two teams and each team stands in a single line down the back of the room. The flashcards are spread out on the floor or stuck to the board at the front of the room.

The teacher performs one of the rhythms. The first student in each line must race to the front of the room and be the first to grab the appropriate card. They then take the card to the teacher for verification. If correct that student scores one point for his/her team. Both students return to the end of the line and the next student in line plays for the team.

Another possibility is to draw a percussion instrument on each card or have the pictures drawn by the students. Have a percussion instrument played where it cannot be seen by the students. The first student to grab the appropriate card earns a point for the team.

Rhythm Chart

For 5-7 year olds, make up a simple chart by creating a large grid that is 4 squares across and 4 down. The chart represents 4 rows of 4 beats. Onto this chart you can attach various pictures representing body percussion. For example if the children are to clap 4 beats and stamp 4 beats, there will be 4 pictures of hands on the first row and 4 of feet on the second row. Pictures can be attached using Velcro or Blue-Tac or some other means. They can be easily re-arranged by the teacher or the children to form a great variety of patterns. Since the activity involves reading from left to right and from top to bottom, there are benefits in terms of reading readiness. For a variation, you could use pictures of percussion instruments.



Composer Game

This is a variation on the old game of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Class sits on chairs in circle formation. Decide on a beginning point for the circle and then moving clockwise around the circle, the first four students are assigned the name of a composer (Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Vivaldi). If playing this game with young students, they could wear a sign around their neck with the composer's name on it. The remaining students in the circle are assigned a number from 1 to the last person.

Play always commences with the student in number 1 position. All students perform a simple four-beat body percussion ostinato (such as knees, clap, left click, right click) which is led by the person in number 1 position. On the first beat of the pattern a student says his/her composer or number name and on the second beat of the pattern, they pass the play to another student in the circle by saying that student's name/number. Play continues with this person now repeating their own name on beat 1 of the ostinato and someone else's name on the second beat (the third and fourth beats are beats of silence).

Continue passing play around the circle for as long as possible. You can go out for one of several mistakes (i) missing a beat or not staying consistent with the ostinato (ii) not responding to your name call (iii) responding to someone else's name call (iv) passing play back to the person who passed it to you. A student who goes out must move to the end of the circle and everyone else behind him/her moves up one seat and is thus promoted. The object of the game is for you to move around the circle, finally achieving number 1 position yourself by getting students ahead of you in the line to go out.

Another Rhythm Game

This game is good with Lower Primary age groups and can be used as a preparation to teaching crotchet/quaver rhythms. Select a 4 or 8 beat phrase from a folk song that the children know. The phrase should contain only crotchets and quavers (ta and ti-ti). Choose the appropriate number of students to represent each beat. These students stand up and make a line across the front of the classroom. The class claps the rhythm of the phrase while the teacher moves from child to child. That child or a volunteer from the class should determine whether they hear one or two sounds on each successive beat. If one sound is heard, the child who is representing the beat can hold up one finger (or one hand) or if two sounds are heard, two fingers (or hands). The class can clap the rhythm once again to check answers. If correct, the volunteers can sit down. The exercise can be repeated or the rhythm could be transferred to the board in stick notation.

Balderdash

This game is suitable for Upper Primary and Lower Secondary students. It can be lots of fun with musical terms/ signs or with words associated with a topic you are studying (such as opera, baroque music, etc.) Students form small groups of 3 or 4. Give to each group a list of musical terms. The goal is not to figure out what each term means, but to write a believable/creative definition that might trick their classmates into thinking it was correct. Encourage students to avoid general definitions like "a musical instrument" and to aim for specific definitions like what the instrument looks like, sounds like, who plays it, etc. The teacher can then prepare a multiple choice quiz that combines the correct definition with the best 'fake' ones. You can then go over the quiz at a later stage with the class and have students raise their hands if they picked certain options. Students enjoy seeing who picked "their" definition.

Progressive Games

If you've ever done any folk dancing you will know that a progressive dance is one in which you have to keep changing partners. By constantly changing partners, it makes the experience more sociable and adds a constant element of variety. Have you ever thought how well this idea can adapt to the singing games that you play regularly with your classes?

This is a great idea to add a "new spin" on some of those games you might have played many times with your classes in the past. It works equally well with most age groups but is particularly useful with upper Primary and Secondary classes.

The idea is simple. If you are playing a partner game, such as *Long Legged Sailor*, *Who Stole the Chickens*, *A Sailor Went to Sea* simply ask each person in the group to number off (1 to 2). At the end of one verse or round of the song, the teacher calls out a number. Students with that number have to stand up and then move to find a new partner. Movement can be student directed, that is, they find any new partner they like. It could also be teacher directed, for example, "stand up and move 4 places clockwise." As a further surprise, the teacher can call out "Fruit Salad" which means everyone has to run and find a new partner on the other side of the room.

This idea also works well with singing games that involve 4 or more people (such as *Four White Horses*, *Weevily Wheat*). Simply ask each person in the group to number off. At the end of a verse or round players are asked to advance their current number by one (Number 1 becomes 2, etc). A student who was number 4, now becomes a number 1 and must move on to a new group.