

SINGING GAMES IN THE UPPER ELEMENTARY

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Children + play + music = singing games! There is perhaps nothing more playful in music class than singing games. Yet students in the upper elementary grades are going through social and emotional transitions that can make them hard for music teachers to reach: indeed, they are becoming “too cool for school.” Because of this, not all games are successful. What makes a good game for upper elementary students? Where can they be found? And most importantly, can we play some?

Why play singing games in the elementary classroom?

- get students singing
- allow time in class for students to re-focus
- create community in the classroom
- use songs to extract elements for literacy
- sing multicultural music(s)
- have fun!

What do students in upper elementary like?

- games with movement
- games with competition
- tunes with syncopation
- tunes with minor/modal/blues-y melodies
- games that pose a challenge

Potential challenges:

- overwhelming rambunctiousness!
- elimination games: what happens to students who get out?
- getting students to sing
- bad sportsmanship
- hand-holding

How to teach:

- step by step
- layer challenges
- differentiate instruction
- decide: game before song, song before game, or both at the same time

Aquaqua

Israel

A - qua - qua del - a o - mar qua, qua, qua, Del si - ma tri - co

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tri - co, tri - co, tra Va lo, va lo, va lo, va la va la, va lo,

Source: First grade students of Givat Mordecai, in Jerusalem, Israel; September, 1979. Collected by Rita Klinger.

Game: Standing circle, left palms up, right palms down; lightly touching both neighbors' hands. The beat is passed from right hand to the neighbor's right hand, until the end of the singing. On “1, 2, 3, 4, 5,” the action speeds up. If the person who is supposed to get the tap on “5” gets his/her hand out of the way in time, the one who tapped goes in the middle of the circle for the next round. If the person who's supposed to get the tap on “5” isn't quick enough and does get tapped, he/she goes into the middle.

Big Fat Biscuit

Big fat bis-cuit, Chew - be-lew. Just from the o - ven, Chew - be-lew. Jump o - very on - der, Chew - be-lew.

Game: Students line up side by side, three to six at a time. At the end of the song, all students yell, “Jump!” The students in the line jump, flat-footed, competing to see who can jump the furthest. The winners from each round meet up in the final to see who is the champion jumper for the day.

Chicken in the Fencepost

Chick-en in the fence - post, can't dance Jo - sey, Chick-en in the fence - post, can't dance Jo - sey,

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Chick - en in the fence - post, can't dance Jo - sey, Hel - lo Su - san Brown - ie - o!

Game: Two standing concentric circles of unequal size, holding hands, with a stuffed chicken in the middle. Two students (“the chicken-hunters”) stand outside the circles. While the chicken-hunters hide their eyes, the teacher chooses one pair of people in each circle to be “doors.” The class sings, while the two circles move in opposite directions. At the end of the song, the circles stop moving, the doors fly open, and the two chicken-hunters scramble to try to be the first one through the both doors to grab the chicken in the middle. The winner can pretend to eat it!

More challenging options:

- more than one door in each circle
- more than two chicken-hunters
- more than two circles
- circles continue to move once song ends

Epo I Tai Tai E

E-po i tai tai e - E-po i tai tai e - E-po i tai tai E-po i tu-ki tu-ki, E-po i tu-ki tu-ki e.

Maori song from New Zealand.

Possible translation: We shall not be sad, we will only be happy (from http://gsmusic.com/music/lyrics/v11_pdf/epo_i_tai_tai_e.pdf) and <http://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=translatoin+epo+i+tai+tai+e&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>)

Game: Clapping game. With partners, students perform the following patsch pattern on the beat: 2 beats patting own lap, 2 beats clapping own hands, 4 beats clapping partners hands. Repeat until end of song. For added complication, partners can face each other in two concentric circles. After each complete patsch pattern, all players step one person to the right, for a new partner.

Four White Horses

U.S. Virgin Islands

Four white hor- ses, up the ri - ver, Hey, hey, hey, Up to-mor-row, up to-mor-row is a rai - ny day.

7
Come on and join our sha-dow play. Sha-dow play is a ripe ba - na - na, up to-mor-row is a rai - ny day.

Game: Two sets of partners (four players) form a square, standing opposite each other within arms reach. Students perform the following clapping pattern. Note that the pattern is in 6/4 meter, the song in 4/4.

1. The “ones” clap partners’ palms above shoulder level. The “twos” do the same with hands pointing down, at waist level.
2. All clap own hands together.
3. “Ones” clap below, “twos” above.
4. All clap own hands together.
5. Hands pointing up, all clap neighbors’ hands, L and R.
6. Clap own hands together.

For added challenge, try increasing the tempo of the song, or inviting players to close their eyes.

Possible teaching strategy:

Class 1: five-minute lesson segment. Students sit in rows.

- Teacher sings song two times, students identify what part of the world it might come from
- Teacher sings and demonstrates patsch pattern, students try to figure it out on own
If necessary, teacher breaks down for students
- Teacher sings, students do patsch pattern with the teacher as their “long-distance partner”
Repeat 2-3 times.

Class 2: six-minute lesson segment. Students sit in rows to start.

- Teacher sings, students perform patsch pattern with teacher as long-distance partner
- Teacher sings while performing patsch pattern with one student; class watches
- Without singing, students turn and face a partner, figure out patsch pattern with partner
- Teacher sings song slowly, while students perform patsch pattern with partner. Repeat.
- Repeat (d), but students sing “if they think they can handle the challenge”
- If time, repeat with a different partner. Teacher pairs stronger and weaker students.

Class 3: five-minute lesson segment. Students begin in rows to start.

- Students sing song, first with the teacher, then without. From here on out, the students are responsible for the singing. Repeat if necessary.
- Students sing, perform patsch pattern with partners. Repeat.
- Two successful pairs form a group of four, practice briefly. Less successful pairs continue working in groups of two. Repeat, if necessary.
- All pairs join to form groups of four. Practice patsch without singing.
- All groups of four perform patsch pattern while singing the song. Repeat 2-3 times.

Class 4: five-minute lesson segment. Students begin in groups of four, facing each other.

- In groups of four, students review patsch pattern
- Students perform patsch pattern while singing the song
- Successful groups of four invited to “close your eyes for an extra challenge”
- Repeat, if students don’t dissolve with laughter.
- Repeat, with faster tempo.

Guru Ndiani

Gu - ru Ndi - a - ni jong - we

Ha jong - we Gu - ru!

*From Zimbabwe. Collected from Lora Chiora-Dye. Used with permission.
Translation: Who will fight the chicken?*

Note: the last word of the second part is chanted/yelled, not sung.

Game: Standing circle. The class sings the song repeatedly, while two players stand on one leg in the middle of the circle, arms crossed over their chests. While hopping, they try to knock each other off balance. The first one to have both feet touch the ground is the loser. It works best if the students are of the same gender, and roughly the same size/weight.

Hey, Betty Martin

Hey, Bet - ty Mar - tin, tip - toe, tip - toe, Hey, Bet - ty Mar - tin, tip - toe fine;

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Hey, Bet - ty Mar - tin, tip - toe, tip - toe, Hey Bet - ty Mar - tin, tip - toe fine.

Game: Students sing the song and tip toe around the room. At the end of the song, they freeze. Anyone caught moving by the teacher (or other judge) is eliminated. Continue play, with different movements (jump, march, float, skip, crawl, slither, disco, surf, shower, scratch, etc.), until one student remains.

I Lost the Farmer's Dairy Key

I lost the far-mer's dai - ry key, I'm in some la - dy's gar - den, Do, do, let me out, I'm in some la - dy's gar - den.

Game: Rock/Paper/Scissors game. Formation: two concentric circles, where the inside circle is "stuck in the garden." After singing the song, the students speak: "Rock, rock, scissors; rock, rock, paper; rock, rock, rock, rock, rock, rock, choose!" On "choose," the students show either rock, paper, or scissors. Rock beats scissors, scissors beats paper, paper beats rock. If the person on the inside wins, then he/she gets out of the garden, by switching places with the loser. If the inside player loses or there is a tie, no one changes. For added excitement, the teacher can yell out "Switch!" in the middle of a round, at which point the outside circle moves one player to the right, thereby facing a new player. Calling "switch" more than one time in a round ratchets the excitement level up that much more!

Game from *As American as Apple Pie*, the fantastic resource by Jeff Kriske and Randy DeLelles. Used with permission.

Jump Shamador

Call: Response:
5 Good mor - ning to you daugh - ter, Good mor - ning to you, mo - ther,
C: R: C: R:
13 What is your in - ten - tion, I want to be a tea cher, You can't be a tea - cher, I must be a tea cher,
All:
Jump sha - ma - dor me dar - lin', Jump sha - ma - dor me dear. Jump sha - ma - dor me dar - lin', Jump sha - ma - dor me dear.

From *Caribbean Songs and Games (Folkways album 7856)*, ed. Edet; transcribed C. Roberts, 6/09

Game: "The mother walks around the ring picking daughters at random. The child gives the profession. The mother answers, emphasizing her objections by shaking her head and stomping her feet. Each child gets a chance to be the 'mother.'" Between each verse the words "Jump Shamador" are spoken four times.

Navajo Happy Song

9
 Hi - o hi - o - ip - pee a - na, hi - o hi - o - ip - pee a - na, hi - o, hi - o - ip - pee
 a - na hi - o, hi - o - ip - pee a - na, hi - o, hi - o hi - o

Collected by Ellen McCullough-Brabson, in the Southwestern United States.

Translation: Vocables, with no meaning.

Game: Seated circle, sitting so that students' knees are almost touching those of their neighbors. In order of difficulty, perform the following patsching ostinati while singing:

1. O O F F
2. O O L L
3. O O R R
4. O O L L O O F F O O R R O O F F
5. O L O F O R O F

O = Pat own lap

F = Pat floor

L = Move hands one knee to the left; i.e. right hand on own left knee; left hand on neighbor's right knee

R = Move hands one knee to the right

Pak, Pak

Pak, pak, ka - a - ak, Sin, si - nu ma - a - ak.

*From The Philippines, Collected by Miriam Factora
 Used with permission*

Game: Groups of four or five, in a standing circle, facing counter-clockwise. The first player places his inside foot (right foot) at a 90 degree angle. Moving counter-clockwise around the circle, the next player also extends his/her foot 90 degrees, placing his foot on the calf of player one. Repeat for players 3 and 4. Once the circle is set, sing the song, hopping around on the left foot. For upper elementary students, it is often most fun if the tempo gradually increases, moving until the players fall down. Balance can be an issue as this game is starting, and it helps to rest your right hand on the shoulder of the player in front of you.

Quack Diddioso

8
 Quack did - dli - o - so Quack quack quack, sing san ma - ri - co, ri - co, ri - co,
 ri - co, va - lo - ra, va - lo - ra, va - lo, va - lo, va - lo va - lo!

Source: As sung by fifth grade students in Seattle, WA, in June, 2007. Transcribed by C. Roberts

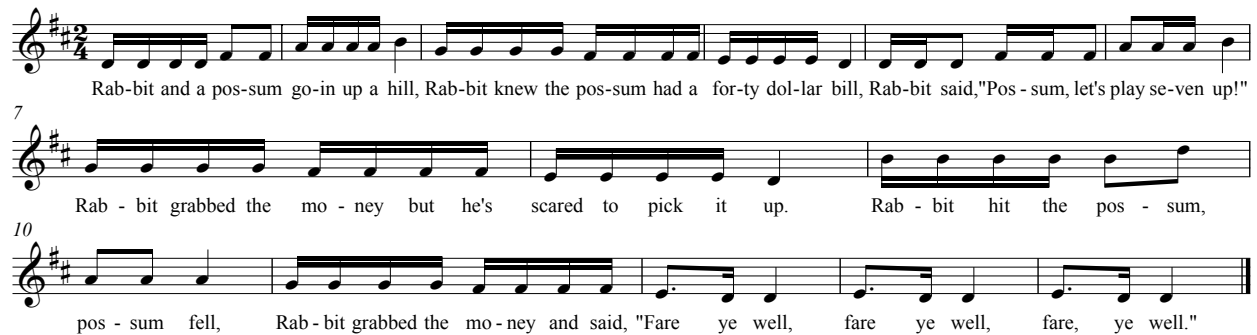
Spoken: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5!

Translation: Vocables, with no meaning.

Game: Seated circle. Students extend their left hand to their left, palm up, and then place their right hand in their neighbor's open hand on their right. As the song is sung, the beat gets passed from hand to hand around the circle.

Once the song is finished, the students count from one to five, passing the beat all the while. On “five,” the person whose hand is about to be (gently!) patted tries to move it before being touched. If they move their hand in time, the player trying to tag him/her (“four”) is out; if not, player “five” is out. The game then begins again. During the counting portion of the game, it is appropriate to go out of tempo, i.e. as fast as they can!

Rabbit and a Possum



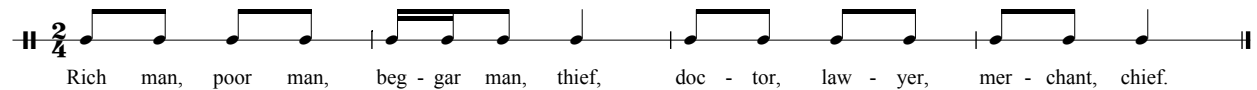
Rab-bit and a pos-sum go-in up a hill, Rab-bit knew the pos-sum had a for-ty dol-lar bill, Rab-bit said, "Pos - sum, let's play se-ven up!"

Rab - bit grabbed the mo - ney but he's scared to pick it up. Rab - bit hit the pos - sum,

pos - sum fell, Rab-bit grabbed the mo-ney and said, "Fare ye well, fare ye well, fare, ye well."

Game: Like the swimming pool game, Marco Polo. Seated circle. As the song is sung, two players (the “rabbit” and the “possum”) stand in the center of the circle, acting out the story. At the end of the song’s tale, the possum is left without his 40-dollar bill, and he tries to get it back. To do this, the possum stands up, covers his eyes with one hand, and with the other tries to find the rabbit. The possum calls out “Rabbit!,” to which the rabbit must answer, “Possum!” Both players remain inside the circle, until the rabbit is caught, or some pre-determined time runs out. The two animals each choose new students to take their places, and play resumes.

Rich Man, Poor Man




Rich man, poor man, beg - gar man, thief, doc - tor, law - yer, mer - chant, chief.

One can change “Rich man” to “Rich woman,” if desired.

Game: Counting-out rhyme. Standing circle. Teacher points to students on each beat, naming them as “Rich man,” etc. At the end of each round, the “chief” sits down, eliminated from play. Continue until one person is left: the final rich man (or woman)!

Sagidi, Sapopo



Sa-gi-di, Sa-gi-di, Sa-po-po, Sa-gi-di, Sa-gi-di, Sa-po-po, Sa-gi-di, Sa-gi-di, Sa-po-po, Sa-gi-di, Sa-gi-di, Sa-po-po.

Philippines

Source: Factora, M. B. (1995). *Musical folk games of Manila (Philippines)*, p. 51.

Also found in: Boshkoff, R., & Sorenson, K. (Eds.). (1995). *The OAKE collection of multicultural songs, games, and dances*. Fargo, ND: OAKE. p. 37.

Translation: Tagalog is the main language in the Philippines, but these words are vocables, with no meaning.

Game: Improvisatory game. While the whole group chants the rhyme repetitively, a leader performs a movement on each beat of the measure, changing movements at the start of each measure. The rest of the players imitate the movement a measure later, in canonic fashion. Once successful, the movements can be performed in canon with three or more groups. For an additional challenge, the children can perform the canon with one player on a part.

Sansa Kroma

Akan, Ghana

San - sa kro - ma Nee neh woo aw-che-che ko-ko-ma. San - sa kro - ma Nee neh woo aw-che-che ko-ko mah.

9
San - sa kro - ma nee neh woo aw-che-che ko-ko-ma. San - sa kro - ma Nee neh woo aw-che-che ko-ko-ma.

Source: Adzenyah, A. K, Maraire, D., & Cook Tucker, J. (Eds.) (1986/1996). *Let Your voice be heard! Songs from Ghana and Zimbabwe*. Danbury, CT: World Music Press. (p. 43-45).

Translation: Sansa, the hawk. You are an orphan, so you snatch up baby chicks.

Game: Beat-passing game. Seated circle. A rock (or rocks) is passed around the circle, picked up on the first beat and passed on the third. Alternate passing game, using a two-measure passing pattern: Tap the rock on the ground on beats 1 and 3 of the first measure; pass on beat 1 of the second measure; clap on beat 3 of the second measure.

Simama Kaa, Ruka

Si - ma - ma kaa, Si - ma - ma kaa, Ru - ka, ru - ka, ru - ka, Si - ma - ma - kaa.

Collected by Kedmon Mpana, in Dodoma, Tanzania. Used with permission.

Translation:

Simama: Stand up

Kaa: Sit down

Ruka: Jump

Game: Start the song seated in a chair. Act out the movements as you sing them, jumping on the beat for all of measure three (i.e. four times).

Tarzan, the Monkey Man

Tar - zan, the mon-key man, swing-ing from the rub-ber band. Splish, splash, take a bath, the co - lor is (blue)!

Collected by Melissa Roth, in Texas. Used with permission.

“Tarzan” Game: Seated circle. Students extend their left hand to their left, palm up, and then place their right hand in their right-hand neighbor’s open hand. As the song is sung, the beat gets passed from hand to hand around the circle. On the last word of the song, the student who is about to tap their neighbor yells out a color (blue, red, etc.). The students continue to pass the beat while they spell out the color, adding “and you are out!” at the end. On the word “out,” the person whose hand is about to be (gently!) patted tries to move it before being touched. If he/she moves his/her hand in time, the player trying to tag him/her is out; if not, the tagged player is eliminated. The game then begins again. During the spelling portion of the game, it is appropriate to go out of tempo, i.e. as fast as they can!

Slightly more challenging: Do not chant “and you are out!” but end the game as the players finish spelling the word. This way, they have to anticipate where the ending will be, and it won’t be the same every round.

Telephone Song

Call: Response: Call: Response: C:

Hey, John-ny! I think I hear my name, Hey John-ny! I think I hear it a-gain, You're wan-ted on the

6 R: C:

te - le phone, If it i - sn't Ma-ry, then I'm not home, With a rick-tick-tick-e - ty tick— Oh yeah.

Sources: (1) *American Methodology* (Robertson/Eisen); (2) Per Rita Klinger: *It was collected by Marilyn Murata, who learned it from children in New York City in the summer of 1976.*

Tideo

Pass one win-dow, Ti - de - o, Pas two win-dows, Ti - de - o, Pass three win-dows, Ti - de - o, Jin-gle at the win-dow,

8 Ti-de- o. Ti-de- o, ti-de- o, Jin-gle at the win-dow, Ti-de- o. Ti-de- o, ti-de- o, Jin-gle at the win-dow, Ti-de- o.

Sources: *150 American Folksongs to Sing, Read, and Play* (Choksy/Brummitt); *American Folk Songs for Children*; *Handy Play Party Book* (Rohrbough/Riddell); *Bought Me a Cat* (Trinka)

Game: A double circle of players, partners facing each other. Each time the students sing “pass,” they step one person to their right. Each time they sing “Ti-de-o,” they pat their legs, clap their hands, and pat both hands of their partner. When they sing “jingle at the window,” they wring the dishrag: joining hands, turn all the way around. To make the last part more challenging, students can attempt to jump 360 degrees, without touching the ground.

Vamos a Jugar

Va-mos a ju - gar el jue-go, de la oc-ca oc-ca che. Va-lo va-lo va-lo va-lo me; Chi-co chi-co chi-co chi-co che.

Spoken: uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho, nueve, diez!

Collected by Sally Trenfield, in 1995, from her students in Texas. Used with permission.

Game: Seated circle. Students extend their left hand to their left, palm up, and then place their right hand in their neighbor’s open hand on their right. As the song is sung, the beat gets passed from hand to hand around the circle. Once the song is finished, the students count from uno to diez in Spanish, passing the beat all the while. On “diez,” the person whose hand is about to be (gently!) patted tries to move it before being touched. If they move their hand in time, the player trying to tag him/her (“nueve”) is out; if not, player “diez” is out. The game then begins again. During the counting portion of the game, it is appropriate to go out of tempo, i.e. as fast as they can!

Other resources for singing games for all ages:

Jill Trinka: *Little Black Bull*; *Bought Me a Cat*; *My Little Rooster*; and *John the Rabbit*

The Amidons: *Jump Jim Joe* and *Down in the Valley*

Lois Choksy and David Brummitt: *120 Singing Games and Dances for Elementary Schools*

Lamar Robertson and Ann Eisen: *An American Methodology*

Local and national workshops! Great material can often be found at Orff, Kodaly, and NAFME workshops and conferences