

First Grade Music Newsletter

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We are having an exciting first half of the year in music! We continue building on the skills introduced in Kindergarten such as steady beat, developing our singing voices, reading simple rhythm patterns, playing simple rhythm patterns on percussion instruments, recognizing higher and lower sounds, and understanding form in songs and musical pieces.

We began the year learning the train song: "Chicka Hanka", an old rock n' roll song, "Walk Right In", and a pretty song called: "Each of Us Is A Flower". The focus was on the form of each song. These songs were fun to sing and we created lively actions to go with the varying sections. We compared AB form with ABA form. We also introduced the idea of long tones verses short tones.

Developing a sense of "steady beat" is very important as a musician, dancer and singer. We listen to music with a strong beat and act out body percussion, (patting knees, tapping shoulders, tapping nose, stomping, etc.) to demonstrate an understanding of the beat. It's great fun to get out the rhythm sticks and create rhythm patterns for songs such as, "A Whale Of A Tale" and "The Paiute Stick Passing Song". Keeping a steady beat is always the underlying focus!

We spend time reading simple notation. Using "ta", "ti-ti" and rest symbols in various rhythmic patterns, the children are learning to read simple notation. This prepares us for ensemble work! We are also using music books and studying the musical page! The children are becoming familiar with the title, the author, the staff, staves, verses, and repeat signs. Some favorites have been: "Over The River and Through The Woods", "Thanksgiving Song" and "Mission Control"

In First grade, we play the bar-instruments and begin ensemble work. Bar instruments are xylophones, metallaphones, bass bars, and glockenspiels. We have enough of these instruments to allow two players per instrument and everyone playing a part! There are parts for hand-percussion instruments as well. Favorite pieces on the instruments have been: "Peas Porridge Hot", where the children say the chant while playing a specific accompaniment, "Jingle Bells and "Hear How the Train Goes".

In every class we warm-up our voices with a wolf puppet named, "Awhooby". We are becoming familiar with our voice as an instrument and how it is different from our speaking voice. We concentrate on developing our "head voice" and often echo-sing phrases to songs with an emphasis on matching pitch. "No More Pie" has been the hit! Around Halloween, we listened to "The Wizard's Brew" and practiced using our voices in new theatrical ways depending on the ingredients we added. The children loved this activity. Lots of actors!

Most recently we have been singing the "Chinese New Year" song and a Valentine song.

Since the beginning of the year, we have been listening to classical pieces. Some examples have been: Haydn's: Symphony #94 in G Major ("Surprise Symphony"), Villa-Lobos's "Little Train of Caipira" and Tchaikovsky's

“Nutcracker March”. I use listening maps to help guide the children while they are listening to a specific piece. Listening maps are visuals, (posters or overhead transparencies), and help to look at sections of music, study the form and perhaps focus on particular instruments. Often we discuss how the choice of instruments together with dynamics can make a piece sound more interesting and exciting. Listening for the ratchet in “Little Train Of Caipira” is always a favorite!

The overall emphasis is to teach an appreciation for music and to have fun! We are looking forward to the rest of the year.

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