TUNE UP TO LITERACY

ORIGINAL SONGS AND ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS

DR. AL BALKIN
TUNE UP TO LITERACY
TUNE UP TO LITERACY

ORIGINAL SONGS AND ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS

DR. AL BALKIN

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
CHICAGO   2009
Dr. Al Balkin, Western Michigan University professor emeritus and composer/lyricist, has taught music at every level, from nursery school to graduate school. A consistent ASCAP award recipient, Dr. Balkin has written songs that have appeared on CBS television’s Captain Kangaroo and on NBC, PBS, and CBS network radio. His song cycles, “We Live in the City” and “City Scene,” broke new ground in elementary and middle school music, and his full-length theater piece, The Musicians of Bremen, has been performed over two hundred times. He wrote the music for America’s first production of The Hobbit as well as several off-Broadway children’s musicals. A graduate of Indiana University and Teachers College, Columbia University, where he received his EdD, Dr. Balkin has dedicated his career to arts-generated, multidisciplinary learning, exemplified by his songs, workshops, and articles, which have appeared in Principal and Music Educators Journal. He also coauthored the textbook Involvement with Music (1975).
CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY ROB REID vii
PREFACE ix
CONSIDERATIONS AND TIPS xi

SONGS
MARCH OF THE ALPHABET 3
VOWEL MAMBO 7
AT THE LIBRARY 11
BETTER THAN TV 14
SING A SIMPLE RHYME 17
CALL ON A VERB 20
GET THE POINT 24
LETTERS TO SOUNDS 28

WHAT’S A CONSONANT? WHAT’S A VOWEL? 33
A SYLLABLE 37
SOUNDS TO WORDS 40
NOUNSENSE 44
PRONOUNS 50

ONE COMPLETE THOUGHT 55
SINGULAR OR PLURAL 60
THE ADJECTIVE SONG 63
FACT OR FANTASY? 66
LEARN TO READ 70

STRETCH YOUR IMAGINATION 74
BOOKS 79

RHYME-A-TON
A RHYMING DICTIONARY OF ONE-SYLLABLE WORDS
AND WORD GAMES FOR CHILDREN 83

Recordings of the songs are available on the book’s website, along with the sheet music: www.ala.org/editions/extras/balkin09980.
Picturesque and briskly

Pictures on pages, for all different ages, you'll find

Stories of people, and animal creatures, all kinds.

Take a look. Words tell us stories. Pictures do too. When words paint the pictures, we see our own view. Books have a binding to keep them together. It's smart to take care.

There's a front cover. In back, there's another. Each part

Copyright ©1992 by Al Balkin
Published by NOW VIEW MUSIC
al-ways there. _______ Whe-ther you're big or
small, most im-por-tant of all, a book has so
much to share.______
**Lyrics**

1. Pictures on pages,
   For all different ages,
   You’ll find in a book.
Stories of people,
   And animal creatures,
   All kinds. Take a look.

2. Words tell us stories.
   Pictures do too.
   When words paint the pictures,
   We see our own view.

3. Books have a binding
   To keep them together.
   It’s smart to take care.
   There’s a front cover.
   In back, there’s another.
   Each part, always there.

4. Whether you’re big or small,
   Most important of all,
   A book has so much to share.

**Activities**

Whether child or adult, in the library or at
home, being surrounded by books gives
us a good feeling. Books are very personal. We
reach for them, we touch them, we open and
close them, we turn their pages, we read them
until our eyes get weary. We know them. With
books we learn about real and fictional people,
we acquire information, we are entertained and
sometimes even inspired. Books become life-
long friends. It is often said that when you have
a book to enjoy, you’re never lonely. The song
“Books” recognizes all this but also points out
that a book has a physical presence of its own
that we should be aware of and nurture. “It’s
smart to take care. . . . / A book has so much to
share.”

1. Listen to the song and discuss the lyrics before singing it. Using real books, show the children the physical characteristics and features mentioned in the song, such as the binding, the front and back covers, and the page setup as well as some things not mentioned, including the table of contents, the index, the title page, and so on. Show the children how to handle a book with care.

2. According to the song, “Words tell us stories. / Pictures do too.” Have the children choose pictures from magazines or from pictures you provide and tell the stories that the pictures show.

3. According to the song, “When words paint the pictures, / We see our own view.” Ask the children what this means to them.

4. Encourage children to tell experience stories to the whole group. Make the transition from telling the stories to writing them down. If the children have trouble making this transition, record their stories, write them down, and have the children copy
what you wrote. They can also play back their recorded stories and watch the written words.

5. Make a group book. Have each child write a page on a common theme and illustrate the page. The following are some examples of themes:

   “What I Do with My Friend”
   “My Favorite Sport”
   “What I Admire about a Special Person”
   “My Number One TV Show [Movie]”
   “A Trip into Town”

Then have the children write individual storybooks.

6. Have the children make their own blank books by cutting writing paper and construction paper (for the covers) to a desired size and stapling them together. You might want to provide pre-cut paper for this activity. You can also pre-punch holes at the edges and have the children insert yarn or brads to hold the pages together.

7. Help children develop the journal-keeping habit. Give each child a blank book (or let them make one) and have them illustrate the covers. Have them write their first entry about making their journals and explain that they should set aside a few minutes each day to write in their journals.

8. Show the children a variety of ways to bind their books: stapling, tying with yarn, using small key rings, using a binding machine with plastic binders. If possible, include cloth binding.

9. Invite children to read their books to the group, then add the books to the library. Arrange for parents to hear this presentation by the group.

10. Cut pages and covers in the shape of a theme, such as a fish shape for an ecology program or a tulip shape for a spring program.

11. Demonstrate various techniques used by book illustrators and have the children practice these techniques. Invite a local illustrator to show her or his work to the children.
Encourage literacy with twenty original songs by musician and educator Al Balkin! Children’s and school librarians will welcome Tune Up to Literacy, a handy package of music and activities that musically introduces and reinforces crucial literacy concepts such as the alphabet, vowels, consonants, nouns, verbs, adjectives, sentence construction, punctuation, sequence, rhyming, and much, much more. The book includes:

- 20 original songs to encourage children’s development of literacy
- Rhyme-a-ton, a rhyming dictionary of commonly used one-syllable words
- Activities related to each song—from inventing new verses to telling stories to playing flash-card games

Catchy and strikingly original, the road-tested songs in Tune Up to Literacy are proven tools for acquainting kids with basic literacy concepts.