Tuneful Chatter Resource: Singing and Listening

Age Group: 3 – 5 years

Early years activities for singing and listening.

By Sarah Carroll and the darts team

Warm ups

Hello Song

Using the same hello song every week helps develop confidence and familiarity in your sessions. This hello song has a steady tempo so encourage children to sing along, tap along or change the lyrics to match your theme e.g. roar like a lion hello.

Wave your hands hello
Wave your hands hello
Wave your hands hello

Wave your hands hello
Clap your hands hello...
Say / whisper /wobble / sign / think / sing hello...

You can listen to the song here.

Model the song and encourage children to join in with the actions and singing. Use props like scarves or bubbles to introduce sensory elements in your session.
Encourage the children to come up with ideas for how they say hello (e.g. be a penguin, tap your head) or use an idea someone has demonstrated in a previous verse e.g. wriggle your bottom hello.

Top tip: Model call and response with a child singing the instruction and the group singing back. Encourage the caller to sing by first singing with them and then supporting them to sing alone.

Who's got a...?

To the tune of Frères Jacques ask questions based on your theme, emotions, props or clothing. This may help introduce an activity or theme. The leader will sing the question and the group sings back if it applies to them. Using this regularly helps build confidence in solo singing and develops social skills like listening and turn taking.

Who's got a pink scarf?
I've got a pink scarf

Who's got a red toy?
I've got a red toy

Who's got an apple?
I've got an apple

Who's got a drum?
I've got a drum

Model the song and encourage children to respond to questions by holding up their object and singing back to you. If children are reluctant to sing, they could put their hand up, vocalise or do the Makaton signs. Confirm their response by singing, "Maisie's got blue socks."

Top tip: Find out about the children and build relationships by asking questions about what they like e.g. who likes sunshine? Or who has a sister / pet dog?
Try call and response with a child asking the questions and the group singing back. You may need to support the child to come up with a question first and sing it with them.

You can listen to the song here.

Main activities

Listening Bag

To the tune of 'This Old Man', pass the listening bag to the beat of the song. Inside your bag put animals, phonics sounds, pictures from your story/theme or different sound makers. The child retrieves an object from the bag as you sing 'Put your hand in and see what you have found' and says

what it is. Then we repeat the song using the sound they have found (e.g. the phonics card 'ch' or a dog picture verse would have lyrics 'ch, ch, ch' or 'woof, woof, woof').

Listening bag
What's inside?
Something's in there trying to hide
Put your hand in
See what you have found
A phonics card / dog / grass
Let's make the sound.

You can listen to the song here. Song credit: Sue Nichols.

Pass the bag round to the pulse encouraging the children to sing along. For non-verbal children they could show you an action for the sound they find e.g. drum sign or bunny ears.

Pause after 'See what you have found' to allow the child to say or sing what they have found. Sing the next line then ask them to tell you what sound it makes.

Top tip: Experiment with singing this song fast and slow, quiet and loud, in different pitched voices like a robot voice or princess voice - this encourages children to explore their voices and reinforces keeping a steady pulse.

I Spy With My Little Eye

To the tune of 'Lou Lou, Skip to the Loo' play eye spy based on your book or theme. Choose an item in the room or on the page of your book. Identify its specific colour of the item or the phonics sound it begins with. Let them guess what you spy then have the children take turns at being the spier.

I spy with my little eye
I spy with my little eye
I spy with my little eye
Something the colour purple
or something that starts with 'sh'

You can listen to the song here. Song credit: Polly Ives.

Sing the song and see if children can guess what you are thinking of. Let them take turns spying. Support non-verbal children by asking them to point out their answer from the book or from a set of picture cards and then we sing the song - the child can nod when correct answer is guessed.

Children who are spying can stand up and sing along. Check they have their object first and know what colour it is. Use their name in the song e.g. Sarah spies with her little eye. Leave a gap for them to put in their answer and guess away. Have a correct answer sound like a bell or tambourine.

Top tip: See if anyone would like to try solo singing this song while the rest of the children keep the beat and do some actions. Encourage the children to sing this outside of your session, in the playground or in the supermarket!

Cool Downs

Can you make a sound like this?

Recreate some sounds from your activities or stories from your session. Sing the song and after each line make a sound for the children to copy. You can invite a child to make a sound in the gap for everyone to recreate - no sound is too silly! Although, it can be great to end with some unvoiced noises (shh, ss, ff, breathing) so they make some quieter sounds.

Can you make a sound like this? Weeeee
Can you make a sound like this? Oooooh
Can you make a sound? Can you make a sound?
Can you make a sound like this? Toot toot

You can listen to the song here. Song credit: London Rhymes.

Top tip: Other great sounds could be stomping, clapping, transport noises, animal sounds, fairground sounds, firework noises, phonics, sounds or body percussion.

Encourage children to really commit to making the sounds and include actions too if that helps engagement.

Ask some children to be the sound makers that everyone else will copy. They can stand up or you can go around the circle for everyone to have a turn.
Point at animals or things from your book and see if the children can make the sound just from looking at the associated picture. Or you could encourage each individual child in turn to copy your noise to check their ability to recreate sounds.

New Song or Soundscape
Using a speaker, put a song on based on your theme. Encourage the children to lie on their backs and listen to the music. It is great for young children to be exposed to
a wide range of genres so think outside the box! If you want to add elements of reflection after a minute or so, ask children questions about the session e.g. do you remember how the bear in the story was feeling? Imagine the sunshine warming your skin etc.

Song Ideas based on Themes
Jungle: I like to move it, will.i.am
Snow: Let it go - Instrumental Version, Frozen Karaoke
Elephants: Carnival of the Animals: V. The Elephant, Saint-Saëns
Calm: .oOo., Mette Henriette
Party: Loud Pipes, Ratatat
Sea: Wellerman Sea Shanty, Nathan Evans
Rain: I have never been here before, Andy Goodman
Forest: The Lost Words Blessing, Spell Songs

Encourage children to really listen and have some time to regulate at the end of the session.

Walk around with other sounds to make a 3D soundscape (rain shaker, humming, whistling, beatboxing, blowing). Add some simple movements to respond to the music that the children could copy like stretching.

Encourage children to bring songs from their own musical environment at home - ask what they listen to and encourage the teachers to reach out to families for song requests.