

Humor in the Elementary General Music Classroom

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Thank you for your interest in humor! I created this handout with informal language (some of which will only make sense if you were at the session) in order to catalog as many specific tips and tricks as possible for your immediate use. That said, the most important piece of information on this paper is my email address. If you see anything that we did not talk about today or that you would like to explore further, please do not hesitate to email me. Thanks! -Tiger

- **Classroom management:**
 - Satirize what to do and not do
 - How to act in groups: “Here’s what I DON’T want to see” or “There are two types of classes, classes that do *this* (satirize immature behavior) and classes that do this (model good behavior), let’s see what type of class you are”
 - How to complete assignments, improvise, compose: Satirize the “I’m done, now what” mentality
 - How to use vocabulary: “Here’s how someone in first grade would describe this music (satirize with overly simple description), but since you are in fourth grade, you can describe it like this (model a good description with vocabulary)”
 - “Neutralize” a particular student
 - The Johnny Thumbs Up: If rehearsal goes well, let the goofy student give their approving “thumbs up”
 - Bargaining for “Line Time”: If a student behaves, he or she earns a line show
 - Give pretend jobs when needed
 - “You can help me carry this boulder”: When a student wants to help set up for chorus but there is nothing left, ask them to bring in pretend items
 - “Sargent at arms”: When a student is sick and can’t participate, assign them a “security” job helping other students and making sure they’re “safe”
 - Goofy bodies that have to follow the rules:
 - “Swagger walk” or “Big huge dinosaur” to get into line, or say, “Feet, you’re only allowed to move this far” to help in a folk dance
 - Create “danger music” to avoid yelling during chase games
- **Vocal warm ups:**
 - “Old British Ladies” for vowel shapes
 - “Explosions” at the end of a descending vocal glissando
 - “Superhero Chest” for posture
- **Character of the singing, dancing, playing:**
 - Act out echo songs like “My Name is Michael” or “Bill Grogan’s Goat”
 - Enhance “Sasha” with your best pretend “mean face”
 - Enhance “Let us Chase the Squirrel” with “squirrel face”
- **Disguising repetition:**
 - “Let’s do this like a 90 year old, now like an 80 year old, a 70 year old...” or “Let’s write a four note pattern for the elephants, now the dogs, now the ants...”

- **Attach novelty to aid memory:**
 - Talking to notes, “Hello ‘ta,’ you have one note-head and one stem. You’re a ‘ta’ even if you’re upside down”
 - “Quiet face” for rests
- **Motivation and Incentives:**
 - Sing “Chicken on a Fencepost” well and we can play with this prop
 - Sing “Who’s That, Tapping at my Window” to see who’s at the window
 - “We can make real soup if everyone says the words in the rhyme, ‘Chop Chop’” (pantomime cooking and drinking the soup at the end)
 - Decode “secret messages” in rhythmic dictation: Create silly messages to correspond to different rhythmic patterns. Students can access them if they “decode” properly.
 - Dance party at the end of class with quality music (e.g., bluegrass)
- **Inclusion:**
 - “My Gal’s a Corker” for rhyming
- **Making very young children not afraid:**
 - Singing “bodyguards”
 - Does your singing or improvisation pass the Dr. Robison “dance test”
 - “Funny” question of the day: sing a silly answer to a question during 1on1 assessment
 - Puppets
 - Silly beat keeping
- **Assessment:**
 - Facial expressions, particularly during mistakes
- **Ostinato building:**
 - Start with silly words (example: “Chicken wings, so spicy, chicken wings, so good!”)
 - Turn words into body percussion
 - Put body percussion onto unpitched percussion
 - Put everything into a piano dynamic
 - By this time, the students who still need the silly words will have them, but everyone else will have forgotten about them
- **Improvising:**
 - “Cowboy hat” or “Baker’s hat” game: Say the rhyme and pass the hat, you must improvise if it lands on you
 - Any word: “CHICKEN!”
 - Rhythmic word: “Chick-en”
 - Rhythm: “Ti ti” (two eighth notes)
 - Rhythm and direction: “High Low” (two eighth notes on tones “sol-mi”)
 - Rhythm and neutral syllable: (sing as above but on “loo”)
 - Rhythm and solfege: (sing as above but on solfege)
- **Music appreciation and history:**
 - Funny stories from music history (anything in a narrative form usually works): Haydn’s surprise symphony or joke quartet, Mozart’s musical joke, Rossini’s last minute overtures for the symphony players. With these stories as context (or entry point), many students seek out these musical works on their own around 4th grade.