

Music as a Reinforcer in English Language Learning

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Music has the power to stir our emotions. We often observe children singing or humming songs, rhymes, and sometimes just humming some familiar sounds. Here in Sirohi, firstly, children do not have much exposure to the English language and, secondly, it is their third language. Students often find it difficult to comprehend or even articulate certain words, phrases and sentences. Hence, doing rhymes with them every day becomes essential to reinforce their learning. Music has rhythm and melody, which helps students to develop fluency in the language and when rhymes are sung with actions and gestures, children are also able to comprehend the meanings of English words and expressions.

Any language has four skills, and these are listening, speaking, reading, and writing (referred to as LSRW). Students are required to practise these skills regularly to comprehend the language and gain fluency. In the classroom, when we teach rhymes, children use all these skills, and it helps them to recognise many words. This eases the process of learning, in this case, English, because when we use these words later on in stories and articles, students do not find them difficult. They even understand parts of the text on their own.

Classroom experiences

We were discussing the topic 'bird' with students of class III, as we have a poem *Bird Talk* in the NCERT textbook. We invited our music teacher to the class to familiarise the children with the rhyme. We created a song with this poem. The students enjoyed this rhyme; they danced to it and hummed the tune the whole day. They learned the actions and gestures of the song and the learning outcome of singing the rhymes with actions and gestures was carried out with the complete participation of all the students. All of them were able to sing the rhyme and they identified the birds *Robin* and *Jay* in the picture in their textbooks without us having to tell them. The vocabulary developed with this rhyme has helped us in the chapter *Nina and the Baby Sparrow* in which the students were able to understand the text with only a little help.

When this rhyme was sung with actions in the assembly, students from all classes started singing along and they sang it in the corridors, on the playground, in their classrooms and even in their homes. We also pasted a chart of the rhyme in the classroom so that students could look at it and read it independently whenever they had the time.



Figure 1. Children of class V singing and dancing

Later, we started getting clubbed periods of one-and-a-half hours for English for the primary and upper primary classes and we noticed that students would get bored and often lose attention. So, we introduced an action rhyme to bring their focus back to the classroom. The rhyme 'I am alive, awake alert, enthusiastic' was enjoyed by the students. They made different poses with the word 'enthusiastic.' In the beginning, students found it difficult to repeat these words, but slowly learned to do so. Whenever we noticed a drop in the energy level of the students, we asked them to stand up and recite this rhyme with action. Through this rhyme, we were able to get their attention back in the class for the task at hand. This rhyme was then transformed by students into various forms, and they enjoyed interacting with each other with these words. This has also helped students to build a vocabulary and speak fluently.

Creating higher-order skills

According to Bloom's Taxonomy, creating something is a higher-order skill. Students love creating poems both in groups and individually. When we ask them to add lines to a poem, we get many different types of rhymes with some amusing words. They enjoy reciting these rhymes and they also love to create

different patterns with these rhymes and sing along with the whole class. It gives them confidence in the language, and they become less hesitant to speak in it. This helps us teachers in the classroom to give them different kinds of texts to read and share with each other.

One of the activities that we conduct in classrooms is 'listen and write'. Students listen to a poem four to five times. Then, we ask them to write as many words from the poem as they can remember. Through this exercise, we have noticed that students write twice or thrice as many words when they listen to and enjoy the poem. The lines help them to both, remember and develop their phonological awareness.

Positive results

Music and poetry can trigger ideas and stimulate the imagination of children. We feel elated when children write poems or create art, taking inspiration from poems and songs learned in class. Inspired by a poem taught in class, two students of class VII wrote their own poem (Figure 2). Thus, it is rightly claimed that music and rhymes have magical powers which transport children to different and higher mental spaces, something may not happen otherwise.

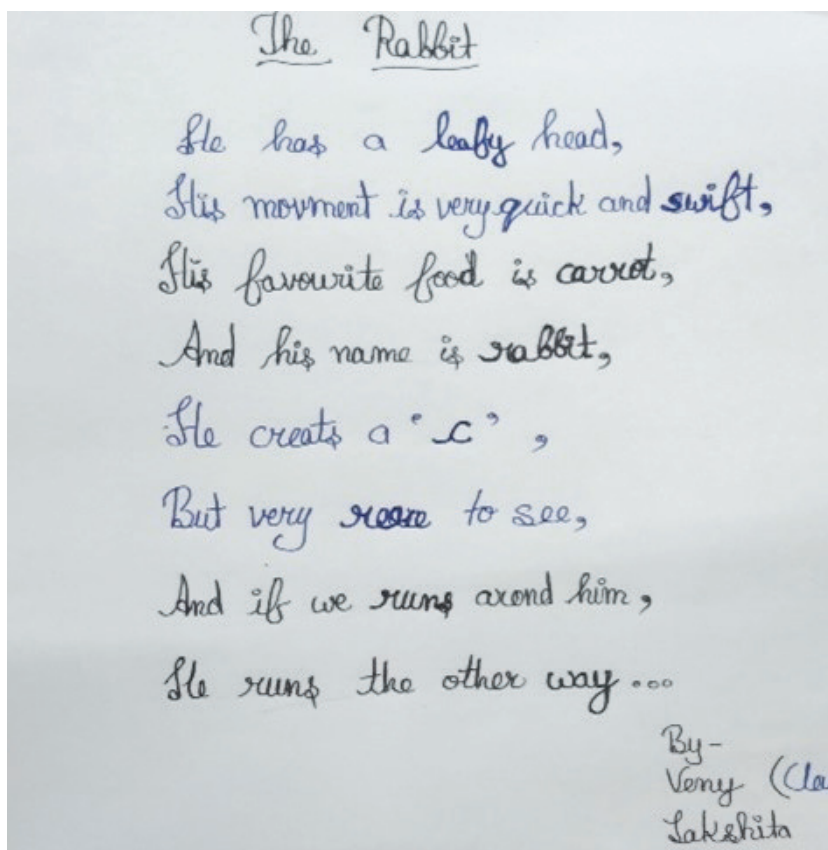


Figure 2. The poem written by two students of class VII

Music ignites the imagination of young minds and provides a scaffolding for creative writing. Our young children write their own short poems. Thus, incorporating music into creative writing is an effective and joyful way to fuel students' imagination and introduce them to creative writing. For instance, getting inspired by the poem *It's a Beautiful Day...* one of our students in class III wrote her own poem (Figure 3).

We have found music to be an integral part of the language classroom. Children learn a language better when they gain confidence in it. Music helps us to build that confidence in our children.

As Rosenblatt has said, language has both aesthetic and efferent aspects to it. Music highlights that aesthetic stance and helps children build a connection with the language of the words of the song. Music makes certain words a part of their active vocabulary: for instance, our students have now started using different words from poetry in their day-to-day lives. It is clear to us that if we want students to learn any language effectively, we need to help them build their vocabulary and gain fluency for comprehension. In the case of English as a third language, this necessary goal is achieved through introducing rhymes as an everyday activity in the classroom.

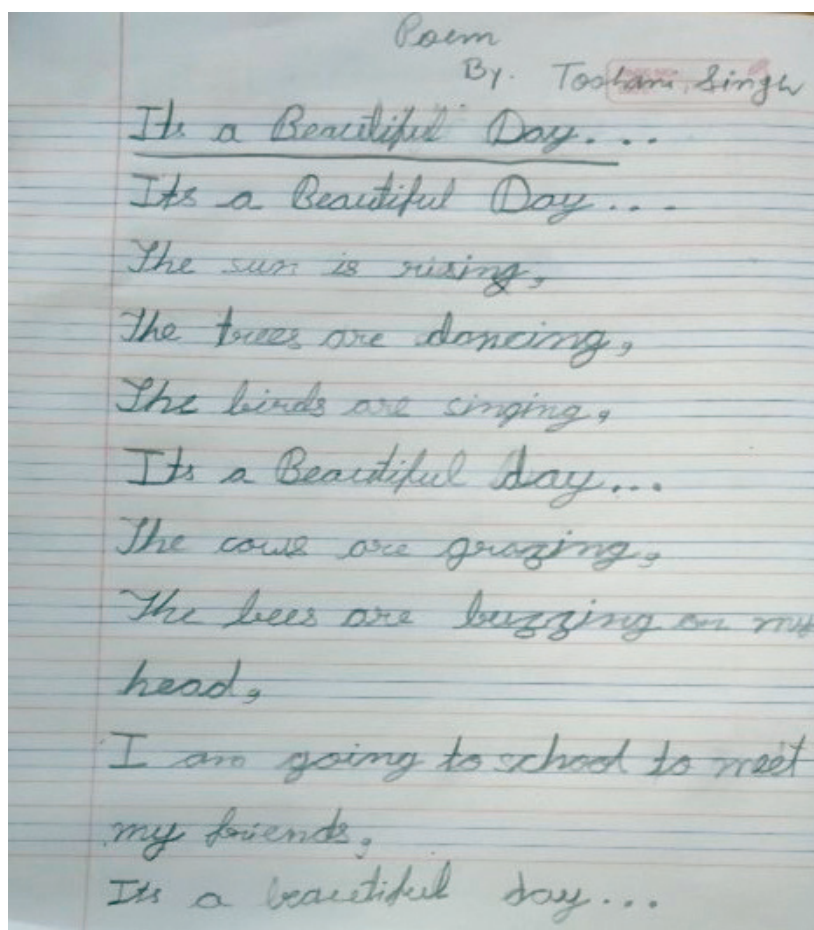


Figure 3. Poem composed by a student of class III



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