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Children's Literature in the Music Classroom: Finding the Music Within

By Delores R. Gauthier

Have you ever watched children while their teacher is reading to them? Many students sit cross-legged with their elbows propped against their knees and their faces resting on their cupped hands, while others lie on their tummies. Faces are upturned, eyes are riveted on the teacher, and all are spellbound with the reading of the story. The power of literature to capture the attention and the imagination of children is undeniable. Most children are very enthusiastic about being read to and are easily captivated by stories of all kinds—from history to make believe. Elementary classroom teachers take advantage of this enthusiasm and read to their classes on a regular basis, sometimes twice a day.

Classroom teachers have numerous reasons to read to students. Reading to students aids in the understanding of story structure, broadens familiarity with different styles of books, and helps to increase vocabulary. Book language is often different from spoken language, and reading allows students to hear different ways of expressing thoughts. Perhaps not least of all, teachers read to their students with the hope that students will develop a lifelong love for reading.

Children's books with musical and rhythmic language can be a valuable tool for the music teacher.

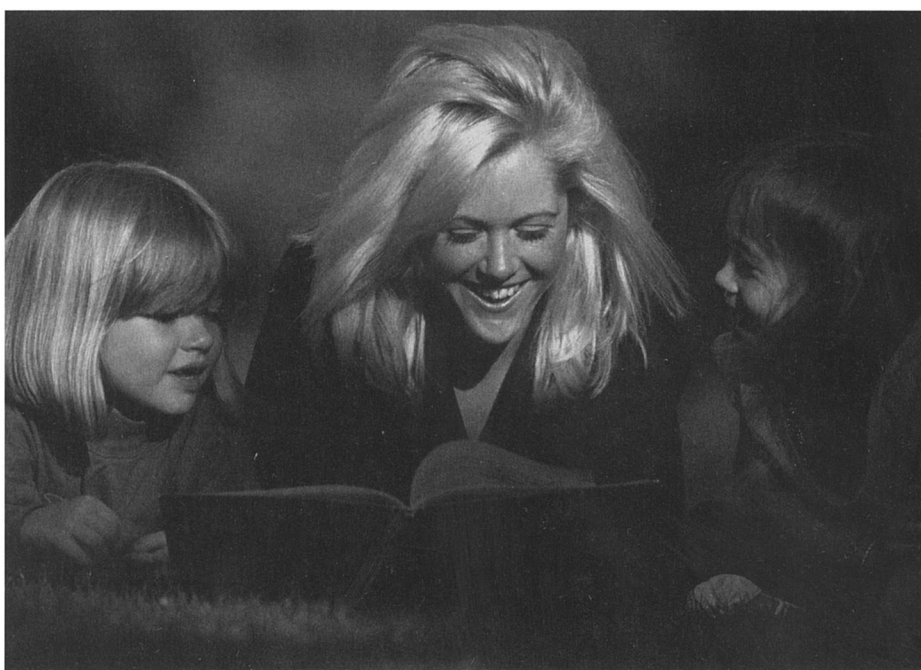


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Students and teachers alike can have fun exploring musical language and concepts found in many children's books.

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How does this relate to the elementary general music teacher? Can you use children's literature in the music classroom? The answer is definitely yes, and for similar reasons. Books can help students understand musical structure, become aware of different styles of music, and develop a musical vocabulary and musical skills. Increased skills and knowledge can help students develop an appreciation for music that will last a lifetime.

Incorporating children's literature into the music class also creates the opportunity for you to collaborate with the classroom teacher on the use of books. Classroom teachers already have an interest in reading to their students, so working in partnership can benefit you both. By working together, you may be able to find books that are relevant to both classes. You also may become more interested in each other's curriculum, which would be beneficial for all, especially the students.

If the classroom teacher reads a book that you plan on using, you may have more time to concentrate on the musical concepts found within the book. However, some books can provide a hook, or a way to capture students' interest in a music lesson, so you may want to read them for the first time in music class. Some books can facilitate the understanding of a new concept or reinforce familiar concepts, while others may assist students in understanding melodic and rhythmic concepts and concepts of style, timbre, and tonality. Books can reinforce ideas of vocal exploration, assist students in learning the instruments of the orchestra, and complement efforts at addressing multicultural issues as well.

A visit to the children's literature section of any bookstore will reveal that there are lots of children's storybooks to choose from, so many that finding books appropriate for teaching music may seem like an overwhelming task. The following ideas might be helpful in narrowing your search for just the right books.

First, remember that selecting books for the music classroom is all about finding the music within. Even though most children's books are not specifically written to help children understand musical concepts, it is possible to find books that are rhythmic in nature or can

easily be set to a melody. Others can reinforce students' understanding of musical styles or are helpful in students' efforts to explore the timbres of their voices or of musical instruments. You may also find many books you love but cannot figure out how to use in music class. While there are many wonderful books, finding the music within some is just not possible; not all books are appropriate for use in the general music classroom.

Incorporating children's literature into the music class creates the opportunity for you to collaborate with the classroom teacher.

Second, be open to all kinds of books. Although many books are based on the text of a song, such as "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain," remember not to be too literal in looking for the music within a book; don't just look for books that are illustrations of a song. Be open to the possibilities other books have to offer.

Third, a book intended for a specific age level may be used with children at other levels. For example, a picture book intended for preschoolers may be used appropriately with third or fourth graders. A closer look at some books and how they can be used to teach musical concepts may be helpful in understanding how to use books in the general music classroom.

Barnyard Banter

Barnyard Banter by Denise Fleming is an excellent book for children in kindergarten or first grade. While looking for the goose, the reader encounters twelve different animals, from the cows in the pasture ("moo, moo, moo") to the crickets in the

stone wall ("chirp, chirp, chirp"). Here is one way to use this book.

■ **National Standard:** Standard 1 (vocal production).

■ **Objective:** The students will explore their voices using high/low and loud/soft sounds.

■ **Materials:** Small pictures of each animal in the book with the sound the animal makes below the picture.

1. Ask the students what animals they might find on a farm.

2. Let the students know they are to listen for and remember as many animals as they can from the book. Read the book.

3. Ask what animals are in the book. Hold up the picture of each animal mentioned. (Pictures need not be in the order of presentation in the book.)

4. Read the story again while students (a) figure out the order of the animals presented in the book, (b) practice making the sound of each animal as it appears in the text, and (c) label each animal sound as high, medium, or low and as loud or soft.

5. Depending on the size of the class, assign pairs or groups of students to be each animal (e.g., two students each get a picture of a cow).

6. Read the book again, this time only reading the first part of the sentence and having the students with the appropriate picture respond with the animal sound. For example, when you read, "Cows in the pasture," the students with the cow picture respond, "moo, moo, moo," using an appropriate voice.

7. Have students trade pictures, and read the story again, as in step 6. Or hold up random pictures and ask students for a whole-class response or call on individuals to make the sound corresponding to the picture.

Do You See a Mouse?

Bernard Waber's *Do You See a Mouse?* is terrific to use with older students for vocal exploration and reinforcing a 2:1 rhythmic relationship (two shorts equal a long, or, in Kodály/Orff terms, various patterns of *ti* and *ta*). In fact, adults in workshops enjoy working with this book. The story takes place in the Park Snoot Hotel where a mouse may be running loose. Mr. Posh, the hotel owner, engages the services of Hyde and Snide, the "best mouse catchers ever," to look into the matter. Other characters in the

book include Gaston the Chef and Madame Eevah Deevah, the world-famous opera singer. Here is one way of using this book.

■ **National Standard:** Standard 5 (reading iconic notation).

■ **Objectives:** (a) Given the rhythm patterns, the students will identify which patterns fit recurring phrases from the book and be able to say those phrases according to the rhythm pattern. (b) The students will use their voices in ways that are different from their normal speaking voices (e.g., high/low, loud/soft, nasal, dark, hooty, strident, with an accent). (c) The students will describe the voices heard using labels previously discussed in class (i.e., high/low, loud/soft, nasal, dark, hooty, strident).

■ **Materials:** Pictures of each character listed in the book with the name beneath the picture.

1. Place the three rhythm patterns using iconic notation (figure 1) or musical symbols (e.g., eighths and quarters) on the board in a random order.

2. Students chant the rhythm patterns according to the method they have been taught (e.g., long/short; ta/ti).

3. Students read the sentences the characters say and decide which pattern best fits each sentence. Class says each sentence in rhythm and in the order they appear in the book.

4. Assign or ask for volunteers (individuals or pairs) to be the various characters in the story.

5. Give students time to decide how to vocally portray their character.

6. Read through the entire book, reading the unassigned parts yourself and facilitating movement from one character to the next by announcing the next character in the story.

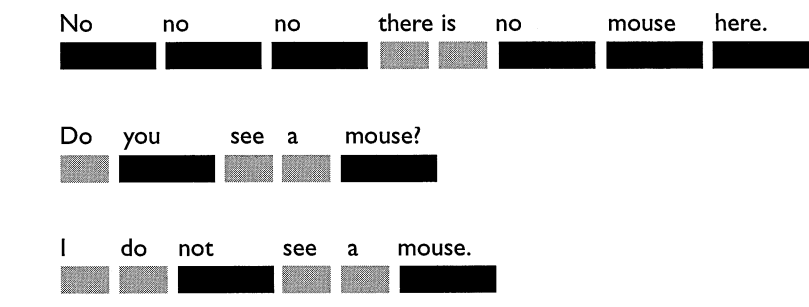
7. Discuss with the students the different ways they used their voices to portray their characters.

When working with younger students, it is best to read the story first. With older students, you can expect them to read and take part in the vocal exploration aspects of the story from the beginning.

I Went Walking

The text of *I Went Walking* by Sue Williams consists of three lines, "I went walking," "What did you see?" and "I saw a ___ looking at me." On the first

Figure 1. Do You See a Mouse? Rhythm Patterns



page, the author shows part of the animal seen, and the next page reveals what the walker saw (e.g., duck, horse, cow). I use this book to reinforce melodic concepts for younger students. The text is easily set to a simple melody of skips and steps. For example, the melody for "I went walking" might be 5-3-5-3 (long, long, long, long), and "What did you see?" might be 4-4-3-2 (long, short short, long), while "I saw a ___ looking at me" might be 5-3-3-5-3-3-2-1 (long, short short, long, long, short short, long, long).

You can present this book as a follow-up to the song "Teddy Bear," as both songs incorporate a 5-3 skip and a 3-2-1 descending melodic line. (The book for "Teddy Bear" is listed in the Suggested Children's Books sidebar.) Students who have learned the 5-3 and 3-2-1 steps in "Teddy Bear" could apply that knowledge to the skip pattern of "I went walking" and "I saw a ___," and the step pattern of "looking at me." (You could sing the pattern for "What did you see?") Here is one example of how you can use this book.

■ **National Standards:** Standard 1 (singing alone and with others) and Standard 6 (describing music).

■ **Objective:** Given 5-3 and 3-2-1 melodic patterns, the students will compare and demonstrate differences between patterns of a familiar song and a new song.

1. Sing the entire book to the students using the 5-3 skip and 3-2-1 step patterns. The students will find the clues and guess what animals were seen.

2. Sing the "I went walking" phrase, and ask students what song they know that sounds similar. You can give students a clue by singing 5-3 and showing the pattern on the body scale or by

singing *sol-mi* and using the Curwen hand signs to "Teddy Bear" (5-5-3/5-5-3). Have students sing and sign the 5-3 pattern.

3. Have students sing "I went walking" (5-3-5-3) with you. Ask how this pattern is different from the "Teddy Bear" pattern.

4. Ask the students to listen to determine what other part uses 5-3. Sing the song again, giving students a visual clue by using the body scale or hand signs to "I saw a ___." Have students sing that phrase.

5. Remind the students that in the song "Teddy Bear," they told Teddy Bear to touch the ground. Sing "touch the ground" on 3-2-1 using visual cues, then have students sing that part with you.

6. Ask students to listen for a line that sounds like 3-2-1. Sing all three lines from *I Went Walking* with visual cues. Have students sing the 3-2-1 line ("looking at me") with you.

7. Sing the entire song using hand motions with students.

8. Read the book again with students singing "I went walking" and "I saw a ___ looking at me" while you sing "What did you see?"

The Old Black Fly

Jim Aylesworth's *The Old Black Fly* can be used with a variety of age groups. The text, which can be sung to the melody of "Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho," is about a fly that gets into everything from A to Z. (The author sets the text around the alphabet.) The recurring line is "Shoo fly! Shoo fly! Shooo," and it coincides with the minor descending scalar pattern in the song. The melody may be sung with very little syncopation, but it is more fun to jazz it up a bit for older students. Here

- Abiyoyo*, by Pete Seeger (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1986). ISBN 0-689-71810-1.
- The Animal Boogie*, by Debbie Harter (Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books, 2000). ISBN 1-84148-094-0.
- Barn Dance!* by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault (New York: Holt, 1986). ISBN 0-8050-0799-7.
- Barnyard Banter*, by Denise Fleming (New York: Holt, 1994). ISBN 0-8050-1957-X.
- Bein' with You This Way*, by W. Nikola-Lisa (New York: Lee & Low Books, 1994). ISBN 1-880000-26-1.
- Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle (New York: Henry Holt, 1995). ISBN 0-80501-744-5.
- Cajun Night Before Christmas*, illustrated by James Rice (Gretna, LA: Pelican, 2001) ISBN 0-88289-940-6.
- Castles, Caves, and Honeycombs*, by Linda Ashman (San Diego: Harcourt, 2001). ISBN 0-15202-211-2.
- The Cat Came Back*, illustrated by Bill Slavin (Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Company, 1992). ISBN 0-8075-1097-1.
- Crocodile Beat*, by Gail Jorgensen (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1998). ISBN 0-689-71881-0.
- Do You See a Mouse?* by Bernard Waber (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995). ISBN 0-395-82742-6.
- Each Peach Pear Plum*, by Janet and Allen Ahlberg (New York, Viking, 1978). ISBN 0-14050-39-X.
- Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*, by Ellen Christelow (New York: Clarion Books, 1991). ISBN 0-395-55701-1.
- Froggie Went A-Courting: An Old Tale with a New Twist*, by Marjorie Priceman (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 2000). ISBN 0-316-71557-2.
- Good Night Moon*, by Margaret Wise Brown (New York: Harper Trophy, 1947). ISBN 0-06-443017-0.
- The Grand Old Duke of York*, by Maureen Roffey and Bernard Lodge (New York: Whispering Coyote, 1993). ISBN 1-879-08562-3.
- The Grouchy Ladybug*, by Eric Carle (New York: Harper Collins, 1997). ISBN 0-06-443450-8.
- Good Night Pillow Fight*, by Sally Cook (New York: Harper Collins, 2004). ISBN 0-06-205189-X.
- Hush!* by Ho Minfong (New York: Orchard Books, 1996). ISBN 0-531-09500-2.
- I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Pie*, by Alison Jackson (New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1997). ISBN 0-525-45645-7.
- In the Small, Small Pond*, by Denise Fleming (New York: Holt, 1993). ISBN 0-8050-2264-3.
- In the Tall, Tall Grass*, by Denise Fleming (New York: Holt, 1991). ISBN 0-8050-3941-1.
- It's Raining, It's Pouring*, by Kin Eagle (Boston: Whispering Coyote Press, 1994). ISBN 1-879085-88-7.
- I Went Walking*, by Sue Williams (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1989). ISBN 0-15-200471-8.
- The Jazz Fly*, by Matthew Gollub (Santa Rosa, CA: Tortuga Press, 2000). ISBN 1-889910-17-1.
- King Bidgood's in the Bathtub*, by Audrey Wood (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1985). ISBN 0-15-242730-9.
- The Napping House*, by Audrey Wood (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1984). ISBN 0-15-256708-9.
- Never Talk To Strangers*, by Irma Joyce (New York: Golden Books, 1995). ISBN 0-307-10231-9.
- Oh Soldier, Oh Soldier, Won't You Marry Me?* by Pam Adams (West Orange, NJ: Child's Play International, 1991). ISBN 0-85953-093-0.
- The Old Black Fly*, by Jim Aylesworth (New York: Holt, 1992). ISBN 0-8050-1401-2. Paperback ISBN 0-8050-3924-4.
- Over in the Grasslands*, by Anna Wilson and Alison Bartlett (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1999). ISBN 0-316-93910-2.
- Over in the Meadow*, adapted and illustrated by Paul Galdone (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1986). ISBN 0-671-67837-X.
- please, baby, please*, by Spike Lee and Tonya Lewis Lee (New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2002). ISBN 0-689-83233-8.
- Rattlebone Rock*, by Sylvia Andrews (New York: HarperCollins, 1995). ISBN 0-06-443-484-2.
- The Remarkable Farkle McBride*, by John Lithgow (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). ISBN 0-689-83340-7.
- Splish, Splash*, by Jeff Sheppard (New York: Macmillan, 1994). ISBN 0-02-782455-1.
- Summertime*, by George Gershwin (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 2002). ISBN 0-689-85047-6.
- Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear*, illustrated by Michael Hague. (New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1993). ISBN 0-688-10671-4.
- That's Good! That's Bad!* by Margery Cuyler (New York: Holt, 1991). ISBN 0-8050-2954-0.
- That's Good! That's Bad! In the Grand Canyon*, by Margery Cuyler (New York: Holt, 1991). ISBN 0-8050-5975-X.
- Thump, Thump, Rat-a-tat-tat*, by Gene Baer (New York: Harper Trophy, 1989). ISBN 0-06-443265-3.
- Today is Monday*, by Eric Carle (New York: Philomel, 1993). ISBN 6-987-1563-5.
- To Market, To Market*, by Anne Miranda (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1997). ISBN 0-15-200035-6.
- The Twelve Days of Kindergarten*, by Deborah Rose Lee (New York: H. N. Abrams, 2003). ISBN 0-8109-4512-6.
- Twist with a Burger, Jitter with a Bug*, by Linda Lowery (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995). ISBN 0-395-67022-5.
- The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, by Eric Carle (New York: Philomel Books, 1987). ISBN 0-399-20853-4.
- Zin! Zin! Zin! A Violin*, by Floyd Moss (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995). ISBN 0-671-88239-2.

are some ideas on how to use this book in a third- or fourth-grade music class.

■ *National Standard:* Standard 1 (singing alone and with others), Standard 2 (performing on instruments, alone and with others), and Standard 6 (describing music).

■ *Objective:* Given the recurring melodic pattern sung to “Shoo fly! Shoo fly! Shooo” from *Old Black Fly*, the students will identify the melodic direction, sing the melodic pattern, arrange bells to reflect the pattern, and then play the pattern on bells while singing through the book.

1. Begin by singing the book while students listen for two things: (a) the repeated pattern that is the same in each verse (Shoo fly! Shoo fly! Shooo) and (b) the pattern that the text is centered around (the alphabet). The students should raise their hands as soon as they know the answer.

2. Ask students what direction the “Shoo fly!” pattern moves and whether it does so by skips or steps. (Pattern moves down by steps.) Sing the descending minor scalar pattern, and have students sing the pattern back.

3. Place students in groups and give them five bells. Without talking, each group is to decide how to order the bells so they will sound like the “Shoo fly!” descending pattern. They may play or gesture, but they cannot talk. Once they think they can play the pattern, they sit quietly.

4. Have each group choose one group member to demonstrate their answer. Call on each group to play the pattern.

5. Have students decide on an order of players within their group and line up behind their bells. Read through the book with students playing along on the “Shoo fly!” phrase. After the first student in each group plays the phrase, that student goes to the end of the line so the next person can play, and so on, until the end of the book.

6. Depending on the level of the students, they could be asked to notate the pattern so they can read it during music class on another day.

“Shoo fly!” could also be an introduction to minor tonality or a reinforcement of descending melodies that move by steps. To carry this to the next level, teach the students the melody to the part they didn’t sing, as it is made of

Figure 2. *please, baby, please* Rhythm Patterns



descending 5-3 and 4-2 patterns and ascending scalar patterns.

please, baby, please

Anyone who has lived with or taken care of a toddler will enjoy *please, baby, please* by Spike Lee and Tonya Lewis Lee. This story depicts a day in the life of a toddler, from waking up at 3 a.m. to going back to bed at 10 p.m. The words “please” and “baby” are repeated throughout the book, but not always in the same order. This book is an opportunity to begin rhythmic dictation with students in the latter half of first grade or beginning of second. Students will need to be familiar with short and long sounds, rhythm icon bars, the shortest sound line, and the movements of tipping (tapping fingertips of both hands together to show the shortest sound) and sliding (placing the fingertips of the left hand at the base of the right hand and slide until the fingertips of right hand are at the base of the palm of the left hand to demonstrate the long sound).

■ *National Standards:* Standard 4 (arranging music within specified guidelines) and Standard 5 (reading iconic notation).

■ *Objective:* Given rhythm cards, the students will arrange the cards according to what they hear. Having placed rhythm cards in the appropriate order, the students will demonstrate the short and long patterns.

■ *Materials:* Packets of rhythm cards for each student. The packets contain four “baby” cards and two “please” cards. See figure 2 for rhythm patterns.

1. Read the story to the children. Have them listen for the words that repeat in the story.

2. Ask students what words repeat. Write the words “baby” and “please” on the board.

3. Have students tip their fingers together and whisper “short.” Ask them how many shorts they tip and say when you say the word “baby.” Tip your fin-

gers together and count off, “Ready listen, ba-by.” Once students have determined that there are two shorts in baby, ask a student to put two short rhythm icon bars on the board below the word “baby.” Tip and say the word with the students.

4. Point to the short sound line on the board and ask the students whether “please” is a long or a short sound. Guide students to the answer by having them tip along as you say “please.” Ask how many shorts they tipped and which rhythm bar pattern goes under the word “please.” Once students have determined that they tapped two shorts, that there are two short sounds in a long sound, and that a long bar goes under the word, ask a student to put one long rhythm icon bar below the word “please.” Tip and say “please” with the students.

5. Give each student a packet of cards. Ask what two words are in the packet and whether they look the same as or different from the words on the board.

6. Say the words, “please, baby, please” in rhythm. Tell students to put their cards in the order you said them.

7. Have the students say the pattern using the words “short” and “long.” Prompt the students with “ready say and” in rhythm to the shortest sound. Then have the students say the pattern with the words “baby” and “please.”

8. Read the story again and ask students to put the words from their packet in the order that you say them as you read. When you read, be sure to read the repeated words in rhythm. Have the students tip and slide the pattern using the words “short” and “long,” or “baby” and “please.”

The Napping House

The Napping House by Audrey Wood is an add-on story like the song “There Was an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly.” It tells of a cozy bed and a snoring granny and several other characters.

Figure 3. Napping House Rhythms



■ **National Standards:** Standard 1 (chanting alone and with others maintaining a steady beat, vocal production) and Standard 5 (reading music at the iconic level).

■ **Objective:** (a) Students will keep a steady pulse as the teacher reads *The Napping House*. (b) Students will choose how to use their voices according to character/object cards taken from the book. (c) Given two rhythm patterns, students will decide which rhythm fits given word phrases, read the word phrases in the correct rhythm, and play the rhythm on a rhythm instrument.

■ **Materials:** Character/object cards with the name and picture of a character or object from the book on the front and the corresponding action on the back.

1. The first time you read the book, focus on keeping a steady beat. On your signal, have the students say the repeating line, “in a napping house where everyone is sleeping,” while patting and clapping the beat.

2. On another day, add vocal exploration. Take seven volunteers and assign each to be one of the characters or objects and give each of them a character/object card. When it is their turn, the students will read their card in a voice (high/low, etc.) that fits how they think their character or object would sound. Students not receiving a card will say, “in a napping house, where everyone is sleeping.”

3. The third time you read this book, explore 2:1 rhythmic relationships and instrumental timbre. Place the two rhythms in figure 3 on the board.

4. Have students decide which rhythm pattern fits the action word phrases on the back of each character/object card and place the phrases by the appropriate rhythm pattern. For example, the character card for “a dozing dog” includes the phrase “who thumps the child.” The action phrase matches pattern A (short long short long). Have the entire class prac-

tice saying each action rhythm pattern.

5. Give students a variety of instruments and ask them to choose which instrument timbre best fits each character. Choose seven students to read the character names and seven students to play the action rhythm pattern on the chosen instrument. Those who do not have a part say, “in a napping house, where everyone is sleeping,” as the class reads the book together.

Options Abound

Once you find books that you think will work in a music lesson, you need to

decide how the books will fit into your curriculum. Consider the musical concepts you teach at each grade level, and then decide which books may help students better understand those concepts. The Suggested Children’s Books sidebar lists a variety of books to help you get started. I have listed the books by title because most people remember the name of a children’s book rather than its author. You can find a longer list of books and a list arranged according to musical concepts in the *MEJ* Bonus Content, available online at www.menc.org/publication/articles/journals.html beginning in January.

Don’t feel you have to find all the books you want to use in one review session. As you gain experience using children’s books in music class, finding the music within will get easier. Once you are hooked on using children’s literature, it will be hard to pass by a children’s book without stopping to take a look.■



MENC Resources

To learn more about the connections between music and reading, see the following MENC publications. Call 1-800-828-0229 or visit <http://www.menc.org/publication/books/booksrch.html> to order.

- *Integrating Music and Reading Instruction*, by Laura J. Andrews and Patricia E. Sink, presents lesson plans that integrate music and reading concepts and skills. 2002. Item #1664.
- *The Music and Literacy Connection*, by Elaine Bernstorff, Dee Hansen, and Gayle Stuber, examines those skills that apply to both music reading and text reading. 2003. Item #1667.

The following articles give ideas for using children’s literature in the music classroom. You can order selected back issues of MENC periodicals by calling 1-800-336-3768. Articles are also available in periodical databases at many public and university libraries:

- Addo, Akosua Obuo. “Using African Children’s Literature in Elementary General Music Classes.” *General Music Today* 16, no. 2 (Winter 2003). <http://www.menc.org/publication/articles/journals.html>
- Calogero, Joanna M. “Integrating Music and Children’s Literature.” *Music Educators Journal* 88, no. 5 (2002): 23–30.
- McDonald, Nan L., Douglas Fisher, and Rick Helzer. “Jazz Listening Activities: Children’s Literature and Authentic Music Samples.” *Music Educators Journal* 89, no. 2 (2002): 43–49, 57.