

## Using Traditional Songs

By Sue Clarke

On the LearnEnglish Kids website you can find many traditional songs for use in the primary classroom. Children love songs, particularly the traditional variety which are easy to learn, fun to repeat and provide a way in to the target culture. The traditional songs on the LearnEnglish

website range from very simple short songs such as 'Twinkle, twinkle little star' to longer songs which tell a story. On this page you will find some ideas for using and exploiting the traditional songs available on the website. Go to <http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-traditional.htm>



### Why use songs in the primary classroom?

Traditional songs are repetitive and have a strong rhythm. They are easily learnt by primary children and quickly become favourites because of their familiarity. They are fun and motivating for children. They allow language to be reinforced in a natural context, both with structures and vocabulary. All songs build confidence in young learners and even shy children will enjoy singing or acting out a song as part of a group or whole class. This also develops a sense of class identity. Children are often proud of what they have learnt and will like having the opportunity to 'show off' what they have learnt to friends or family.

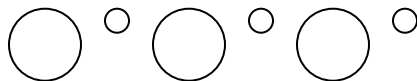
Many songs can help develop memory and concentration, as well as physical co-ordination for example when doing the actions for a song. For the teacher, songs can be a wonderful starting point for a topic and can fit in well with topics, skills, and cross-curricular work

### Developing pronunciation

Traditional songs are particularly useful for developing pronunciation and acclimatising young learners to the sounds of the language. At primary level, vocabulary teaching tends to concentrate on single word items and songs allow learners to learn about how sounds connect and run together. For example, children can become aware of using contractions, weak forms. Traditional songs allow them to learn 'chunks' or meaningful phrases of language rather than single words.

Songs are also important for developing awareness of stress patterns and rhythm. You could concentrate on a particular sound and ask children to count how many times they hear it in a song, or you could represent patterns on the board with circles and ask children to clap them.

e.g.



Incy Wincy Spider

(example from *The Primary English Teacher's Guide* (2002) by Jean Brewster and Gail Ellis with Denis Girard, Penguin)

### Introducing the songs

It is a good idea to warm up for a song by providing some input. You could do this by using visuals of the main vocabulary items, or using realia. For Old MacDonal for example you can practise animal vocabulary with flashcards or small toy animals. For the Goldilocks song you could provide some household items, e.g. 3 bowls and cutlery.

When you introduce the song allow the students to watch and listen to the song a couple of times to become familiar with the tune. Explain the meaning of unfamiliar words to the children using the visuals in the flash animations. Ask children to point to the correct visuals or items of realia as they listen. Children usually start to sing along naturally without much prompting from the teacher. You can print off the lyrics for most songs and hand them out in class. Children can practise at home!



<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/>

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish.htm>

### Exploiting the songs

Once children are familiar with the tune and the words, there are many ways in which we can exploit traditional songs. One of the simplest is performing actions to accompany the song. A very good example of this is provided in the song 'If you're happy and you know it', where the children can join in with the actions in the flash animations. The last verse asks them to repeat all the actions at a much quicker pace – providing lots of fun and laughter! Go to <http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-happy.htm>



You can invent actions for songs. For example in the 'Goldilocks' song you can show size for 'big', 'small' and 'tiny' by stretching your arms out wide. Make a roof over your head with your hand when you sing 'house'. You can ask students to help you invent actions for songs!



This is the way we brush our teeth  
On a warm and sunny morning

Other songs are good for reinforcing structures and grammar. For example the song 'This is the way we brush our teeth' is excellent for practising present tense and provides ample opportunity for acting out with gestures for each part of the daily routine. Go to <http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-way.htm>

You could extend the vocabulary by making other verses to practise other actions in a daily routine, depending on the items you are teaching.

Another excellent example of providing alternative versions of a song is given in the Britlit materials for Old MacDonald, where words are changed to 'Old MacDonald had a Zoo'. You can encourage your students to make up extra verses using the vocabulary they know. You will find Britlit materials on the teaching English website, with lots of ideas for using traditional songs and stories with primary-aged children:

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/resources/britlit/primary-learners>

Some songs provide opportunities for drama and acting out narratives, for example 'When Goldilocks went to the house of the bears'. You can download masks from the website to use for acting out both the song and the story. For more activities, games and suggestions of using the goldilocks song and story go to <http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-topics-goldilocks.htm> For more work on narratives you could ask children to re-order pictures, phrases or sentences from the song. For an example see the Incy Wincy Spider worksheet at <http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-incy-activity.pdf>

### Arts and Crafts

Many of the songs also lend themselves to creative arts and crafts activities. For an example of making a mobile please see the separate tips for Incy Wincy Spider:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-parents-tips-incy-wincy.pdf>

For Old MacDonald you could make a classroom wall display of farmyard animals. You could ask children to draw the separate stages of the daily routine practised in 'This is the Way' and label them for a class display or make individual posters showing their own daily routines. For traditional narrative songs you could ask children to make storyboards or mini-books of the stories.



Down came the rain  
and washed poor Incy out.

### Cross-curricular links

You can use some traditional songs to develop strands of your curriculum. If you wish to concentrate on numbers and maths for example, you may wish to use the song 'Ten Little Aeroplanes' which provides opportunities for counting and reinforces spelling of the numbers in English. <http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-aeroplanes.htm>. If you are working on science and 'The Sky' you could use the song 'Twinkle, twinkle little star'. If you want to work on the area of geography and weather you could use the 'Incy Wincy Spider' song. For consolidation of 'Time' use the song 'Hickory Dickory Dock'. For a wealth of ideas on cross-curricular themes using the song 'Old MacDonald' go to

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/download/britlit/oldmac/oldmac.shtml>

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/>

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish.htm>