

Community Singing

Throughout time, music and the arts have been central carriers of culture. All around the world, communities have come together to sing and dance. In the same way, when we gather as a family, or for a school wide sing-a-long each week, or in larger groups at festival time, we build a sense of ongoing community through shared songs. This not only strengthens the sense of belonging, it anchors the rhythmic flow of our lives.

Community singing is one of many ways that music weaves its way through the days and weeks in the Enki approach. Because music, like all the arts, speaks directly to the heart or feeling life, it can bring the child a living and holistic experience of the world around. Therefore, as is described in depth in the *Enki Teacher's Guides*, we work with all the arts as an integral part of our studies - from social studies, to math, to sciences.

Each study and each age group is best served by one kind of music or another, and most of the time these specific needs are our focus. However, in the case of community singing, we are working with music and song that must span the needs of many ages and many moods - all in service of joining together. Sometimes we come together in play, sometimes in calm, sometimes in reverence, sometimes in sorrow. Community singing must be able to meet all these needs; it is to this end that this collection is offered.

In the school situation, we recommend closing the week with a Friday assembly for the whole school (or upper and lower schools separately in a large school). This assembly can include a sharing of the week's events by different classes and ample time to sing old favorites together. This gives the children a sense of having completed the week and a feeling that all is set and well for their return the following week.

At home, Sunday night can be a wonderful time to share a review of the week's events with the whole family and join in song. This provides an anchor before heading back into the business of the work week.

There are many ways to structure these weekly gatherings, but all should include a significant amount of singing together and should not be too long or the purpose is defeated - about 30 to 40 minutes is plenty. One approach is to have a short period of singing at the beginning, followed by a brief series of reports or sharings of highlights from the current week, or plans for the following week. More singing at the end brings things to a joyful and dependable close.

The Songs:

Virtually any circle song can be done in the Weekly Community Sing (*see Enki Learning through Movement*). However, the children enjoy learning new songs and this is a chance to sing different kinds of songs, along with circle time favorites. Whether at home or in a school, this is a time when you will be working with mixed ages. Therefore, there will be songs that are a bit over the heads of the little ones and a little young for the oldest. Finding a balance that meets everyone's needs is important. Humorous songs, "nested" songs (Ratlin Bog and the like), and rounds and harmonies can help bridge the gap.

At the same time, some of these songs can be overly exciting for the little ones (under age seven), and they will get too wild and silly. With little ones, silly songs and nested songs may need to be used sparsely or done almost as if they were a secret – quietly singing with a sense of hidden joke for the bigger children.

Rounds and harmonies present a special opportunity and special challenge. These, by their nature, demand a kind of individual consciousness – if you don't have this you will lose your place and melt into the others. That melting – which creates real problems in rounds and harmonies – is exactly what we want for the children under eight years old. This melting into the world is the great gift and strength of young children and, on the whole, we recommend *not* using rounds or harmonies with them. But community consists of many ages, and the older children and the adults *find* their strength in their individuality. To meet both these needs, we recommend including rounds and harmonies when there are at least two older children or adults present. The little ones will stay with one or another leader and use their gift for melting to follow. In this way, the little ones do not need to call on their individuality but can ride along, and the big ones can take the lead and exercise their gift – all in one song!

Friday/Community Sing is also the time to introduce Festival songs. These are often worked with in class or family time, too. Then when the Festivals arrive, the children can join in the singing with full gusto. Festivals are not the time to be learning a song, but rather one for using singing to join together. We include nonsectarian nature songs, traditional songs that have been adapted to celebrate the seasonal changes in any culture or tradition, and some holiday music from different traditions.

We also encourage including within the Community and Festival singing some songs which are sung in the foreign language being studied. Until Grade Four or Five, we recommend sticking to the foreign language being studied or it becomes confusing. At that point the children should have a strong enough base in the foreign language being studied that songs from many languages may be brought into the Community signing.

Not infrequently, some children will not stay in tune very well or will be out of time. While one might want to work to improve this in a school-time setting, the community singing is the time to enjoy as many keys and rhythms as present themselves. It is not a time for correction or practice. However the actual singing time is structured, and whatever songs are shared, the goal is to enjoy being together and making music.