

How To Sing Well

LESSON/ACTIVITY PLAN

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

This Curriculum Guide is designed to prepare, reinforce, and extend learning concepts and ideas from the MPR Class Notes video *How To Sing Well*. The information and activities in this Guide are intended to make music come alive and align with Minnesota Standards in Music Education. We hope you will personalize, modify, or adjust content to meet the needs of your unique classroom.

How To Sing Well teaches five basic concepts:

1. A lot of music that is written for the voice contains four voice parts: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass.
2. Singers must have good posture to make good sound.
3. Good breathing is important for good sound.
4. Singers must warm up their bodies and voices to sing well.
5. Singers need to listen to themselves and others in order to make music together.

(Cite standard/benchmark 4.1.2.3.2. & 4.3.1.3.1)

PREPARING TO WATCH THE VIDEO

Just as literacy teachers use pre-reading strategies, music teachers can use pre-listening/pre-watching strategies. This helps students create a mental framework to organize new ideas, relate new content to prior knowledge, and make connections. What you bring to a listening experience will affect what you hear and take away from that experience.

PRE-LISTENING STRATEGIES

1. Ask questions. Here are a few examples of questions for pre-listening. Students can “think out loud” or journal in response.
 - a. What makes good singing?
 - b. What are some things singers must do with their bodies to sing well?
 - c. Do you think good singers are born with their singing skill, or do they need to practice? Is singing easy for you? What kinds of things do you do to practice getting better?



- d. Name some singers you like. (They don't need to be famous- it could be your mom or cousin or friend.) What do you like about their voice?
2. Preview vocabulary. Here's a list of music vocabulary contained in the video.
 - a. Soprano
 - b. Alto
 - c. Tenor
 - d. Bass
 - e. Ensemble
3. Listen to and watch a variety of singers. Ask students to watch and comment on differences in sound, body movement, or other observations. Here are some suggested examples:
 - a. Soprano Kathleen Battle sings "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlzTNBSeYmo>
 - b. Alto-need good suggestion here
 - c. Tenor Ian Bostridge sings "Erlkoenig."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmx4MN3xZpM>
 - d. Bass Paul Robeson sings "Ol' Man River."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eh9WayN7R-s>
 - e. These examples include various combinations of opera singers, folk singers, hip hop artists, and rock musicians singing together.
Renee Fleming and friends:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6b-3xP842Y>
Alicia Keys and friends:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nabLUSXO8vE> or
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmip4thnJgU>.
4. Do some singing! Ask students what they must do with their bodies to make good sound.

REINFORCE IDEAS AND CONCEPTS FROM THE VIDEO THROUGH ACTIVE LEARNING

The five core concepts from the video are listed below again. This time, there are suggestions and ideas for experiential learning activities so students can learn by doing.

A lot of music that is written for the voice contains four voice parts: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass.



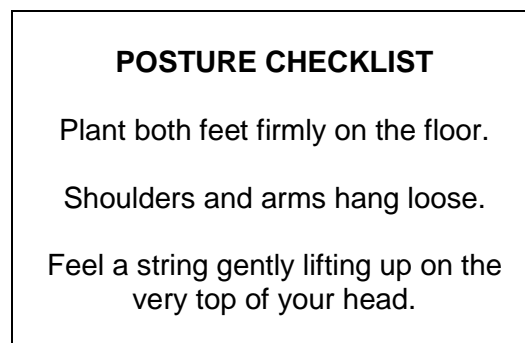
1. Create four index cards with labels: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass.



Using YouTube, Spotify, or your CD collection, find a handful of examples of each voice type. Play a version of *Name That Tune* that could instead be called *Name That Voice Type*. Select a contestant to listen to an example and hold up the card that representing the voice type she hears. It might be challenging to get correct answers right away, but many children will want to take turns as the “contestant” and the repetition will help students with both accurate identification and vocabulary development.

Singers must have good posture to make good sound.

1. Select a favorite classroom song and sing it in “slouch” or “sloppy position”. Students will have fun contorting their bodies into ridiculous bad posture positions. After singing sloppy, ask them to show you good position (modelling good position yourself) and repeat the song. Ask if they hear and feel the difference? Is it easier to sing? Do you sound better?
2. Create a “Posture Checklist” poster and hang it in a visible place your classroom. Choose simple language with imagery. It might look like this:



Or find or create a posture—your students might even enjoy posing for a “do” and “don’t” posture pose.



INCORRECT ALIGNMENT

CORRECT ALIGNMENT

3. Make a mental note to notice and compliment a student's posture each time you sing in class.

Good breathing is important for good sound.

1. Buy a bag of small balloons and give one to each student. Ask students to hold the balloon up to their mouth with one hand while placing their other hand on their abdomen. Instruct them to try filling the balloon first by breathing with their chest, then again by filling their "stomach" or diaphragm with air. You might need to practice a few times until they can successfully feel the difference.

Singers must warm up their bodies and voices to sing well.

1. Together with your students, do the exercises mentioned in the video: lip trills and sirens. Incorporate these into your daily classroom routine.

Singers need to listen to themselves and others in order to make music together.

1. Standing in a circle, go around and assign each student a designation: high, middle, and low. Just like "numbering off." Do not sing or define the pitch for them. Ask them to simply hear it in their head. On the count of three, ask them to sing and hold their pitch out loud. As they hold their pitch, ask them to hear another sound from the circle, and when you say "Switch!", they should move to the

new pitch they were hearing. Then, “Switch back!” If you are doing this with good listening, the switch back will sound even better than the first time. None of this will sound particularly tonal, so be prepared to celebrate the dissonance. This activity is most successful with older elementary or middle school students, or students who have a lot of experience successfully matching pitch.

EXTEND LEARNING WITH PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Here are some singers from around the world, singing a wide variety of musical styles. What do they have in common with the singers you saw in the video? What is different? Compare and contrast through discussion, or start a listening journal and ask students to respond to new kinds of music through writing.

Here’s the Finnish group Loituma singing “Eva’s Polka”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4om1rQKPijl>

This is an example of Tuvan throat singing. See if you can tell which sounds come from the singer’s voice and which come from an instrument. Notice that at certain times, two sounds come from the singer’s throat at once.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DY1pcEtHl_w

Here are the Tenores di Bitti, from Sardinia:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsB9P5ziaCM>

Listen to this guy yodel!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQhqikWnQCU>

Some beautiful harmony from this South African group:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RidvzcBB3-l>

And some Indian vocal percussion:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3z5nJ9XCIO4>

And a few choirs with of younger singers:

The Capital Children’s Choir:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7a2u9v0V0c>

The Vienna Boys Choir:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SC1GfEXjaBUr>

Or the Chicago Children’s Choir:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duexPeKM-Ks>

2. If your students haven’t done a lot of part singing, start with partner songs. “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot/When the Saints Go Marching In” is a good one. Singing “Swing Low” requires really good breath support for holding long notes. Those singing “When the Saints” should be able to keep a good sense of pulse so the songs fit together rhythmically.



3. Another good way to ease into harmony and part singing is through canons. Use body solfege to teach the scale. Once students feel comfortable doing this in unison, start one group on “do”, bringing a second group in when the first group hits “mi”. Once two-part canons are mastered, try three and even four.
4. Help students create their own assessment chart. They will create a checklist of all the things needed for good singing:

SINGING SKILL	MASTERED	DEVELOPING	CHALLENGING
Good posture	X		
Clear diction			X
Listening		X	
Singing one's part on pitch		X	

Students may record a short video singing a favorite song and play it back, using the chart as a tool for self-assessment. This will help them develop habits of self-assessment that are critical for building strong musicianship skills.