Music Activities for the K–12 Crowd
By: Sarah Sahr
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Below there are several classroom activities using music. The list ranges from young learners to older learners, which does not necessarily denote proficiency level. Some of the activities for younger students are appropriate for advanced English language learners while some of the activities for older students are appropriate for beginning ELLs. Please manipulate the activities to meet the needs of your students. Enjoy!

Who’s Got the Flashcard?
Grade: Early elementary
Level: Upper beginner

This is a hybrid of the games hot potato and musical chairs. Students stand in a circle, facing in, with their hands behind their backs. The teacher shows the class a flashcard (if you are studying animals, use a picture of an animal; studying food, use food, etc.) and elicits the name of the item on the card. After all students know what the item is, have one child stands in the middle of the circle, eyes closed. Have music ready to play (mp3, CD, video, etc).

Explain that when you play the music, the students pass the flashcard around the circle behind their backs. When the music stops, they stop, and the student with the flashcard holds it hidden behind his or her back, out of sight of the student in the center. The student in the center has three chances to find out who has the flashcard by asking:

*Have you got the cat?* Or *Do you have the cat?*

The proper response would be:

*Yes, I have* / *No, I haven’t.* Or *Yes, I do* / *No, I don’t.*

Rotate the middle student until all students have a chance to be in the middle and use a different flashcard each time.

For 100th Day (A little late for this year but...):
Grade: Early elementary
Level: Upper beginner

Make musical instruments
Have each child bring in a cardboard toilet paper tube. Have them securely tape one end closed (using strong tape) and fill it with 100 dry beans. Close the other end with paper and secure paper with tape. The students have made a 100s shaker. Using the shakers, sing the 100th Day Song.

100th Day Song (to the tune Ta Ra Ra Boom De Ay)
*It is the 100th day*
*So shout hip-hip hooray!*

Music: Classroom Activities 1
We will count, eat, and play,
On the 100th day!

We count by 5s and 10s
Together with our friends.
Join in the fun and say,
Hooray for 100th day!

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**Can/Can’t Chants**

**Grade:** Late elementary  
**Level:** Intermediate

The words *can* and *can’t* often cause pronunciation problems with English language learners. For example:

- **Length of vowel** /kæn; unstressed kən/ or /kænt, kɑnt/
- **Aspirated** /t/

I can go. (reduced and not reduced)  
I can’t read your handwriting.  
I can’t allow you to go today.

Chanting can help students pronounce the appropriate vowel with the appropriate word:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I Can’t Do It</strong></th>
<th><strong>Can’t Stay, Gotta Go</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can’t do it.</td>
<td>Can’t Stay, Gotta Go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t do it.</td>
<td>Can’t Stay, Gotta Go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, you can.</td>
<td>Gotta go, gotta go, gotta go!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, you can.</td>
<td>Can’t stay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t do it.</td>
<td>O.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, you can.</td>
<td>Gotta go, can’t wait.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can do it.</td>
<td>You’re late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can do it.</td>
<td>Gotta go, can’t wait.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, you can.</td>
<td>Hurry up! You’re late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t do it.</td>
<td>Gotta run.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I can’t.</td>
<td>Have fun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, you can.</td>
<td>Can’t wait.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I can’t.</td>
<td>You’re late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, you can.</td>
<td>Gotta go, can’t stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t do it.</td>
<td>Gotta go!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, you can.</td>
<td>You can do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can do it.</td>
<td>You can do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching note: In the second chant, use of the word “gotta” is a great example of elision, the omission of sound(s) in spoken English. “Gotta” is a very informal way to say “got to” which is also very informal in most conversational settings. However, for the sake of the above chant, it’s just fun to say.

**Rhyming Exercises**

Below are the lyrics for two songs, broken into phrases; the following activity can be done with different ages and levels—choose the appropriate song for your age group and level. Divide the class into groups of three to five students. Give each group an envelope with the phrases cut into strips and mixed up. The groups have to arrange the strips in order, using the rhyming words as clues. You might want to give the students the first and last phrases so they know where to start.

**Grade:** Elementary  
**Level:** Upper intermediate to advanced (students must be able to read)

*“Hush, Little Baby,”* a traditional American lullaby (in so far as mockingbirds are thought to have come from the North American continent):

Hush, little baby, don’t say a word,  
Papa's gonna buy you a mockingbird.  
And if that mockingbird don't sing,  
Papa's gonna buy you a diamond ring.  
And if that diamond ring turn brass,  
Papa's gonna buy you a looking glass.  
And if that looking glass gets broke,  
Papa's gonna buy you a billy goat.  
And if that billy goat don't pull,  
Papa's gonna buy you a cart and bull.  
And if that cart and bull turn over,  
Papa's gonna buy you a dog named Rover.  
And if that dog named Rover won’t bark.  
Papa's gonna to buy you and horse and cart.  
And if that horse and cart fall down,  
Well you'll still be the sweetest little baby in town.

Use [this link](#) for students to self-check and, if you’d like, sing the nursery rhyme as a class.
Grade: Secondary
Level: Upper intermediate to advanced

“Sk8ter Boi,” by Canadian pop star Avril Lavigne, is a more teenage-friendly song. This exercise can be done with any popular song that has good rhyming patterns. Consider singers and groups such as U2, Michael Jackson, or the Jonas Brothers....

"Sk8er Boi"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He was a boy, she was a girl</th>
<th>She calls up her friends, they already know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can I make it any more obvious?</td>
<td>And they’ve all got tickets to see his show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He was a punk, and she did ballet</td>
<td>She tags along and stands in the crowd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What more can I say?</td>
<td>Looks up at the man that she turned down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He wanted her, she’d never tell</td>
<td>He was a sk8ter boy, she said ”See ya later boy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretly she wanted him as well</td>
<td>He wasn’t good enough for her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But all of her friends stuck up their nose.</td>
<td>Now he’s a superstar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And they had a problem with his baggy clothes.</td>
<td>Slammin’ on his guitar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does your pretty face see what he’s worth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He was a sk8ter boy, she said “See ya later boy”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He wasn’t good enough for her.</td>
<td>Sorry girl, but you missed out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She had a pretty face</td>
<td>Well, tough luck that boy’s mine now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But her head was up in space</td>
<td>We are more than just good friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She needed to come back down to earth.</td>
<td>This is how the story ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five years from now, she sits at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeding the baby, she’s all alone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She turns on TV, guess who she sees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sk8ter boy rockin’ up MTV.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too bad that you couldn't see, see the man that boy could be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is more than meets the eye, I see the soul that is inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He’s just a boy and I’m just a girl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I make it any more obvious?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are in love, haven’t you heard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How we rock each other’s world?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m with the sk8er boi, I said, “See ya later boy”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll be backstage after the show.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll be at a studio, singing the song we wrote about a girl you used to know</td>
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Places for students to self check:
Download the song
The lyrics* with the song
The video with an advertisement

*Note that the lyrics provided may differ slightly from the actual song.

Music BINGO!
Grade: Elementary and secondary
Level: Depending on the song... all levels

MATERIALS:
- A pencil
- Bingo Chart
- Song: “In the Middle, In the Middle, In the Middle”

How to play...
- Provide each student with a copy of the empty Bingo box, below.
- Write the words below, randomly, on the board.
- Students choose and write one word into each empty Bingo box.
- Teacher plays the song “In the Middle, In the Middle, In the Middle.”
- Students cross out the words as they hear them from the song.
- When a student crosses out 3 in a row, horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, her or she shouts “BINGO!” and is the winner of that round.

WORDS

*block  *ears  *middle
*clear  *eyes  *street
*corner  *green  *wait
*cross  *hear  *walk
*don't  *light
*down  *look
**Musical Dictation**

**Grade:** Upper elementary and secondary  
**Level:** Depending on the song... all levels

Choose a piece of music that you are sure students are going to enjoy.  
Have students break up into groups of three or four and sit each group on the floor in a circle.

Explain the rules to the class:

1. Take a pen and quickly pass it to the person next to you in your group as the music plays.
2. When the music stops, the student who has just received the pen needs to write down the last word(s) they heard in the song.
3. Students get a point for each correct word.
4. The team with the most points at the end of the dictation wins.

Suggestions for how to build up the difficulty of the dictation:
- start with a single word for students to write down... then add two words, three words, and so on, each round... build to short phrases
Creating a Music Lesson
Grade: Secondary
Level: Upper intermediate to advanced

Everyone has a reason for liking the music they do. Most music has a message. Students (or groups of students) will be responsible for creating a music lesson. In this lesson, students must teach their audience the message of a song of their choosing. Make sure all song choices are approved by you in advance for appropriateness.

1. **Introduction**: Students should plan a way to get the audience’s attention. How are students going to teach the class the song’s message?
2. **Information**: Students should tell their audience what they need to know to understand the lesson. This often means giving some background information or context for the song. What is the song’s message? The most important thing for students to do is tell their audience what is expected of them. The student should probably play the song for the audience.
3. **Independent Practice**: Explain that this is where they should have the audience do something. There can be a worksheet, some kind of group work, a question and answer session, and so on. Students need to create at least one activity for his or her classmates to complete.
4. **Applied Practice**: Students should convey to their audience why the message of this song is important. How can the message relate to them? Why should the audience care?
5. **Closure**: Students should sum everything up for their audience. Make sure the audience has gotten something out of what has just been taught.

Suggestions for Using Popular Music in the EFL Classroom

Though I have provided a song suggestion for each activity below, many songs will work for these activities; be sure to pick songs that are content- and message-appropriate for the age you are teaching and that the lyrics are clear.

**Listening:**
- Dictation: “Can’t Help Falling in Love,” UB40 (very slow... only 11 lines)
- Cloze activities/gap fills: “Sunrise,” Norah Jones

**Speaking:**
- Role plays, duets: “Don’t You Want Me, Baby,” Human League
- Paraphrase lyrics: “What’s he building in there,” Tom Waits
Reading:
- Reading Comprehension: character, setting, plot, etc. Read lyrics first, discuss, listen to song, discuss: “Cats in the Cradle,” Cat Stevens & James Taylor
- Identify long and short vowels: “Yesterday,” The Beatles

Writing:
- Write a letter to the singer: “Hero,” Enrique Iglesius
- Write new endings / new final verse: “Closing Time,” Semisonics

Grammar:
- Conditionals: “If I had a Million Dollars,” Jimmy Buffet or Bare Naked Ladies
- There are hundreds of songs that use different tenses.
  - “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For,” U2 – present perfect
  - “Sacrifice,” Elton John – present tense
  - “Sailing,” Rod Stewart – present progressive
- Irregularities of the English Language: “English is Cuh-Rah-Zee,” Pete Seeger

Vocabulary:
- Days of the week: “Friday, I’m in Love,” The Cure
- School Subjects: “What a Wonderful World,” Sam Cooke or James Taylor

Other Useful Web Sites:

Nursery Rhymes:
- Garden of Song.com: Simple piano playing for many nursery rhymes and folk songs.
- Nicky’s Nursery Rhymes: Many more nursery rhymes and songs... some with lyrics.
- Friends of Eagle Island: Another place to find music and lyrics to nursery rhymes. This site is put together by the American Girl Scouts.

Where to get Music:
- Amazon.com: music downloads, average US$0.99 per song.
- KIDiddles: Favorite children’s songs—some just lyrics; others have music.

Math & Science:
- Dailymotion.com: Math Science videos; there are some advertisements.
- Musical Times Tables x2 (YouTube): Times Tables x2. Once your students get the rhythm, you could move into times tables x3... times tables x4...
- There’s Science in Music: Bill Nye the Science Guy talks about how music and science go to together.
Sarah Sahr works at TESOL and has her Masters in ESL administration. She has managed a school in Vietnam, trained teachers in South Korea, implemented school reform in Qatar, run a circus train classroom for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, and taught 8th grade writing in Maryland. Prior to all that, Sarah was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ethiopia. She is also a certified ashtanga yoga instructor and has managed an eco-lodge in Chugchilan, Ecuador.