
Chapter 4

Songs, Chants and Rhymes in English Language Teaching

by

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Introduction

“Oh, my! I still remember this song after all those years! I don’t believe it!”
Reda Fadel, February, 2001

Mr. Reda Fadel, the former English Language Counsellor at the Egyptian Ministry of Education uttered the above, expressing his surprise at being able to join a group of teachers in singing a song he had learned when he was a student in the primary school. I think most of us would agree with him that songs once learned are very hard to forget.

Experienced teachers of English to young learners understand the importance of songs, chants and rhymes in the teaching /learning process for their many benefits. This chapter will highlight the importance of using songs, chants, and rhymes in teaching English to young learners, including the functions of songs, chants and rhymes in ELT, criteria for choosing songs, chants and rhymes and ways of presenting them to the class. Examples of songs, chants and rhymes suitable to young learners will also be included.

Functions of Songs in English Language Teaching (ELT)

Many educators have repeatedly written on the benefits of songs in an ELT setting (Curtain & Pesola, 1994; Orlova, 1997; Chiaili & Meilo, 1998; Enright & McCloskey, 1988 to name just a few). These benefits can be summarized under the following two factors:

Linguistic Factors:

- To enlarge the vocabulary background of children
- To develop pupils' listening and speaking skills
- To introduce and familiarize children with the target language culture

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- To improve children's pronunciation
 - To teach various language functions
 - To recall grammatical points
 - To develop auditory discrimination

Affective Factors:

- To add fun to learning
- To motivate children to participate -- even shy ones
- To help teachers get closer to their children
- To stimulate children's interest in the new language
- To create a lively atmosphere in the language classroom

The Hello! series already includes a number of chants and songs that are helpful in teaching the language objectives, but you can also choose and/or adapt other songs and rhymes to fit into the lesson.

Criteria for Choosing a Song:

Some teachers analyze the errors of their students and search for songs or rhymes that can work as a remedy for these errors. This is one method of selection – basing the song choice on student needs. Nevertheless, a teacher should exercise care when choosing songs. The following criteria can be used: (Curtain & Pesola: 1988, p. 246-265)

1. The song should contain limited vocabulary.
2. The song should contain language compatible with that being used in the classroom.
3. The song should present a limited musical challenge.
4. The rhythm should be straightforward and repetitive.
5. Song topics should be within the experiences of children.
6. For primary level 4 and 5 it is useful if songs are accompanied by actions.
7. It is also helpful if the words of the songs are highly repetitive and if they have a refrain: a repeated stanza, between verses of the song.

Techniques for Presenting Songs

There are different ways and procedures for presenting a song to your class. It all depends on the level of your class, the simplicity of the song, and the time available.

Suggested Steps in Presenting a Song:

Curtain and Pesola (1988:265) suggest the following steps for presenting a song:

Step 1: Prepare the students.

- Tell them what the song is about, preferably in English, making heavy use of visuals and gestures.
- Play a recording or sing the entire song so that students know what they are working toward.

Step 2: Go through the words.

- Make sure the students understand the words, or at least that they understand the key words necessary for singing the song meaningfully and with enjoyment.
- Place new vocabulary in context and illustrate the meaning with gestures and visuals.
- There should be very little new vocabulary in any new song, and the new words should be presented several days before you introduce the song.

Step 3: Speak the song line by line.

- Say the song one line at a time and have the students repeat the words. If your song is on the board, track the words with a pointer/ruler.

Step 4: Sing a line at a time.

- Sing the song to the students one line at a time and have the students sing it back.
- Practice each line several times until the children can sing it independently. Then practice it two lines at a time, and finally put the entire song together.
- If a song is longer than four lines, it is preferable not to teach it whole in a single period but divide it into sections and concentrate on the refrain at first.

Step 5: Add Rhythmic Accompaniments:

- Begin to add rhythmic accompaniment such as clapping, finger snapping, foot stamping or hand shuffling.
- Consult the music teacher for additional suggestions.
- Some songs can be used effectively for a game or dramatic play, e.g., "The Hokey Pokey" or "The Farmer in the Dell."

Action Songs

Many songs can be made into action songs in which you and the class act out some gestures as you sing. Action songs are particularly appropriate as they help children to remember the words and their meanings. When using action songs, you might divide your class into groups of singers and actors or you might be the singers and actors all together at the same time.

What if I can't sing?

If you have no confidence as a singer, there still are a number of ways to use songs in your classroom:

- Try to find tapes or CDs of songs you can use in your classroom to help you and your children learn the song.
- Ask students who are good singers to lead the songs.
- If you don't know the tune, and don't have a tape, just chant the song - speak the words in the rhythm of the song without singing. Use hand clapping or finger snapping to reinforce the rhythm. Your children will still find this chanting very enjoyable.

Sample Songs:

Old MacDonald Had a Farm

Language goals:

Past tense verbs.

Farm terms, animal names and sounds Rhythm and intonation of English

Old MacDonald had a farm,
E-I-E-I-O
And on his farm he had some chicks,
E-I-E-I-O
With a chick - chick here,
And a chick - chick there,
Here a chick, there a chick - chick,
Everywhere a chick - chick
Old Mac Donald had a farm,
E-I-E-I-O

Teaching Suggestions:

- You can add to this song by substituting different animals with their

sounds, and continue the song:

Cows ----- moo- moo

Cats ----- meow-meow

Ducks ----- quack-quack

- You can also add to the fun by having the children make up animal motions to go along with the animal sounds, e.g., they could flap their wings when they were a chick or walk with a waddle when they were a duck.

I Caught a Fish Alive

Language Goals:

Numbers from one to ten.

Question-answer format, question words.

One, two, three, four, five,
I caught a fish alive.

Six, seven, eight, nine, ten,
I let it go again.

Why did you let it go?
'Cause it bit my finger so.

Which finger did it bite?
This little finger on my right.

Teaching Suggestions:

This song is also a finger play. Build meaning by having the children act out the song.

One, two, three, four, five,
I caught a fish alive.

(Count on the right hand; hold a fish with your hands.)

Six, seven, eight, nine, ten,
I let it go again.

(Count the fingers on your left hand; let the fish go.)

Why did you let it go?
'Cause it bit my finger so.

(Shake finger)

Which finger did it bite?
This little finger on my right.

(Hold up the little finger on your right hand.)

Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Music by Wolfgang A. Mozart, lyrics author unknown

Language Goals:

Figurative language

Vocabulary for natural world

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high
Like a diamond in the sky.
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are.

Teaching Suggestions:

- This song also lends itself to action. Students can point to the star on the "Twinkle, twinkle, little star" line
- The tune to this song lends itself to many variations - try making up words using the vocabulary from your current lesson in your text.

Mary Had a Little Lamb

Traditional Mother Goose Rhyme

Language goals

Vocabulary

Past tense verbs

Comparisons

Rhythms and sounds of English

Mary had a little lamb,
Little lamb, little lamb,
Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow.
And everywhere that Mary went,
Mary went, Mary went
And everywhere that Mary went,
The lamb was sure to go.
It followed her to school one day,
School one day, school one day,
It followed her to school one day

Which was against the rules.
It made the children laugh and play,
Laugh and play, laugh and play
It made the children laugh and play,
To see a lamb at school.

Teaching Suggestions:

- Before the story, ask the children what would happen if someone brought a lamb to school.
- As you sing, have children act out the parts of Mary, the lamb, the other children, and the teacher.

Baa Baa Black Sheep

Language goals:

Animal sounds
Counting to three
Question format
Vocabulary

Baa Baa black sheep,
Have you any wool?
Yes, sir, yes, sir
Three bags full.
One for my master
And one for my dame,
And one for the little boy
Who lives down the lane.

Teaching Suggestions

- You might mention that some of the words in the story aren't used often today in English. Now we might call a master or a dame a "boss" or "employer."

The More We Get Together

Language goals

- Comparatives: happier, more
- Vocabulary: friends
- Pronouns

The more we get together
Together, together
The more we get together
The happier we'll be.
For your friends are my friends
And my friends are your friends.
So the more we get together
The happier we'll be.

Teaching Suggestions

- Use actions to show the meaning of this song:
 - Put hands together when you sing the word "together."
 - Smile when you sing "the happier we'll be."
 - Point to a partner when you say "your friends", to self when you say "my friends."

Head and Shoulders

Traditional

Language goals

Body parts.

Head and Shoulders,
Knees and toes, knees and toes (2x)

And eyes and ears,
And mouth and nose

Head and shoulders,
Knees and toes, knees and toes.

Teaching Suggestions:

You and the children point to the body parts as you sing the song.

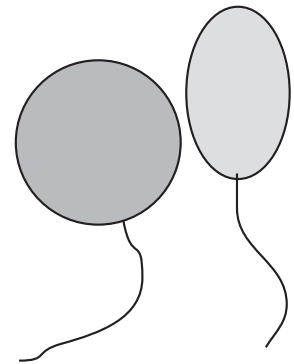
Colors

Language goals:

- Color words
- Commands

Red and yellow, blue and white

Stand up.
Green and orange, black and brown
Turn around.
And reach up high, above your head,
Red and yellow, blue and white,
Sit down.



Teaching Suggestions:

- Give your students different colored paper to hold up at the right times while they sing the song.
- Practice identifying the colors without singing at first.

The Hokey Pokey

Roland Lawrence LaPrise, Copyright 1950, Acuff-Rose Music Inc.

Language Goals:

- Direction words
- Body parts
- Command forms of action verbs

You put your right hand in,
You take your right hand out,
You put your right hand in,
And you shake it all about.
You do the hokey pokey,
And you turn yourself around,
That's what it's all about.
Oh, hokey pokey,
Oh, hokey pokey,
And that's what it's all about.

Teaching Suggestions:

- The first time through, sing the song as written here.
- The second time, substitute left hand
- Then repeat the verses with right foot, left foot, your head, your whole self.

BINGO

Author unknown

Language goals:

- Past tense sentences
- Letter names
- Vocabulary

There was a farmer had a dog,
And Bingo was his name, O!
BINGO, BINGO, BINGO,
And Bingo was his name, O!

Teaching Suggestions:

- 1) Write the words on the blackboard
- 2) Sing the song as it is.
- 3) Erase the O and sing the song again, this time leaving off the O and clapping your hands for O, instead of singing it.
- 4) Erase the G, sing and clap twice.
- 5) Erase the N, sing and clap 3 times.
- 6) Continue in the same way until on the last time, you clap for all the letters B-I-N-G-O instead of singing them.
- 7) End by singing the last line: And BINGO was his name, O!

Jazz Chants

Introduction to Jazz Chants

Rhymes and rhythms have always been a part of children's play and are part of the natural way children develop their first language. American ESL teacher Carolyn Graham (1979), has created many rhymes with rhythms especially designed for English teaching. She calls these "jazz chants". Jazz chants can be used in a primary classroom for a variety of reasons:

- To teach the natural rhythm, stress and intonation of conversational English.
- To recall a grammatical point, i.e., present simple, past simple, pronouns, questions, etc...
- To teach language functions, i.e., asking for information, giving explanations, etc...
- To develop students' listening and speaking skills.
- To create an interesting, relaxing atmosphere that helps students in acquiring the new language.

Presenting Chants

The following steps help in presenting a chant to your students:

- Review the main structure in the chant.
- Chant it to familiarize students with it.
- Say one line at a time and ask students to repeat after you.
- Say the line again, clapping or snapping your fingers where the language is stressed as indicated by the asterisks (*)
- Have students repeat the chant several times with clapping or snapping of fingers.
- Write the chant on the blackboard or a chart.
- Many chants are designed for two groups. For these, divide the class into two groups. Group A chants the lines on the left. Group B chants lines on the right. In a question-answer chant, for example, Group A would ask the questions and group B answer them.

Sample Jazz Chants

There are several Jazz Chants in the Hello! Books, for example "A Song", in Hello! 1 (p.14).

Language Goals

Basic greetings, girls, boys

Girls

Hello, boys.
Hello, boys,
How are you?

Boys

We're fine, thanks
We're fine, thanks
We hope you are, too.

Hello, girls
Hello, girls
How are you?

We're fine, thanks.
We're fine, thanks
We hope you are, too.

Teaching Suggestions

- Practice a few lines at a time and work up to the whole chant
- Role play using language from the chant to greet visitors - and use the greetings when visitors arrive.

Hind, Hind, What's in the Fridge?

Language Goals:

Questions and answers

Names for foods

Sounds and rhythms of English

Hind, Hind,

What's in the fridge?

What's in the fridge, Hind?

There's some honey, Ali.

There's some honey, Ali.

There's some honey in the fridge, Ali.

Hind, Hind,

What's in the fridge?

What's in the fridge, Hind?

There's some cheese, Lamees.

There's some cheese, Lamees.

There's some cheese in the fridge, Lamees.

Hind, Hind,

What's in the fridge?

What's in the fridge, Hind?

There's some jam, Riham.

There's some jam, Riham.

There's some jam in the fridge, Riham.

There's some honey, Ali.

There's some cheese, Lamees.

There's some jam, Riham.

(Adapted from Carolyn Graham's Chant: "Midge, Midge, What's in the Fridge?" in Let's Chant, Let's Sing)

Teaching Suggestion:

- Use pictures of food to help children learn the meanings and to put actions into the chant.

Who is Salma?

Language goals:

- Questions and answers
- Letter names and sounds
- Initial, medial and final sounds in English

Who has a name that starts with S?

I do.

She does.

What's her name?

Salma.

Who has a name that ends with A?

I do.

She does.

What's her name?

Salma.

Who has a name with an L in the middle?

I do.

She does.

What's her name?

Salma.

Who is Salma?

I am.

She is.

What's her name?

Salma.

(Adapted from "Who is Sylvia?" From Carolyn Graham's Jazz Chants for Children.)

Teaching Suggestions

- This chant can be performed in three groups.
- Have your class take turns being "Salma" - but using their own names.

Write Your Own Jazz Chants

You can also write your own jazz chants to suit your own teaching points. The jazz chant below was written to help children learn the names for objects in the classroom during the first days of school.

Show me a Friend

A TPR Chant

(McCloskey, 1999)

Language Goals

Follow directions in English

Command forms

Names for objects in the classroom

Making students feel comfortable and helping them use English during the first days of school.

Show me a pencil.
Show me a pen.
Show me some paper.
Show me your friend.

Open the window.
Shut the door.
Hands on the table.
Feet on the floor.

Point to the ceiling.
Point to the ground.
Stand up. Sit down.
Look around

Show me a chalkboard.
Show me a book.
Show me a chair.
Give me a look.

Point to your teacher.
Point to yourself.
Point to the trash can.
Point to the shelf.

Raise your hand high.
Put it down.
Give me a smile.
Never a frown.

Over to the left.
Now to the right.
Stand up. Sit down.
Point to the light.

Show me a pencil.
Show me a pen.
Show me some paper.
Show me a friend.

Teaching Suggestions

- Teach a few stanzas at a time over several days.
- Have the children point to the objects, places as you recite the chant.
- After the children know the chant well, have them perform it for the class in small groups.

Rhymes

Rhymes are words and phrases that have a memorable rhythm and end in the same sound to add a musical effect. Nursery Rhymes are traditional English language rhymes that most children in English-speaking countries learn at

an early age. They can be helpful for learning English as a foreign language, as well, and they have the added benefit of introducing students to important aspects of the cultures of English-speaking countries.

Sample Rhymes:

Humpty Dumpty

Traditional Mother Goose Rhyme

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses, and
All the king's men,
Couldn't put Humpty Together again.

One, Two, Buckle My Shoe

(Traditional Mother Goose Rhyme)

One, two
 Buckle my shoe.
Three, four
 Shut the door.
Five, six
 Pick up sticks
Seven, eight
 Lay them straight.
Nine, ten
 Say it again.

The Twelve Months of the Year

January, February, March, April, May.
These are the months, they're easy to say.
June, July, August, September.
Repeat them with me and you will remember.
October, November and December.
The twelve months of the year are easy to remember.

Thank you, Mommy

This is your day, Mommy,
This is your day, Mommy,

I want you to know
That I love you so.
Thank you, thank you, Mommy.
Who's always there? Mommy.
To love and care? Mommy.
This is your day
And I want to say:
Thank you, thank you, Mommy.

Moving On

I'm a plane
Flying high,
Touching clouds
In the sky.

I'm a boat
Sailing by,
Making waves
Oh so high

I'm a bike
Bright and new,
Won't you take me
Home with you.

Conclusion

In this chapter we dealt with the importance of chants in English language teaching, their functions, the criteria for selecting a chant to suit your class, and some suggested procedures for presenting chants to young learners. Although it might be difficult to get your class used to the new songs, you will find that all children like them very much. We have to take advantage of this kind of love to enrich the language-teaching environment.

voices from the field

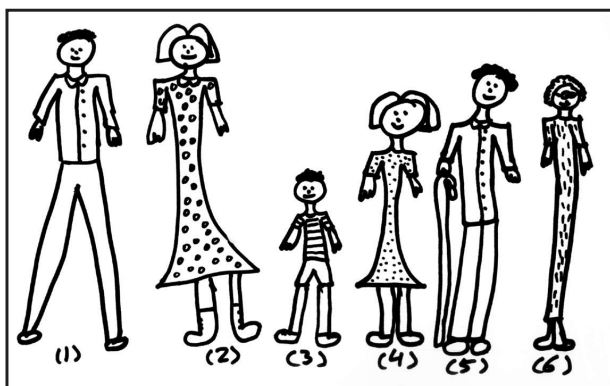
SONGS AND CHANTS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH

Technique: Songs and Chants

Ingy Mohamed Ahmed, FoE, Helwan University, 4th Year,
Department of English and Social Sciences

Hello 2! Second Term, 4th Year, Unit 14, Lesson 1, Page 1 “My Family”

3-5 February, 01



After presenting the new words from Hello! 1, Unit 18, Lesson 1, “My Family”, I wrote the following chant on the board to provide my Ss with more practice:

Chant 1

Verse 1: This is my father.
This is my mother,
This is my brother
This is my family (2X)

Verse 2: This is my sister,
This is my grandfather,
This is my grandmother
This is my family (2X).

At first I read it as a whole to them to provide them with a model. Then I read it line by line pointing to each word and the class repeated after me. (And while the class repeated, I pointed to each word they read).

And then I let the whole class read in one voice, by pointing to each word and they read the chant, and to add more challenge to the atmosphere, I divided the class into 3 groups (A, B, and C). Each group sang the chant. The whole class applauded the best group.

Really I am so amazed and happy about the conclusion, i.e., the result of my work. The students caught on very quickly to the singing, and they liked me singing with them. For this song, I'm sure that my lesson was completely digested, and absorbed easily.

After that when I turned to exercise (b), I encouraged Ss to write their own chants

using the real names of their families.

Chant 2

This is an example of what the class came up with:

Verse 1: This is my father, his name is Ibrahim

 This is my mother, her name is Yassmin

 This is my family. (X2)

Verse 2: This is my brother, his name is Ismail.

 This is my sister, her name is Nermine.

 This is my family. (X2)

Verse 3: This is my grandfather, his name is Mohamed.

 This is my grandmother, her name is Maryam

 This is my family. (X2)

In the Second Period:

I began the new lesson using Chant 2 as a warmup to check whether the students remembered the lesson or not in an indirect way. I found that they had memorized it, yet they still needed more practice.

The students told me that they admired the way I taught them the lesson using songs and chants, and they would like more and more songs/chants in their curriculum

Self-Reflections

1. First of all, when I sang the chant and acted it out to them, the students were astonished, and they took this chant as a joke because of clapping hands, and at the beginning the class was noisy, because they were not accustomed to using this technique in their lessons.
2. It's not a familiar technique in most of our Egyptian classrooms.
3. It needs more and more practice in our classrooms. It can be used as a warmup, or in other stages of the lesson such as practice and production.
4. From my own point of view, using chants helped my students learn the following:
 - a. possessive adjectives: my, his, her
 - b. new vocabulary: father – mother – sister – brother – grandfather- family
 - c. This is my father, his name is Ibrahim (present tense of verb to be)

Supervisor's Reflection

Kawthar Abou Haggar, F oE, Helwan University

Ingy (student teacher) used chants and songs in her fourth year primary class. The regular class teacher Mr. Khalid F ikry attended the lesson with me. He sat next to me but he was restless. Then he asked: "Dr. Can I participate with Ingy?" I said: "Sure." They both started using the technique with groups of pupils and the class turned into a musical band. It was such a wonderful situation.

This situation indicates that the technique is successful, convincing and valuable. What

happened could be interpreted as transfer of training to the regular class teacher.

SONGS AND CHANTS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH

Ayman Khafagy

Student Teacher, Helwan Faculty of Education

28 February, 2001

Dear SPEER Writers,

I'm writing this letter to summarize the song and rhymes technique that is included in the course book. Here are a few extra rhymes that are simple to teach:

Touch Your Nose

Touch your finger/foot/arm/leg/face

Touch your nose

Touch your arm/hand/leg/arm/head

Touch your toes

Look Around

Look left, look right

Look up, look down

Look left, look right

Look around, look around

(Unit 18, Grade (4))

Now let me tell you a story which happened to me when I tried to teach this.

First I wrote the song on the board and read it aloud. The whole class repeated it after me several times. Then, I found out that they were enjoying the lesson and weak pupils were becoming more familiar with English and happy to understand what others were saying. Some teachers came to my class and said: "What's happening?" They noticed that these techniques are very useful for the learning process.

The following day, the father of one of the pupils came and thanked me because his son became good in English. I am very happy with my class.

We thank you very much for this activity.

Key Terminology:

Action Song

A song that is sung with actions performed by the students. Children make gestures and move their body along with a song. Total Physical Response (TPR), or giving learners commands to perform, is often used in such songs.

Chants

Rhyming, rhythmic language that is spoken by the class in chorus repetition, sometimes with actions .

Jazz Chants

Special chants written to help with English language learning.

Gestures

Facial expressions and hand and body actions that can convey meaning.

Refrain

A phrase repeated after every verse of a song. This part of the song is very important and useful for language learning because this phrase is likely to be the first one memorized by children singing the song.

Rhyme

Words and phrases that end in the same sound to add a musical effect. The rhyme scheme varies according to the song.

Nursery Rhymes

Short poems with rhyme, rhythm and repetition often used by young children learning their mother tongue. They can also be very useful for young foreign language learners.

Understanding Check:

1. What will you do with a class that loves songs very much, yet are very weak in English?
2. What are the steps for teaching a new song?
3. When you enter the class, you are faced with a storm of " We want to have a new song!" while you want to explain the new lesson. What will you do?

4. Is it possible to get your students, here in Egypt, to write their own English songs, or at least put English rhymes and poems to music? How would you help them do this?
 5. What are some good sources of songs, chants and rhymes for you to use in your classroom?
-

Resources

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Vale, D. and Feuteun, A. (1995). *Teaching Children English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

There are many, many sources of songs, chants and rhymes for children on the internet. Some have tunes that will play on your computer so you can learn to

sing them. Here are a few rich sources:

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Summary Handout for Chapter 4: Songs, Chants and Rhymes in ELT

Songs, Chants and Rhymes in ELT

Why do we use them?

- To create a relaxed non-threatening atmosphere that helps in increasing pupils' interest and motivation to learn the target language.
- To develop pupils' listening and speaking and help in the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar.

Which ones do we choose?

We choose those that meet the following criteria:

- Limited vocabulary
- Limited musical challenge
- Not many cultural differences
- Content within the life experiences of children
- Straightforward and repetitive rhythm
- Reflective of the target culture
- Better if accompanied by actions
- Compatible with the language used in the class

How do we present them?

- Write the song on the blackboard or on a wall chart.
- Prepare Ss by telling them what the song is about and play a recording or sing it yourself
- Go through the words or key words and illustrate their meaning through gestures or visuals
- Say the song line by line. Sing it a line at a time. Students repeat, then sing another line until you sing the entire song.
- If the song is longer than 4 lines, don't teach it all in one period.
- Play the cassette again or sing it and have students sing along.