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Most lessons include supporting visuals!



Inspirations from Children's Literature

Dear Reader,

Even before my children were born, I would wander into a bookstore, pass by all of the adult books, crossword puzzles, cookbooks, and historical fiction, and saunter right into the colorful corner of children's books. With all of their wonderful covers and clever titles, this section was a treasure trove of information and excitement. During book fair time at my school, my librarian would find me on the floor with books all around me, looking through book after book. And in the end, I was always looking for two things: expression and repeated refrains.

As a singer, expressive speech is just part of who I am, so when I read anything, I read it as if I am singing. So many of my ideas for books have come from reading them out loud to myself. For instance, in the book *Suddenly*, when I read it out loud, I naturally spoke in a crescendo to create suspense. When you look at a new children's book, treat the words of the book like music and read with the same expression with which you would sing or play your instrument. Think about how you could add musical elements such as tempo, rhythm, dynamics, or melody to make your reading even more interesting to the listener. By reframing your thinking, you might find that books you have owned for years have music lessons just waiting to be explored.

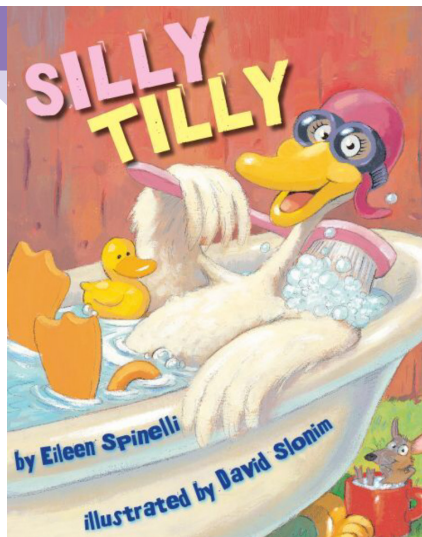
Because repetition, rhyme, and rhythm are such an important part of children's literacy and learning, there are many books that have a wonderful repeated refrain. When you find the right one, it feels as if the author wrote it for the music room. Many of these books will have slight variations, but when reading them, just keep the words the same each time. (The kids will rarely notice and if they do, a simple explanation is usually enough for them to move on.) I do this in the lesson for *Sing Sophie*—just keep the first refrain throughout and the other changes are so slight that the kids don't even realize it.

In other cases, you may be able to add your own refrain. Children's books usually have a predictable pattern so it is clear where the story is going. If this is the case, a simple refrain can be created to complement the story. *Red: A Crayon's Story* is a perfect example of this. The story has a clear pattern that includes two different moods, so I created a melody for each of the two moods. With a little creativity, you will find endless possibilities for so many books already in your library.

Another incredible way to bring books into your music classroom is by pairing them with orchestral pieces. I learned this strategy from an amazing veteran teacher, Lynn Schroeder, who developed lessons to prepare our intermediate students for a field trip to the orchestra where the students were going to hear Mozart's *Variations on Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*. Lynn read *Piggies* by Don and Audrey Wood as the music played and I was mesmerized. The piece flowed with what she read and the emotion of the music matched perfectly with the book. She had so many other wonderful books that she paired with orchestral pieces, but this was the first I heard, and it definitely stuck as my favorite. (Lynn has retired, but graciously allowed me to include the lesson in this book.) This is such a wonderful way to allow students to be exposed to amazing pieces of classical music. Pick your favorite orchestral piece—or just a movement from a larger piece. As you listen, what do you imagine is happening? Perhaps there is a children's book out there that goes along with it.

I hope the lessons in this book not only give you lessons to teach tomorrow, but also inspire you to sit on the floor of your local bookstore, searching for books that will enhance and enrich the future lessons in your music classroom.

Katie Grace Miller



Silly Tilly

Objectives

Students will identify and perform a solo.
Students will sing on pitch with proper posture.

Materials

Book: *Silly Tilly*, written by Eileen Spinelli, illustrated by David Slonim

Supplies: Microphone (real or pretend)

Visuals: Silly Tilly Visuals

Word Wall Cards: Melody, Solo

I got this book for \$2.00 at a book fair one year and it has gotten so much use. Kids love it so much because it is so silly. We giggle the whole way through.

Lesson

1. Begin with a few vocal solfège echo patterns to warm up the kiddos' minds and bodies. The focus for this book is *mi-re-do*, so be sure to include that sequence a few times. (For younger students, you can focus on the *so-mi* interval at the beginning of the refrain or even just the concept of high and low.)



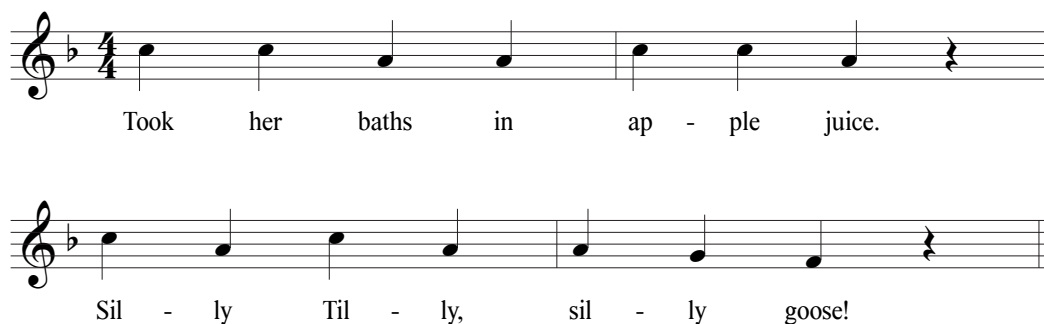
BONANZA BONUS

If I'm doing this lesson with kindergarten, I only point out the *so-mi* pattern at the beginning. With first grade, we review the *so-mi* pattern and discover that our notes get lower at the end. I don't mention the solfège syllables yet. With my second graders, we focus on the whole melody and find the *mi-re-do* sequence on the staff.

2. Introduce the word **melody**.



3. Display the Silly Tilly Visuals and ask the class to describe the melodic direction. Depending on the kids' experience, you can ask them to describe the melodic direction or dive into identifying the solfège syllables.
4. Depending on how much time you have, read the book, singing the refrain yourself each time. The students will join in before long. If time is limited, teach the refrain and sing it as a class until all the students are singing confidently.
5. Introduce the word **solo**.
6. Explain that Silly Tilly does lots of silly things in the book and that after each silly thing she does, one lucky friend will get to sing our song as a solo. Silly Tilly does *a lot* of silly things so everyone will get a turn.
7. As you read the book, sing each silly thing on *so-mi*. Do not skip this step as the students need the pitch reference in order to sing their solo successfully. Try the first example as a whole group:



8. Give the microphone to one student to sing the first solo. Choose someone you know will sing confidently and accurately so the other kiddos have a great model. (If you don't have a real microphone, don't worry. The kids' imaginations will turn a mallet or even a pencil into a microphone for this activity.)
9. As you read the next phrase, the soloist will pass the microphone to someone else. I usually try to start at one side so it gradually gets to the other side and I can remember better who has had a turn and who hasn't. Remind students that if they have already had a turn and someone hands them the microphone, they should pass it to the next student. This gentle reminder should eliminate whining.



BONANZA BONUS

Silly Tilly does something silly on almost every page, sometimes even two or three silly things. There is a middle section where the other animals get involved, so decide ahead of time if there will be solos for those phrases. You may even want to mark your book to remind yourself where each solo will go. With smaller classes, you might finish solos and then have some leftover silly things. If this happens, I take advantage and ask specific students to create musical groups (duet, trio, quartet) with their peers and sing the refrain together.

Next Time

Students can create other silly things for Tilly to do, either in small groups or as a whole class, and add a melody to each one using these parameters:

- The melody can go from low to high
- The melody can go from high to low
- The melody can stay on one note

If time allows, you could even add Orff instruments to the process, again using the melodic direction parameters and allowing them to create without worrying about what pitch they start on.

Assessment Ideas

I use this lesson as a singing assessment at the beginning of second grade. Since we do it during book time, everyone is facing me and watching the story. When the microphone is passed, the children sing without self-consciousness because no one is staring at them.

Distance Learning

This entire activity can be done using Star Soloists. Use the extension idea to ask your kiddos to come up with their own silly things for Tilly to do and record themselves singing their idea. Have a friend who doesn't want to perform for the class? Just have them hold their paper in front of their camera and perform it with them as a duet. Some of my kids are fine singing for me as long as their faces can't be seen.

