

# OUR STREET, OUR SONG

## TOP TIPS FOR SONG-WRITING AND CREATIVE MUSIC-MAKING WITH 3-5 YEAR OLDS

One of the focuses of the *Our Street Our Song* project was to support children and their adults to create new songs and new music.

The four lead musicians worked with EY practitioners and children's families to develop long-lasting skills, so they can continue to lead this activity in the early years settings and in their homes once the project ends.

Here are some top tips from the musicians and Early Years practitioners that they have explored throughout the project.

### 1. LAY MUSICAL FOUNDATIONS

- To build the foundations of **confident** music-making, sing **regularly** at home and in the nursery. Encourage a wide **variety** of songs and music e.g. nursery rhymes, popular and traditional songs from the children's own backgrounds as well as classical, folk, jazz, blues and contemporary music.
- **Ask** the children which songs they would like to sing so they start to make **musical choices**.
- **Listen** to music with the children and **discuss** the different musical instruments you can see or hear, if the music is loud or quiet, fast or slow, high or low, happy or sad and what character (sleepy/ stomping/ scary). Can they make up a **story** about the music?
- Use your **expressive voices** to sing sentences in your every-day routines or activities e.g. "dinner's ready!" or "Let's go outside!"
- Play mouth exercise **games** and vocal **warm-ups** before singing e.g. Ask the children to copy your vocal sounds. Can the children suggest some sounds? Create some simple sequences of vocal sounds (e.g. Baa Baa Moo).
- Sing '**Call and Response**' songs – you sing something, the children copy you e.g. *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*

These are all positive building blocks for the children to start creating their own music and lyrics.

The **blue boxes** below contain **examples** of songs and music that have been created in this project. You can find many of them at the ***Our Street Our Song* YouTube channel** or in the final project **Song Book**.

## 2. CREATE NEW LYRICS (SONGWRITING)

**Take an existing song (e.g. a nursery rhyme) and develop it to make it your own**

- Keep it simple and **change one or two words at a time** to fit your theme.

*Old McDonald Had a Band* (instruments)  
*Little Johnny* (body parts and movements e.g. tiptoes, stomping, sleeping)  
*Big Red Tractor* (colours)  
*See the Sleeping Bunnies* (children, dinosaurs, fairies)  
*There's a Whale at the Bottom of the Ocean* (under the sea)

- A fun and creative activity to develop this is to sing a nursery rhyme but sing a '**wrong**' **word** to encourage the children to listen to the lyrics and spot the 'incorrect' word. Can they suggest the 'correct' word or a 'new word'?
- Create your own more developed **new** lyrics for an **existing** song (see further lyric ideas below).

*Baa Baa Green Sheep*  
*Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* (sparkly shoes, little toes, little sheep, big loud noise)  
*Build a Tower*

- Create your own **unique songs** for **routines** using existing songs.

*Everybody Tidy Up (London Bridge is Falling Down)*

- Create new lyrics **responding** to **creative play** based on nursery rhyme melodies e.g. sing what you are doing.

*Roll the Dough (Row Row Row Your Boat)*  
*Rolling Pin (London Bridge)*

- Create some new **question and answer songs** based on existing nursery rhymes. Encourage the children to sing their own questions to you or other children.

*Do You Like to Eat Bananas? (If You're Happy and You Know It)* – food  
*Are You Hungry? (Frere Jacques)* - emotions and feelings

## Create new songs with new lyrics

- Sing a '**Call and Response song**' – you sing something, the children copy you. Then choose a child to sing something and you copy them. (Top tip – choose a confident child first). Remember they can't do it 'wrong' so copy exactly what they sing!
- You and the children can start to create **new** simple tunes by playing around with a few notes or a **simple melody** – keep it simple e.g. the playground chant Nah Nah Nah.
- **Sing what you see!** Look around and sing about it.

*This is Our Street  
Lucy's Song*

- Create some simple lyrics, ideally following the individual **child's interests and experiences** e.g. if a child loves dinosaurs, explore some lyrics about dinosaurs. If they tell you they've 'seen a parrot on a bike', can you develop that idea further?

*Parrot on a Bike  
Rainbow Mountain  
Dinosaur in the Kitchen*

- Encourage children to think about **rhythm, rhyme and alliteration** but don't get too obsessed by it – being creative with other words is also great. Let it be wacky and fun!

*The Starfish Song  
Joey's Song*

- Find a **structure** for your song – often songs have 4 lines. You may like to create a chorus, that comes back after the verses. Or you could have a dance section in between verses.

*The Love Heart Song  
Grace Owen Dance Party*

- Use **repetition** to extend your song. Can you sing the same tune again but develop new verses with one or two words changed?

*Choo Be Doo  
I'm Gonna be a...  
Chicken Pox Song*

- Can you **sing a story**? Use a book as the starting point e.g. *We're Going On a Bear Hunt* and *Walking through the Jungle*.
- Incorporate the children's **home languages** into their singing. Discuss music in the home with the families – do they sing songs? Can they share them with the children? Can they record themselves? Can they develop the songs? Find ways to include words or sentences in different home language.

*Can You Count to Three?  
Handwashing Around the World*

- Encourage the children to **vocalise in a free-flowing way within their play** e.g. whilst painting or playing with trains. Follow the shapes of your, and the child's movements by the sounds of your voice. Discuss how colours, shapes and patterns might sound.

*Musical Mark-Making  
Waterfall Song*

- Be creative with **phonic sounds** as a warm-up or add them between verses of new songs. Make expressive vocal sounds and rhythms for the children to copy e.g. Ba, Ba, Ba. Be, Be Be. Boo, Boo, Boo.

*Can You Guess the Word that I am Singing?*

- Use a **microphone, hairbrush or wooden spoon** to encourage the children to be more vocally confident.
- Use a **puppet or other toys** as 'the singers' to encourage shy children.
- Use a phone or Talking Tins to **record, listen back and experiment** with the children's voices.

### 3. CREATE NEW SOUNDS & MUSIC (COMPOSING & IMPROVISING)

- Children can **play along to recorded or live music** with a range of musical instruments to create their own versions.

*Stop and Go  
Old McDonald Had a Band  
Mama Don't Allow  
Tambourine Song*

- **Make your own instruments** and sound-makers – discuss the sounds and materials they're made from. Experimenting with and understanding different materials and sizes of instruments builds up children's musical awareness and levels of creativity. The children are the creators.

*Make Your Own Percussion Instruments*

- **Play rhythms of songs on your instruments** (with no words) – can they guess the song?
- **Clap** the pulse (the ongoing beat) to recorded or live music.
- Play copying **clapping rhythm games** e.g. rhythms of children's names or different food words (e.g. bread, sausage, bread). You could clap a rhythm of a nursery rhyme and see if the children can guess which it is.
- Do **simple body percussion** e.g. copy what someone does with their body, e.g. clapping, tapping, stomping to create rhythmic patterns.

- **Show children musical notation** – it encourages the children to see/understand where music comes from and it isn't just a sound. They are starting to relate music note images to music sounds as well as seeing shapes and patterns.
- Use **props or picture cards** to give the children ideas or choices for new lyrics or sounds. Using visual reminders helps shape and structure a new piece of music as well as developing the children's memory.
- Create musical **soundscapes** that depict pictures from books e.g. We're Going on a Bear Hunt – choose instruments and ways of playing that represent the 'grass' page etc.
- Do any **teachers, family members or older children in the setting play instruments?** Can they demonstrate their instruments and play alongside the children? Can they create their own instrumental music together?

#### 4. CREATE AN EXTENDED PIECE OF MUSIC

- Join together **several** new songs and **sections** of music (eg. from above) to create a complete musical story.
- The children can **choose** the **sequence** of events.
- You could have a **leader** (conductor) or picture cards or white board images to **remind** the performers.

##### **Example: 'We're going to the Park'**

1. New song '*We're Going to the Park*'
2. Movement and action music with sound effects for the journey there (walking, cars driving past, opening the gate etc)
3. New song '*Walking through the Park... What do you see? I can see a squirrel... Running up a tree.*'
4. New percussion music about the environment (grass, mud, puddles)
5. New song based on a nursery rhyme 'What can we do in the playground' song (slide, swing, balance bar)
6. New song '*We're Going Home*'

#### 5. SHARE NEW MUSIC AND CELEBRATE CHILDREN'S CREATIVITY

- Often the best new songs or music are created during **1:1** time with a child. Try to remember, write down or **record what they create**.
- **Share** musical creations with the **other children**, perhaps in circle time or at the end of the day. Share it with their **families** – live or recorded.
- Invite children from **other year groups** to watch the children performing their new music.
- Invite **senior management and headteachers** to share how music is at the heart of the children's all round learning.