

Are We Having Fun Yet?

How Singing and Musical Fun with Young Children Pays Off in Reading Readiness

MNAFEE Conference April 2023

Richard Erickson & Ron Gustafson
Teddy Bear Band

<https://teddybearband.com/>

Ann C. Kay
Co-Founder & Education Coordinator
The Rock 'n' Read Project

<https://www.rocknreadproject.org/>

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Songs:

*(*optional/extra credit)*

1. Hello Everybody
2. Whenever Baby...
3. Open Shut Them
4. Na Na La La song
5. Twinkle Twinkle Little Star
6. The Hip The Hip The Hippopotamus
7. Miss Mary Mack
 - *This Old Man
 - *Uno Dos Tres Amigos
8. Two Little Blue Jays, Two Little Robins (fingerplays)
9. Baby Bumblebee & Baby Dinosaur (fingerplay/songs)
10. Mary Had a Little Lamb (slightly revised)
11. Hickory Dickory Dock (with Metronome)
12. Wheels On The Bus
13. Teddy Bear TB Turn Around
14. RE: Pitch matching (Na Na La La again)
15. Itsy Bitsy Spider
16. Five Little Ducks (slightly revised)
17. Land & Sea
 - *Five Little Monkeys
 - *Teddy Bear Band Game
18. If You're Happy & You Know It
19. Jump Around! (TBB Song)



What if there was something natural
that could enable every child's brain
for language and literacy *before* they
start kindergarten?

What if babies and children loved it?

What if it was free?

There is...it's ***singing!***



Neuroscientific Research

Effects of singing and music-making on brain development

- Simultaneously stimulates cognitive, sensory, motor, and reward systems
- Enables sound processing and auditory memory
- Improves neural encoding of speech
- Allows babies to acquire language earlier
- Develops beat synchronization (ability to keep a steady beat)

Beat-keeping, music-making, and reading are interconnected in the brain

Keeping a steady beat



Photo: Auditory Neuroscience Lab,
Northwestern U.

Music-making



Photo: Charles Dludlu/Unsplash

Reading



Photo: Hamza Tighza/Unsplash

**Sound processing is the key
to language and literacy.**



**Singing and basic music skills are
primary ways to develop it.**

Underlying **biology** Sound Processing in the Brain

determines language ability



3 yr

predicts early literacy



5 yr

predicts future struggles in school



10-12 yr

White-Schwach et al. (2015) PLoS Biol

Neuroscientist Dr. Nina Kraus, Director
Auditory Neuroscience Laboratory
Northwestern University, Illinois

Sound processing begins before birth

Fetuses begin to
hear at four months!



Photo: Andre Adjahoe/Unsplash

Singing and basic music skills affect reading

...by enabling and developing foundational skills:

- **auditory processing**
- **auditory memory**
- **phonological awareness**
- **beat synchronization**



Photo: Amina Filkins/Pexels

Children who can't keep a steady beat are likely to struggle with reading.

Music-making is a learned behavior

Just like learning to ride a bike or swim, making music takes practice.

Every child can learn to keep the beat and sing in tune, unless there is a disability.



Photo: Agung Pandit Wiguna/Pexels



The Rock 'n' Read Project

A Minnesota 501c3 nonprofit since 2014

Vision

All children reading at grade level through singing

Mission

Using singing to unlock children's potential for reading and learning

Rock Your Baby!

Mama, rock your baby, rock your baby so sweet,
Sing a song and tap along on baby to the beat.
Daddy, bounce your baby, bounce your baby so sweet,
Dance to the music, put the beat in your feet.

Have your child pat the beat, this is how it trains
A vital neuro network that the brain retains.
Children who sing songs develop smarter brains
That know more words and make greater gains.

So, Mama, rock your baby, rock your baby so sweet,
Sing a song and tap along on baby to the beat.
Daddy, bounce your baby, bounce your baby so sweet,
Dance to the music, put the beat in your feet.

© Ann C. Kay



Photo: William Fortunato/Pexels



Sing your day away!

Children love rhythm, rhyme, and repetition

Give directions in rhythm and rhyme:

"It's time, it's time, it's time to get in line."

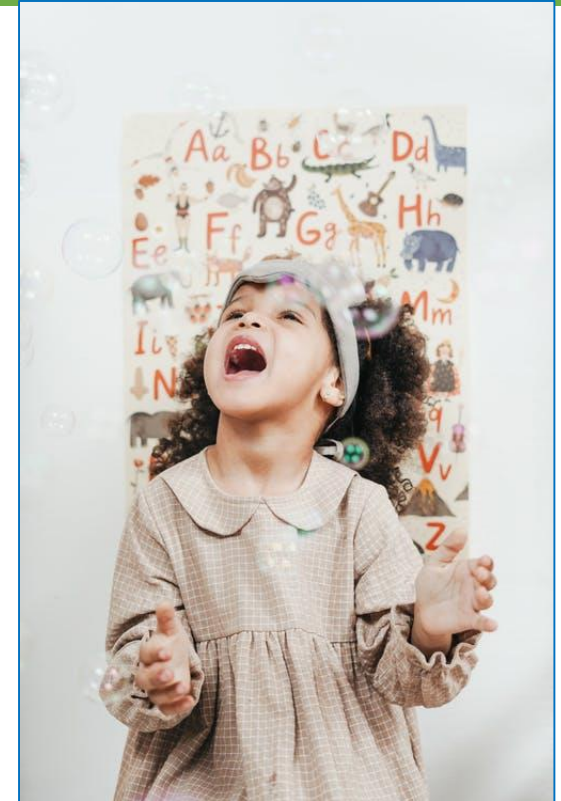
Sing what you see:

"I see Jamal standing by the wall"

Sing greetings, transitions, and goodbyes

Dad and baby

<https://youtu.be/V89k-cnJtRA>



You are your childs' and students' rock star!

Feeling the beat

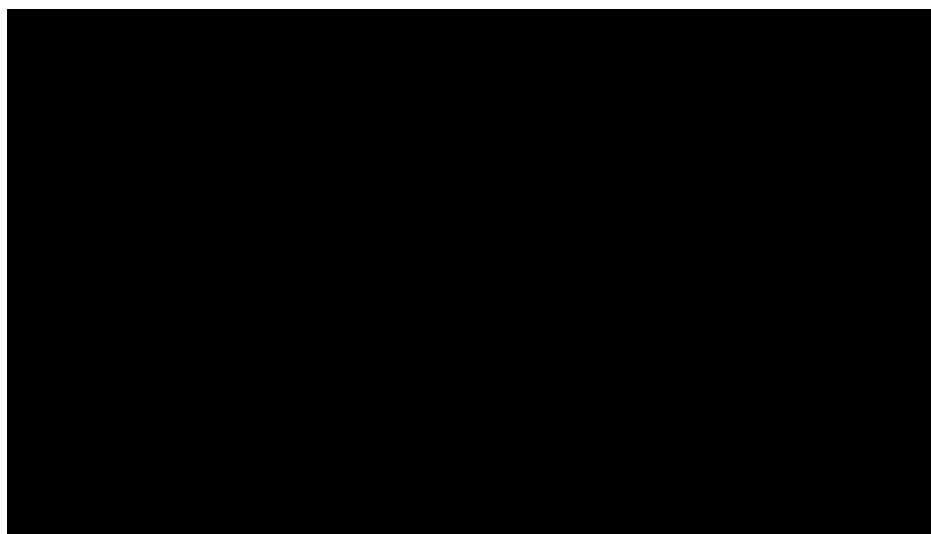


Keeping the beat

10-month-old and 3-year-old



2-year-old with Grandpa



Learning to sing

one child's development

Imitating and filling in words
18 months



Spontaneous singing
24 months



Singing a song in tune
26 months



Tick Tock Games



Steady beat activities

1. Free metronome apps, such as <https://youtu.be/I7mFvUI9HjA>
2. Choose a steady beat speed (such as 120).
3. Have children match beat by patting with two hands on their laps.
4. Choose a faster beat and match. A slower beat.
5. Pat beat with two hands on other body parts, such as shoulders, head, etc.
6. Chant a poem or sing a song while patting underlying beat.
7. While patting, chant a poem or sing a song while alternating between singing out loud and singing inside one's head.

**Keep the beat
or
clap the rhythm (the way the words go)**



Pitch Pipe Games



<https://pitchpipe.app/#/>

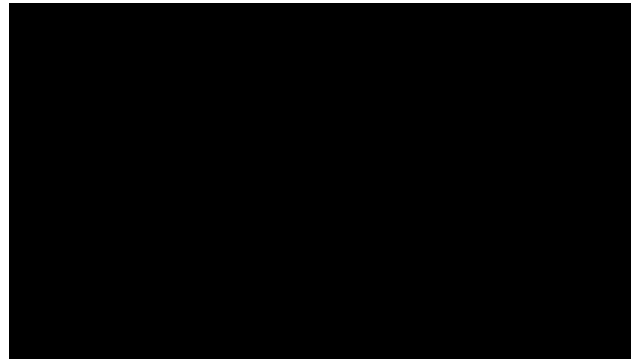
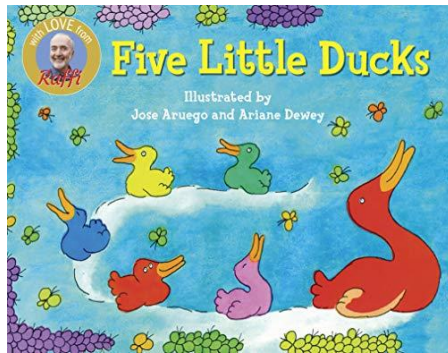
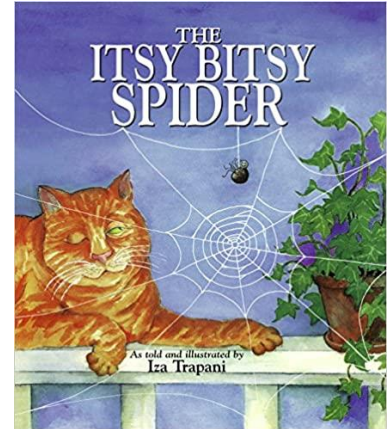
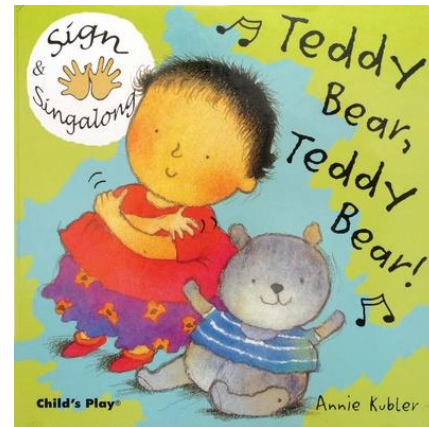
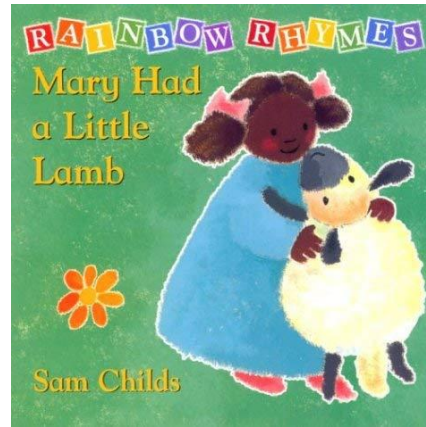
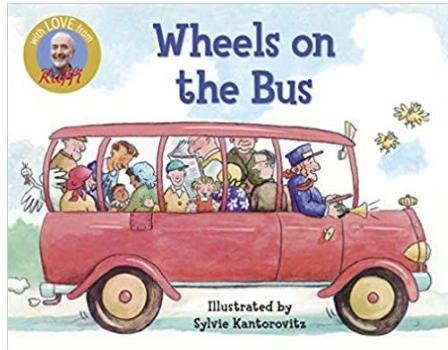
Pitch activities

1. Play a pitch. Children try to match singing “loo” or “oo.”
2. Play another pitch. Children try to match.
3. Play a low pitch (such as low C) and a high pitch (such as A or high C).
4. Ask children whether the second pitch is higher or lower than the first.
5. Have them point up if it is higher, down if lower.
6. Play a pitch and have a child you know can match it do so. Ask the other children to try to match that child’s voice.

Note: Young children’s voices cannot go much below middle C, so most adults have to remind themselves to sing higher than they might usually sing.

Sing/read nursery rhymes and folk songs

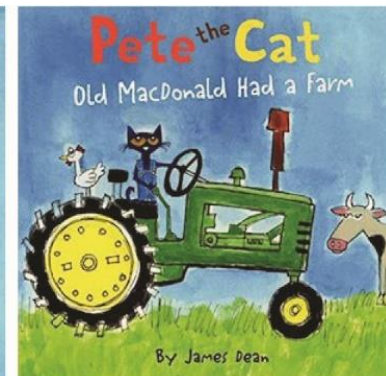
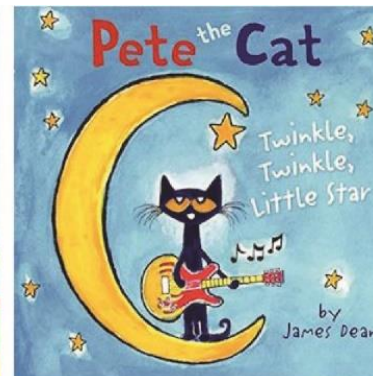
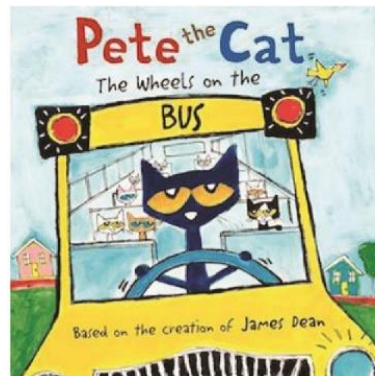
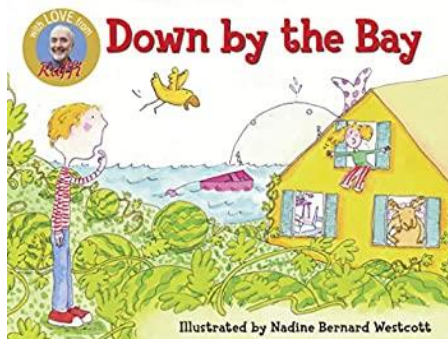
Raffi Songs



Original Pete the Cat books Eric Litwin and James Dean

<https://youtu.be/IUVgSWsyIE8>

Pete the Cat books James Dean



Choral Speaking and Reading

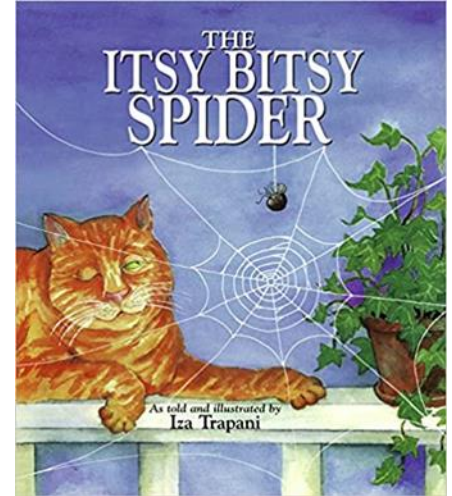
The Itsy Bitsy Spider

The itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout.

Down came the rain and washed the spider out.

Out came the sun and dried up all the rain

And the itsy bitsy spider went up the spout again.



1. Keep beat with both hands on lap while saying poem together. Keep beat with both hands on shoulders, head, elbows, etc.
2. Teacher says one phrase, and children echo (always keeping the beat with both hands)
3. Teacher says one phrase, children say next phrase.
4. Half of group says one phrase, then the other half says the next phrase.
5. Children say one phrase out loud, and next phrase inside their heads.

Inner Hearing



“Fit by 5!”

**Children who are musically fit by age five
will be better readers.**

They can:

- **Keep a steady beat.**
- **Clap the rhythm of the words of a chant or song.**
- **Match a pitch.**
- **Sing in tune.**



Basic Musical Fitness Assessment

Musical fitness is the ability to perform basic music skills

Child's Name _____

Date _____

Keeping the beat

1. Open a metronome app, such as Metronome (Android) or TrueMetronome Lite (Apple).
2. Set metronome to 120 beats per minute.
3. Demonstrate how to pat with two hands on your lap at the same time as the metronome click (beat).
4. Ask child to pat with both hands to the beat.

Did they match the beat?

☐ No ☐ Partly ☐ Yes

Keeping the beat with a song

1. Ask child to join you singing the "ABC Song."
2. Together, pat a slower beat with both hands on lap (about 60 beats per minute) and sing song:
"A B C D E F G, H I J K L M N O P..." (bold letters go with pats.)
3. Ask child to pat and sing song without you. (If they don't know the letters, have them sing the melody using "doo.")

Did they match the beat?

☐ No ☐ Partly ☐ Yes

Clapping the rhythm

1. Ask child to "clap how the letters go" (every sound) of the "ABC Song" while singing the song, one clap for each sound: So, A, B, C, D... will each get one clap, L-M-N-O-P will get faster, shorter claps, and W will get three claps: "dou-ble-u."
2. Demonstrate by slowly singing and clapping "A, B, C, D."
3. Ask child to sing and clap whole song alone.

Did they clap each sound?

☐ No ☐ Partly ☐ Yes

Matching a pitch

1. Use a pitch pipe app, such as Pitch Pipe (Classic), or a piano.
2. Play D (on piano, use the D to the right of middle C).
3. Ask child to match the pitch using "loo."

Did they match the pitch?

☐ No ☐ Yes

Singing in tune

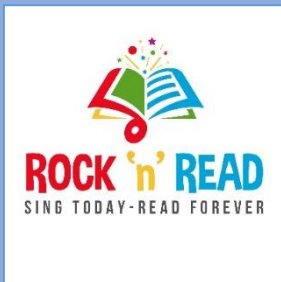
1. Ask child to sing the "ABC Song" again.
(If they don't know the letters, have them use "doo.")

Did their voice follow the ups and
downs of the melody?

☐ No ☐ Partly ☐ Yes

Did they sing the song in tune?

☐ No ☐ Partly ☐ Yes



The Rock 'n' Read Course

for PreK-5th teachers

Learn fun songs and singing games

Learn how to develop auditory processing, auditory memory, phonological awareness, and beat synchronization.

Use singing strategies to practice reading skills with existing curricula.



Sing today... read forever!



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