Let’s Start the Music
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Let’s Start the Music
Programming for Primary Grades

AMY BROWN

An imprint of the American Library Association
Chicago | 2014

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Printed in the United States of America
18 17 16 15 14  5 4 3 2 1

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ISBNs: 978-0-8389-1166-2 (paper); 978-0-8389-9692-8 (PDF). For more information on digital formats, visit the ALA Store at alastore.ala.org and select eEditions.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Brown, Amy, 1976-
Let's start the music : programming for primary grades / Amy Brown. 
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Z718.3.B76 2014
027.62'5—dc23
2013010871

Cover design by Casey Bayer. Image © Shutterstock, Inc.
Text design by Kirstin Krutsch in Snidley and Gentium Book Basic.

This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48–1992 (Permanence of Paper).

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To my mom, Cindy, who started me on this magical musical journey
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family for their love and support and for helping me check out all those books and CDs from the library. Thank you, Mom, for sharing your many musical tips and classroom experiences with me. Megan, thank you for editing the manuscript (several times!) and for encouraging me through this whole process. Molly, thank you for introducing me to the theory of multiple intelligences and the wonders of programming with kazoos. Stephanie Zvirin, ALA acquisitions editor, thank you for giving me this amazing opportunity and for all of your help along the way.
Introduction

One summer I shared with a group of first through third graders one of my all-time favorite stories, Abiyoyo, by Pete Seeger (Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2001). Abiyoyo is about a boy and his father who each has a talent that annoys the neighboring town. The boy plays his ukulele, and the father plays magical jokes on unsuspecting neighbors. When the townsfolk have had enough, they send the two away, only to realize later that they need their special talents when a huge, slobbery giant comes to town. This story has it all: magic, a giant, a child with a great big idea that saves the day, and a catchy song that kids can sing with enthusiasm.

Before reading the book, I taught children the song. Then, as I read the story, they had an opportunity to join in and sing it over and over. After the library program finished, a boy ran out to his mother and excitedly told her about the tale and singing the song. The mother told me how happy she was because she remembered both from her childhood and was thrilled to be able to check out the book and share that memory with her son.

Musical moments like this are special. Think back on some of your favorite musical memories. What song did you listen to over and over? What musical memory or experience is vivid for you? When I was growing up, my mom and siblings and I would dance in the kitchen to Carole King while making dinner. I remember my first job, hoeing a massive field of beans (I grew up on a farm), and then using my paycheck to buy a radio. That began my love affair with the radio station CK 105.5. I remember my last piano recital and the hardest piece I’ve every played, Rachmaninoff’s Prelude in C Sharp Minor. The boys I took piano lessons with often got the fast, loud, and fun recital pieces, but not that time.

Musical experiences can be memory making and magical, and that’s why I love sharing music with children. It’s thrilling to see kids excitedly sharing songs they’ve learned in a program or to hear a boy say that he can’t wait for

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the next library event because he’s going to make a shoe-box guitar. I love it when I listen to a new children’s song and know just the group to share it with. I enjoy watching kids play with instruments they’ve never seen and try to figure out how they work. Music has power. It’s social, it’s creative, it’s play, it’s improvising, and it’s learning. It’s not just singing in tune, taking piano lessons, or having innate talent. Music is for everybody, and it connects with each of us in unique ways. Sometimes, as adults, we forget the joy of music, the thrill of creating, and the enjoyment of sharing that experience with others. It becomes easy to say, “I can’t sing,” or “I’m too old to learn how to play an instrument.”

My hope is that this book will provide entertaining, easy-to-implement ideas, and helpful resources for using music with children in primary grades. You don’t have to know how to play an instrument or need to be able to sing in tune. Trust me, I do not have a perfectly in-tune voice. I often joke that I can tell when I’m not singing in tune, but that doesn’t mean I can fix the situation! I also don’t play a guitar or the piano in my programs, although many people do. That’s OK. Children don’t care about whether you have a good voice. They don’t care if you mess up on a rhythm or do the wrong steps in a line dance. Those mistakes make it easier for them to experiment, to try new things, and to not worry about having to be perfect. They just want to play and have fun. That’s all they want from you, too.

I believe in the following musical premises and have written this book based on them:

- We all have musical talent.
- There are many ways to be musical.
- We can grow in our musical ability.
- Music has powerful benefits in our lives.
- Music is meant to be shared.
- The library is a great place to experience and experiment with music.

In this book you will find information about the importance of using music with children; ways to introduce children to songs and instruments; thirteen ready-made thematic program plans; an appendix of action songs and an appendix with a cross-reference of additional themed resources.

The thematic programs are designed to be used with children in kindergarten through third grade. Each theme starts with an outline (“playlist”)

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for an hour-long program that is composed of books, songs, an activity, and an opportunity for making and using musical instruments like kazoos, guitars, drums, and shakers. My philosophy is to always overplan for a program. I never know how many kids I’m going to have, what the majority age is going to be, or how they will respond to the material that I’ve prepared. Sometimes a book or song will take much longer to share because the crowd is interacting with the material and really responding to it. Sometimes four books will be too much for an active group, and most of the program ends up being songs and activities. Other times the group wants more stories. I have a plan and flow for the program, but in the moment, I tailor it to each group. You may find that a playlist has too many songs or that you don’t have time to do the activity and the musical instrument. Please adjust the material to your group and programming style.

I start my programs by introducing the theme. To do this, I share some information about the topic and ask the group questions. For example, in the theme that looks at sound, I have children close their eyes and listen to a sound. Then I ask them to guess what makes that sound. Sometimes I share facts, riddles, or realia relating to the theme. After introducing the theme, I start with a song and alternate between reading stories and sharing songs for thirty to forty minutes.

I like to have an activity or game in each program. Sometimes I’ll do the activity at the beginning, giving the group something to work on while we wait for latecomers to arrive. Other times I use it to transition to the instrument craft. I finish the program with children working together to design their own instrument. During this time, I play music in the background. For kids who finish early, I have books for them to look at and a collection of musical instruments they can explore.

Everyone has unique programming styles and what works for one person may not work for another. For that reason, I’ve included “bonus books” and “bonus tracks” for each theme. These are additional mix-and-match options so that you can pick and choose material that is most comfortable for you. There is enough material for additional programs on the same theme or variants of the theme.

My hope is that this book will help you discover new tales, entertaining songs, and interactive activities that will assist you in creating musical memories with children.

Let the music making begin!
Ten years ago a librarian friend of mine introduced me to Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (MI theory), and I began rethinking how I use music in library programming. I embarked on a reading journey that changed how I looked at the process of learning; what it means to be smart; and how to make library programming appealing to a variety of children, not just those who naturally gravitate toward books and reading.

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES: WHAT ARE THEY?

Howard Gardner developed the theory of multiple intelligences in the early 1980s. The theory is based on the belief that intelligence is more intricate and varied than people sometimes realize. A score on an IQ test doesn’t tell the whole story about people and their intelligence. Gardner writes, “I believe that human cognitive competence is better described in terms of a set of abilities, talents, or mental skills, which I call *intelligences*.1 There are eight intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist.

The theory of multiple intelligences has the following premises:

- Everyone has eight intelligences, but not everyone has the same skill level for each intelligence. For example, an artist may be very strong in the bodily-kinesthetic and spatial intelligences but not as strong in the logical-mathematical intelligence.
Each intelligence is multifaceted. There’s more than one way to demonstrate an aptitude for an intelligence. For example, with musical intelligence one person may be a proficient pianist while another writes emotional lyrics and yet another selects the perfect song to be played during a pivotal movie scene.

The intelligences aren’t static (this is one of my favorite premises). We can improve upon them. Although I grew up on a farm, I am not strong in the naturalist intelligence. That doesn’t mean that I’m hopeless or that I can’t grow in that intelligence with time and work.

Intelligences are not exclusive of each other. They mix together in amazing and intricate ways. Imagine yourself as a surgeon. You may use music to help you focus on the task or to keep you relaxed through the hours of grueling surgery. You use your interpersonal skills to communicate with the people on your surgical team. You use your spatial skills to visualize what needs to happen during the surgery, and you use the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence to execute the intricate movements required for a successful surgery.

THE EIGHT INTELLIGENCES

This section includes a brief synopsis of each of the intelligences. I have included MI theory resources at the end of the section for further study.

Linguistic intelligence: Linguistic people have an affinity for language and working with language. They can do this through the written word, through storytelling, or through giving speeches. A child who is strong in this intelligence might enjoy a book like *Rip the Page! Adventures in Creative Writing*, by Karen Benke (Trumpeter, 2010). Or he or she might want to try some of the suggested activities, like keeping a favorite word list or creating spoonerisms.

Logical-mathematical: Logical-mathematical people may be strong in logic, math, and science. They may enjoy puzzles, word problems, and science experiments. Kids who are strong in this intelligence often like nonfiction books that explain how and why. They might like a book like *Cool Special Effects: How to Stage Your Very Own Show*, by Karen Latchana Kenney (ABDO Publishing, 2010), which might appeal to them because it explains the science behind light and sound effects.
Musical: Musical people may play instruments, hear rhythms, notice what is out of tune, write their own music, or critique the music of others. They may like to sing, compose pieces, craft playlists for special events, or participate in a band. They might read a book like Learn to Speak Music: A Guide to Creating, Performing, and Promoting Your Songs, by John Crossingham and illustrated by Jeff Kulak (Owlkids Books, 2009). Then they might use what they learn to help them decide what instrument to play and how to write a song.

Spatial: Spatial people use their visual abilities to help them learn and process information. They may express themselves in images. Sketching, photography, and design are activities they may gravitate toward. They might like to do crayon scratchboard creations or eraser art from the book Art Lab for Kids: 52 Creative Adventures in Drawing, Painting, Printmaking, Paper, and Mixed Media, by Susan Schwake (Quarry Books, 2012).

Bodily-kinesthetic: Bodily-kinesthetic people use their body to learn, to create, and to communicate. They may have coordination and precision of movement. They might enjoy sports, dance, physical comedy, and building or making things. They might learn choreography and various dance styles from books like Learn to Speak Dance: A Guide to Creating, Performing, and Promoting Your Moves, by Ann-Marie Williams and illustrated by Jeff Kulak (Owlkids Books, 2011).

Interpersonal: Interpersonal people know how to read a crowd and communicate to a group. They may enjoy working in teams, leading a group or activity, or teaching others how to do something. They might want to plan a block party to help neighbors get to know one another or create a cleanup day for the neighborhood. They might learn how to do these things by reading a book like Ways to Help in Your Community, by Claire O’Neal (Mitchell Lane Publishers, 2011).

Intrapersonal: Intrapersonal people seek to understand themselves better. They are honest about their strengths and weaknesses and may like to take personality quizzes or spend time in self-reflection. They may enjoy reading a book like You’re Smarter Than You Think: A Kid’s Guide to Multiple Intelligences, by Thomas Armstrong (Free Spirit Publishing, 2003). The book has quizzes they can take to see what intelligences they are strong in. It also has suggestions for activities they can do to improve their intelligence in different areas.

Naturalist: Naturalist people pay close attention to their environment. They may like to explore nature or classify things in their neighborhood, like the different architectural elements that can be found on a city street. A child who is strong in the naturalist intelligence might enjoy growing carrots or sweet
potatoes in the kitchen or planting a pizza garden. These activities and more can be found in the book *The Budding Gardener*, edited by Mary B. Rein and illustrated by Jane Dippold (Gryphon House, 2011).  

The following books have additional information about MI theory:


**LIBRARY PROGRAMMING WITH MI THEORY**

When I started programming using MI theory, I began to look at music differently. Music became more than playing a song on a CD that fit with the theme of the day. I explored new ways for children to interact with music and ways to use music to interact with the other intelligences.

For each of the programs in this book, I include a variety of ways to connect with music, and I incorporate at least several of the intelligences. Some of the techniques that I use are the following:

- Asking questions to help children relate the theme to themselves and to others (intrapersonal and interpersonal)
- Including movement activities like playing instruments, engaging in games, or participating in action songs (bodily-kinesthetic)
- Highlighting nonfiction books that have facts, puzzles, jokes, or science experiments that connect to the theme (logical-mathematical)
- Bringing in musical instruments for children to look at and play (spatial and bodily-kinesthetic)
- Using natural or recycled elements for instruments and sharing books that feature nature (naturalist)

**Music and Early Literacy**

Not only is music an important part of MI theory; it is also a vital part of early literacy. In the summer of 2011, the Public Library Association and Associa-

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nation for Library Service to Children rolled out the second edition of the toolkit Every Child Ready to Read®, an update to the early literacy initiative Every Child Ready to Read. The new framework has five practices that parents and caregivers can do with their children to help them develop early literacy skills. One of those practices is singing, and music helps children develop early literacy skills in a couple of ways.

Let’s look at the song “Old MacDonald Had a Farm.” When we sing the song, we sing the words slower than we would say them, allowing children to hear the individual words. Also, in many songs the syllables of words are associated with different musical notes. This is an auditory clue that helps children realize that words are made up of different sounds. Both of these musical traits assist with phonological awareness.

Just like picture books, songs use words and describe objects that children might not be familiar with. If you sing “Old MacDonald” and include a variety of different animals, like goats, llamas, chickens, and rabbits, children who don’t live on a farm and aren’t familiar with farmers can learn about them. This increases their vocabulary.

Singing songs like “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” are enjoyable for young children because they can make the animal sounds and help develop additional verses. They participate in the creation of music while at the same time having fun with language. This assists with print motivation. For more information about the five practices, check out Every Child Ready to Read®, Second Edition Kit (ALSC and PLA, 2011).

**Additional Benefits of Music**

Music is social and can be used to create community. We play music during many types of family and community events, such as birthdays, weddings, and graduations. Playing musical instruments in a band or a class requires that musicians work together to create music. Bobby McFerrin once said, “The most wonderful thing about music is that it’s not really meant to be kept close to the breast, as they say. You know it’s not for yourself alone. I think music is something to be shared with people.” In the library or classroom setting, learning songs together, playing musical games, and creating music are all social activities.

Music can also be used to elicit emotion. When we want to feel a certain way, we might pick music that will help us experience that emotion. People exercise to upbeat, energetic music. Moviemakers create soundtracks to emphasize the
emotion in pivotal scenes. Music played during children’s library programming can also set the tone. A quiet interlude may calm a crowd. An energetic, silly song may cause laughter.

Music inspires movement. It’s very hard to listen to music and not move. Nodding the head, swaying from side to side, snapping fingers, clapping hands, and tapping toes are all natural responses to music. Including action songs in programs can help refocus a restless audience or add an enjoyable interactive element.

Music helps with memory. Some teachers use rap music to help their students remember math and science concepts. A song about space might help kids learn and remember the names of the planets months later. A song about the Dewey decimal system can help children remember where to find science books or fairy tales. Throughout history music has been used to tell stories. People have passed down traditional songs from generation to generation to share important information.

Music also inspires creativity, improvisation, and play, and we can find examples of this innovation throughout the ages. Instruments and musical genres change over time as people and cultures interact with them. The amazing thing about music is that we all have the opportunity to be a part of the music conversation and create our own musical story.

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