

Using Songs

Sue Clarke

On the British Council's site for young learners (LearnEnglish Kids) you can find a wide range of songs to use with your students. These vary in level and difficulty, and can be used with specific teaching points in mind or just for fun to motivate children. They are divided into three categories: 'easy' songs, 'not so easy' songs (both categories for learners aged approximately 8-12) and songs for 'little Kids' (for children aged 7 and under).

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs.htm>

All the songs, lyrics and accompanying activities have been written by young learner specialists and are aimed specifically at children learning English as a second or foreign language. The content of LearnEnglish Kids is organised into topics, and you will usually find a new song with each new topic so keep checking the website regularly.

The songs are animated Flash movies. You do not need to download any special software to view or listen to the songs. Many of the songs have online or printable related activities. On this page you will find tips for using and exploiting the songs in the classroom.

1. For reinforcing grammar points

Some songs lend themselves naturally to teaching or reinforcing grammar points. They may be integrated into lessons with a particular grammar focus and provide much-needed variety, while contributing to the overall aim of a lesson. Particularly at lower levels when children are still learning, basic key grammar patterns songs can play a role as input.

On LearnEnglish Kids there are several songs which can be used in this way. For example the song 'Quiet, please!' is useful to practise the structure 'can I have...?' and to practise other phrases typically used in the classroom. You can listen to the song on the website, or print the lyrics and sing it in the classroom. There is an online game that learners can play related to the song which will help them practise the lexical set of classroom objects.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-quiet-please.htm>

The song 'Over the Mountains' provides practice of the present continuous in the context of travelling. The chorus refrains e.g. 'I'm driving in a car' are repeated several times and children can produce their own sentences afterwards using the activity worksheet.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-transport.htm>

2. Teaching vocabulary of a particular lexical group

Research into child language acquisition has shown that lexical items may need to be repeated many times before they are internalised by the child. Songs provide an excellent means of repeating and reinforcing vocabulary and are suitable for children of all abilities. For example, a song like 'Pizza and Chips' follows a very simple repetitive format and teaches days of the week. This song could be used with very young learners for reinforcing days of the week and as a basis for further work.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-pizza-and-chips.htm>





Songs are easy to fit in with a topic-based or thematic approach. The topic of animals forms part of most young learner syllabi and there are several songs which could be used for this topic. 'Incy Wincy Spider' is a traditional song for young children, as is 'Old Macdonald'. These songs have been given a new lease of life by excellent flash animations and there are lots of materials that you can use related to the songs – younger children can make their own spider mobile:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-incy-wincy.htm>

You'll find a lot of other materials related to Old MacDonald on the teaching English website too.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-old-macdonald.htm>
<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/download/britlit/oldmac/oldmac.shtml>

For teaching parts of the body there is the song 'The Scary Skeleton' which also has a wonderful flash movie and a follow-up vocabulary game. Many of the other songs on the website also have links to interactive vocabulary games.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-skeleton.htm>

3. Developing Listening skills

Longer songs with a wider variety of structures and vocabulary are more suitable for the development of listening skills generally. Some of the songs on the website which are longer and more difficult are useful to develop general listening skills. For example, the song 'Lisa the Lemur' is a story based on the topic of the rainforest. Although quite long, the tune is folksy and catchy and you'll find an activity to download and print, and an online quiz about lemurs. The song would fit in nicely with more general curricular work about the environment and endangered species.



<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-lisa-lemur.htm>



Some songs are linked with stories which your students may be already familiar with. For example the story of Goldilocks and the three bears is a universal story. The song 'When Goldilocks Went to the House of the Bears' is a flash-animated, catchy little song and can be used in conjunction with the flash animated story. You can find this here: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-stories-fairy-tales.htm>

4. Singing

Many of the songs on the Learn English site are suitable for singing in class or for an individual child to sing along to. Community singing in class brings the benefit of total participation from all students, especially if accompanied by actions or mimes. The total physical response (TPR) approach is particularly suited to younger learners. Children really enjoy singing along and it can really improve motivation. Singing can also improve the pronunciation and intonation patterns of the students, especially younger children, through increased awareness of stress patterns, weak forms etc. Some simple songs are very repetitive and good for singing along. For very young learners the 'Alphabet Song' is a good starting point for singing and reinforcing the alphabet.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-alphabet.htm>

Another good song for singing along to is 'Time for another year' which



teaches the months of the year and is excellent for pronunciation work on the months. It is a short snappy song in which all the lyrics are repeated along with the flash movie and very easy to sing along to.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-months.htm>

'People Work' is also a catchy song for teaching jobs vocabulary and has a fun element in that the names of the people rhyme with their jobs.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-jobs.htm>

5. As a stimulus for reading and writing

Many of the songs on the website have a topic or theme and it is therefore easy to extend listening skills into other areas. Some songs link into activity worksheets or quizzes which provide practice in reading skills in the same lexical area. For example the song 'Dinosaur 1-10' links into many dinosaur activities, 'Everything beneath the sea' links to a variety of activities on sea animals and 'Old Scruffy Teddy', a more difficult song, links to a quiz on the history of teddies.



<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-dinosaurs.htm>

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-sea-animals.htm>

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-teddy.htm>

Songs can be a stimulus for writing and creative tasks too, such as changing the words or adding verses.

Exploiting songs

In the classroom you may wish to explore further ways of exploiting these songs and keeping students listening. Here are a few further suggestions, but remember that songs are for motivation and enjoyment.

Before they listen

- Children could predict or guess words from a song
(For example, predict the animals in 'We're Going to the Zoo'
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-zoo.htm>)
- Students could try to guess missing words in a gapped song
- Children could try to put the jumbled lines of a song in order
- Children could try to correct 'misheard' words

During listening

- Children can tick pictures of what is included in the song
(see the worksheet to accompany 'Over the Mountains' for an example)
- Students could be asked to order or sequence pictures or words as they listen
- Children could complete the gaps
- Children could correct misheard words
- Students could sort out jumbled lyrics
- The teacher could give true/false questions
- Students could be asked to match half-lines

After listening

- Children could focus on rhyming words
- The teacher could ask the students to find synonyms in the song
- Children could act out a song or do a role-play of it
(For example with the song 'Pizza and Chips')
- Best of all they can listen again and sing!!