

Children's Literature in the Classroom

- ◆ Music and literacy
- ◆ Singing "FREE": Notes toward an iconography of songs, singers, and singing in children's fiction
- ◆ Literature with characters who are deaf



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Music and literacy

Music adds interest and sparkle to the literacy program. Not only can children read the lyrics of songs, but they can also read about music and musicians. Recently, many books of songs and chants, or books about music or musicians have been published. Some of these books will appeal to younger readers, while others may be more appropriate for students with more background knowledge about music or the type of music highlighted in the book. Others could be appropriate for children at any age depending on interest and previous experience with music. Here are a few of the new books with musical content that will appeal to children and teachers alike, along with teaching suggestions for each title.

BOOKS FOR YOUNGER READERS

Ahlberg, Allan. (1998). Illustrated by Paul Howard.
Mockingbird. Candlewick Press, 24 pages, ISBN
0763604399, \$14.99

In this variation of the nursery song, Ahlberg tells of everyone's concern with the welfare of the baby and how each buys him or does something to make him happy. At last the baby is brought home to a surprise birthday cake. The illustrator sets the book in a turn-of-the-century time period and the details of clothing, toys, and furnishings are a pleasure to observe.

Teaching suggestions

This is a version of an old song that is often entitled, *Hush, little baby*. It can be found in **This is music** (1965) and in Bayless & Ramsey's (1987) **Music: A way of life for the young child**. Bayless and Ramsey label this song *An Alabama folk song*. In **This is music**, the credit line states that the melody and words are from No. 848 B1 in the Archive of Folk Song, Library of Congress. The lyrics in these versions

are not exactly alike and neither of them is exactly the same as those in **Mockingbird**.

- ♦ Children can discuss Howard's illustrations and think about how they might illustrate one of the versions.
- ♦ Children could interview their parents, grandparents, or other relatives to determine which (if any) versions of the song they knew as children and compare those versions to Ahlberg's.

Catalano, Dominic. (1998). Illustrated by the author. **Frog went a-courting**. Boyds Mill Press, 32 pages, ISBN 1563976374, \$14.95

In this version of the old song, the author presents the rhyme as a play in six acts. Frog is a Scottish piper who charms Miss Mouse and her Uncle Rat. After the marriage, the party is in full swing when the cat swoops down and steals the bagpipes. As frog and mouse are leaving for France, Miss Mouse is holding a saxophone. The illustrations have many funny details, such as frog dressed in a kilt playing golf. The musical score is included at the end of the book.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Another version of this song is presented in Langstaff, J. (1955) **Frog went a-courtin'**. Read this version and compare it in terms of language and illustrations to Catalano's version. Discuss the fact that different illustrators have different visions of how a story or rhyme should look and that both are valid.
- ♦ Learning that not everyone shares the same interpretation of a story is an important skill in becoming a reader. Discuss the humor in the illustrations of both versions.

Hoberman, Mary Ann. (1998). Illustrated by Nadine B. Westcott. **Miss Mary Mack**. Little, Brown & Company, 32 pages, ISBN 0316931187, \$14.95

In this version of the old hand-clapping song or chant, the author adds an ending to the story. The elephant jumps the fence, lands in the middle of a picnic and ends up staying with Mary and getting her silver buttons down his nose.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ The front end-paper in Hoberman's book illustrates the clapping motions that can accompany this song. Children can participate in the clapping game while they sing the song.
- ♦ Another version of this song can be found in **World of music-1** (1991). This book presents the song on a chart to be chanted. The clapping patterns recommended in this version are not the same as those in Hoberman's book. Children could try both clapping patterns and decide which they liked better.

McPhail, David. (1999). Illustrated by the author. **Mole music**. Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 32 pages, ISBN 0805028196, \$15.95

Mole hears a musician play a violin on television one night and is so inspired that he sends away for a violin of his own. Of course, it takes Mole a long, long time to learn to play beautiful music; but he practices and practices until he could play well. Mole imagines that his music is heard by many people and that it could change the world. In the illustrations, we see that Mole's music is heard and that it does change people.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Ask a violinist to visit the class and play for the children. Discuss how long it takes to learn to play the violin and how much practice is necessary to maintain high skill levels.
- ♦ Mole thought that music could change the world. Ask children to list as many ways as possible that beautiful music makes the world a better place.

Schwartz, Amy. (1999). Illustrated by the author. **Old MacDonald**. Scholastic, unpagged, ISBN 0590461893, \$15.95

This new version of the old favorite song features a modern farm and a modern farm family. The farmer and his family go through a day's activities waking up, gathering eggs, milking the cow, plowing the corn, feeding the lamb, having a picnic and chasing the ducks, cleaning the horse, feeding the goats and pigs, playing with the dogs, having dinner with the neighbors and finally singing a song. The illustrations include many interesting details to engage the reader as the book is read over and over. The last page has the music and words and is bordered with symbols to help recall the order of the animals in the song.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Sing the song with the class. Enlarge the final page so that everyone can see it and learn to "read" it by following the symbols as the song is sung. Children could take turns using a pointer to lead the singing.
- ♦ This song is presented in other versions, including **Old MacDonald** (Souhami, 1996) and **Old MacDonald had a farm** (Berry, 1997). Discuss the changes in farms and farm life as depicted in the different versions. If there are farms nearby, visit one and record all the things that could be in a version of **Old MacDonald** based on that particular farm.
- ♦ Judi Barrett (1998) has written a transformation of **Old MacDonald** called **Old MacDonald had an apartment house**. Children could be encouraged to write

their own transformations such as *Old MacDonald had a school* or *Old MacDonald had a pet shop*.

Wallner, Alexandra. (1998). Illustrated by the author. **The farmer in the Dell**. Holiday House, 32 pages, ISBN 0823413829, \$15.95

This book is a traditional version of the nursery song but with charming illustrations of the farm of many years ago. There is humor (the American gothic pose on the front cover) and the perspective is often unusual. For example, the wife is seen through the bedroom window and the cat is peering out the kitchen window as the rat runs away with the cheese. The musical score and lyrics are included.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Sing the song in its traditional form, beginning with all the children in a circle and the farmer in the middle. Compare the farm in this book to the farm in Wallner's **Old MacDonald** (cited above).
- ♦ Create a chart such as the one in Wallner's book with symbols for each of the verses.

BOOKS THAT APPEAL TO BOTH OLDER AND YOUNGER READERS

Barnwell, Ysaye M. and Saint James, Synthia. (1998). Illustrated by Synthia Saint James. **No Mirrors in my Nana's house**. (Includes a CD of the song.) Harcourt Brace, Inc., 32 pages, ISBN 0152018255, \$18.00

In this book the lyrics to a song are used as the text of the book and the paintings illustrate these lyrics. In the song, the child says that she never saw the disadvantages of her color or her clothes because she only saw the beauty of everything that was in her Nana's eyes. All of the people in the illustrations have no faces, which could lead to some exploration about the reasons for the illustrator's choice in making them faceless. The accompanying CD contains a reading by the author of the text and the song as sung by an a capella group, Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Listen to the CD and discuss the differences in the author's reading and the song as it is sung by the group. Discuss the decision that the group has made to sing without musical accompaniment and how that changes the musical experience. If possible, find two recordings of the same song, one with musical accompaniment and one without and compare after listening to both.
- ♦ After discussing the faceless characters in the illustrations,

children might also think of other ways the author and illustrator could describe a positive view of self and life. For example, what does it mean when we say we are looking at the world through rose-colored glasses?

England, Linda. (1998). Illustrated by Teresa Flavin. **The old cotton blues**. Margaret K. McElderry Books, ISBN 0689810741, \$16.00

Dexter wants to play the clarinet more than anything, but his mother simply cannot afford to get a clarinet or lessons for him. He learns instead to play the harmonica and he plays with Johnny Cotton. They play the blue-down, deep-down-shaking, slow-laughing feel good music and called it "the old cotton blues."

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Bayless and Ramsey (1987) offer directions for making homemade musical instruments including drums, shakers, rhythm sticks, clappers, rattles, wrist or ankle bells and xylophones. Make some charts with the directions for the instruments so that children can read and follow them. Create some of these instruments, and learn to play a song on them.
- ♦ Play a recorded piece of blues music and discuss the qualities that define the blues as a type of music.

Guthrie, Woody. (1998). Illustrated by Kathy Jakobsen. **This land is your land**. Little, Brown and Company, 32 pages, ISBN 0316392154, \$15.95

The words to the well-known song are illustrated with beautiful scenes from across the country. The book includes a tribute to Woody Guthrie by Pete Seeger and a short (two-page) biography of Guthrie. The music is also included at the end of the book. Younger children certainly enjoy singing the song and older children can sing the song and will appreciate the information about Guthrie as well.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Find several recordings of the song and compare them. Listen to other music written by Woody Guthrie. Guthrie wrote songs about the common experiences of working people.
- ♦ Read Paulsen's **Work song** (1997) and find music that would be appropriate as background for it.
- ♦ As a group, create a diamante about work that is common in the community where the school is located or work that is done by the parents of the children in the class.
- ♦ Compare Guthrie's description of this country with that of *America the Beautiful*.

Isadora, Rachel. (1997). Illustrated by the author. **Young Mozart**. Viking, 32 pages, ISBN 0670871206, \$14.99

Isadora tells the story of Mozart in short anecdotes that young readers will find interesting. Mozart, who could write music before he could write words, composed over six hundred pieces of music before his death at age 35. He was only five when he gave his first public performance. The author says that Mozart did not choose to be a musician; he was born with music in him. The watercolor illustrations capture the happy child and the wonderful settings of the courts and palaces of Europe.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Listen to several pieces of music composed by Mozart. Discuss the author's statement that Mozart was born with music in him.
- ♦ Read stories of other child prodigies and discuss the common characteristics of these people. Ask children to write about their own special gifts or talents.

Jones, Bill T. and Kuklin, Susan. (1998). **Dance**. Illustrated by Susan Kuklin. Hyperion Books for Children, 32 pages, ISBN 078603622, \$14.95

In **Dance**, Bill Jones, a well-known dancer and choreographer, is photographed in various positions as the text describes how the dancer moves and feels. The photographs are dramatic as the dancer is alone on a background of stark white. This book would be appropriate for both younger readers and intermediate grade readers. All ages can benefit from exploring the reasons for dancing and movement and actually trying some of the movements.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Try several of the movements that are illustrated in the book. Invite a dancer to demonstrate some of the movements. Invite a choreographer to explain to the class what a choreographer does in terms of creating movements that illustrate feelings. Try to move in ways that express emotions.
- ♦ If children in the class take dance lessons, they could demonstrate what they are learning.

Karlins, Mark. (1998). **Music over Manhattan**. Illustrated by Jack E. Davis. Doubleday, 32 pages, ISBN 0385322259, \$15.95

Bernie was always coming in second to his cousin Herbert. All he ever heard was "Herbert is so smart. Herbert is so talented." Uncle Louie taught Bernie to play the trumpet;

it took a long time, but Bernie stuck with his practice. At a big family wedding, Bernie had to substitute for the usual trumpet player and he played so well that he made Herbert jealous. The finale was *Moonlight over Manhattan*. Bernie and the other musicians played so well that all of the musicians and the guests floated over Manhattan on the beautiful notes.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Play some recorded music featuring the trumpet (*Moonlight over Manhattan*, if you can find it). Ask a musician to demonstrate how a trumpet is played and how one learns to play it well. Discuss the importance of learning to do something well for yourself, not to please other people.
- ♦ Include the reasons Bernie learned to play the trumpet in the discussion and Bernie's development as a character.
- ♦ Discuss the author's use of flying as a metaphor for the feelings of happiness and success and compare to the characters flying in **Tar Beach** (Ringgold, 1991) and **Abuela** (Dorros, 1991). Encourage the children to write (and notice in the writing of others) metaphors that appeal to them.

Saint-Saens, Camille. (1999). **Carnival of the animals**. Commentary by Barrie C. Turner. Illustrated by Sue Williams. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 45 pages, ISBN 0805061800, \$19.95

Turner explains the origin of the **Carnival of the animals** and the composer's selection of the instruments to represent each of the animals. He also introduces each part of the music with a short explanation. The illustrations by Williams evoke the humor of the animals.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Children could read the introduction and then listen to the pieces on the disk enclosed with the book or they might listen first, write their own descriptions, and then compare theirs to the descriptions in the book.
- ♦ Listen to a recording of *Peter and the Wolf* and compare the introductions of the orchestra to the introduction in Saint-Saens music. Do they both use similar instruments to represent similar animals? List characteristics associated with each of the animals and then ask children to think about which selection seems more appropriate to them.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett. (1977). **Song and dance**. Illustrated by Cheryl Munro Taylor. Simon and Schuster, 32 pages, ISBN 0689801599, \$16.00

In this anthology of poems about song and dance, Hopkins has included some new poets along with many old

favorites. The anthology includes rap, jazz, tap, and square dancing. The illustrations done in collage catch the spirit of the songs and dances.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Select appropriate poems to add more knowledge about the music featured in the books in this bibliography. Some of these poems would be excellent choices for movement activities and for describing songs and music in ways that children could use as models for their own writing about the music of their lives.

BOOKS FOR THE INTERMEDIATE GRADE READER

Fonteyn, Margot. (1998). **Coppelia**. Illustrated by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher. Harcourt Brace, Inc., 48 pages, ISBN 0152004289, \$17.00

In this retelling of the opera, a doll maker creates such a lovely doll that a young man fell in love with her. The young man's fiancée sneaked into the doll maker's house and let the doll maker think that he had brought the doll to life with a magic spell. She caused all kinds of mischief and both she and the doll maker learned their lessons—one learned not to be jealous and the other learned not to expect more than was possible.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ After reading the story, listen to a portion of a recording of this opera. Compare this story to the stories of other Lake operas and ballets. For example, there are several books that tell the story of Swan Lake (**Swan Lake**, Fonteyn, 1989; **Swan Lake**, Isadora, 1991, and **Swan Lake**, Helprin, 1989) and **Aida** (Price, 1990). Discuss the qualities of these stories that are similar to folk tales such as magic, characters that represent good or evil, and a moral to be learned.

Ganeri, Anita. (1998). **The young person's guide to the ballet**. (Includes a CD.) Harcourt Brace, Inc., 64 pages, ISBN 0152011846, \$25.00

This book explains ballet as dance and as story. The author describes the dance steps and the training that is necessary to perform in a ballet. She also provides a synopsis of the stories from some of the more popular ballets, provides brief biographies of some outstanding choreographers, and brief sketches of famous ballet companies. The CD that accompanies the book contains music from *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*. This book will help students appreciate the work and dedication that is required to become a dancer and the stories will add interest when

listening to the music.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Invite ballet dancers (preferably a man and a woman) to demonstrate some of the steps shown in the book, to talk about their training, and to talk about their work as dancers.
- ♦ Read the stories of the ballets that are included on the CD and then listen to the music.
- ♦ Compare this book to **Dance** (Jones, 1998). Discuss how the movements are similar and how are they different in ballet and in modern dance. Compare the training required for each.

Hopkinson, Deborah. (1999). **A band of angels: A story inspired by the Jubilee Singers**. Illustrated by Raul Colon. Atheneum Books, 40 pages, ISBN 0689810628, \$16.00

This book tells the story of the Jubilee Singers who sang in concerts to raise money for their school. These African-American students sang classical pieces and popular songs of the time, but not enough people wanted to hear them to raise the money they needed. Finally, they began to sing the old slave songs and the group became very popular. They sang for President Grant and Queen Victoria. The money they raised was enough to turn their small school into Fisk University.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Listen to several recordings of gospel music and discuss the similarities between gospel and other music such as blues and jazz. If there are local gospel groups, invite one to sing for the class. Research the origins of some of the gospel songs as slave songs.
- ♦ Research Fisk University as it is today.
- ♦ Discuss how the beautiful music of the Jubilee singers changed the world. Would Mole (of **Mole music**, cited above) have been proud of them?

Igus, Toyomi. (1998). **I see the rhythm**. Illustrated by Michele Wood. Children's Book Press, 32 pages, ISBN 0892391510, \$15.95

This book won the Coretta Scott King honor book award for 1999. It is a short history of African-American music for the last 500 years. It includes jazz and swing, of course. It celebrates with bright paintings the contribution of African-American music to the music of America.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Create a time line to represent the last 500 years. Include the major historical events and then add the musical history as it is explained in this book.

- ♦ Examine the illustrations and discuss the feelings evoked by the bright colors and the reason the illustrator selected the colors and styles found in the book.
- ♦ Invite a jazz group and a swing group to perform for the students.
- ♦ Compare the information in this book to that found in **Duke Ellington** (Pinkney, 1998); **The jazz of our street** (Shaik, 1998); and **A band of angels** (Hopkinson, 1998), all listed in this article.
- ♦ Ask children to choose one of the types of music described in the book and research it and then present their information in either oral or written form. Their presentation could include recordings to illustrate their points.

Pinkney, Andrea Davis. (1998). **Duke Ellington: The piano prince and his orchestra.** Illustrated by Brian Pinkney. Hyperion, 32 pages, ISBN 0786 821507, \$15.95

The Pinkneys team up to bring to life the story of Duke Ellington and his music. This biography recounts Ellington’s fascination with the piano after he heard “ragtime” music for the first time and how he worked to learn to play the piano. The story goes on to describe his first musical success and his becoming an incredibly popular and successful musician. The illustrations are the scratchboard style that Brian Pinkney has used before. These drawings with their many lines capture the swirling movements of the music and the dancers.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Listen to several recordings of Duke Ellington’s music. From the book and other research, make a list of the characteristics of Ellington that led to his success.
- ♦ Compare jazz to gospel and blues. Discuss the features that these types of music have in common.
- ♦ Students could prepare a Venn diagram to compare and contrast any two of these musical styles. They could write a persuasive essay explaining which of these musical forms they prefer.

Shaik, Fatima. (1998). **The jazz of our street.** Illustrated by E. B. Lewis. Dial Books, 32 pages, ISBN 0803718853, \$15.99

The narrator describes how musicians gather and begin to play and how the dancers follow the jazz players. The author’s note at the end explains the origins of jazz in New Orleans before the turn of the century. The beautiful paintings are of very modern musicians and children who love the music of their street. This book helps children understand that the music of their own area is important

and that music is important in our daily lives.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Listen to several jazz recordings. Discuss the importance of music to any community.
- ♦ Help the children find information about the music that is important to their ethnic heritage. Discuss when such music is played and how it is important in their families or in their ethnic group.
- ♦ If possible, invite musicians to demonstrate the music that represents the cultural heritage of the children in the class.
- ♦ Create a musical that includes music from all the ethnic groups in the class and share it with other classes.

Younger, Barbara. (1998). **Purple mountain majesties: The story of Katharine Lee Bates and America the beautiful.** Illustrated by Stacey Schuett. Dutton Children’s Books, 40 pages, ISBN 052 5456538, \$15.99

Younger relates how Katharine Lee Bates wrote *America the beautiful*. Katharine kept a journal of her travels across America and wrote various parts of the well-known song lyrics as she saw the different parts of the country. She put the poetry aside when she got home and felt rather disheartened by it. Two summers later, she sent part of it to a magazine and the editor was so excited that he wanted more. Katherine simplified the words and the poetry was sung to the melody of a hymn. When it came time to select a national anthem, many people wanted that anthem to be *America the Beautiful*. Katharine got no money from the song aside from the small payment when it was first published.

Teaching suggestions

- ♦ Sing *America, the beautiful*. Find pictures to illustrate each of the verses.
- ♦ Children can select another poem that describes this country or a part of this country and select music to play with it. Read the poem to the musical accompaniment.
- ♦ Many popular songs are published as poems. Find several such poems, read them and then play the recording of the song or sing the song. Discuss how the music helps present the message or feelings of the poem.
- ♦ Compare *America the beautiful* with *This land is your land*. How are the images similar and how do they differ? Examine the lyrics of each song with special attention to the author’s use of words to evoke imagery. Write a descriptive paragraph that uses words to invite the reader to create pictures in their minds.

Music, dance, and movement help us to know in ways that are sometimes difficult to put into words. The books

listed above are wonderful books for readers with a broad range of reading abilities; and they provide the added dimension of music and rhythm to the reading experience. Learning about music, musicians, dance, and dancers can provide opportunities for all children to find comfortable ways of expressing themselves and new reasons to learn to read.

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