

Ideas for Singing Time in Nursery

We have 4 nurseries and they combine all 4 the last 20 minutes for me to come do singing time. My first few weeks were pretty rough, but things are going great now. Here are some of the things I have learned:

1) Cover up the toys (or put them away) - This makes it easier for the children to pay attention and participate.

2) Put your stuff in a crate or box (ideally one they can't see inside) and put it up on a table (otherwise they want to get into it all the time).

3) Establish clear routines and procedures - The teachers put carpet squares on the floor in a big circle and sit each child on their own square. We do the same welcome and closing songs each week. When it is time to return a manipulative, they don't get a new one until they are sitting back on their square (or you could have them sit in little chairs too--we just don't have any in that room). If you are really firm about that, they quickly learn to stay seated and don't get upset when you take one item away because they know they will get a new one.

4) They need something physical to do for every song - This is true of all of them, but especially the little ones.

5) As has already been mentioned, they LOVE repetition - So we sing the same songs over and over and over again.

6) When teaching a new song, I only teach the first few lines, then progressively add new lines each week. As an example, the first week I came in, I taught the Hello welcome song. I brought two puppets, introduced them as my friends, and then had each puppet take a turn "singing" Hello, hello, hello, hello! Then I stopped there, walked around on my knees, put one of the puppets in front of a child's face and sang, "Hello" and then put the other puppet in front of the next child's face and sang the second "hello" in the song, did that for Hello 3 and 4, then sang "we welcome you today, hello" to the 5th child, then started all over again until all 30 children had been greeted by a puppet. Then we moved onto a new song. We did that for 2 or 3 weeks, then I added the next line of the song (Hello...we're glad you came our way). The next month, I added the rest of the song. I think it drove the adults in the room nuts at first because they kept trying to move the song along, so I started calling out explicit cues as though I were talking to the children, but which were really for the adults. For instance, I would say, "Okay, we're just going to learn a tiny bit of a new song right now." or "I'm going to sing the first line for you, and then we're all going to sing it together FIVE times! Do you think you can do that with me?" "Now we're going to sing it LOUD!" "Now we're going to sing it again, but really, really QUIETLY!"



7) Give instructions to the teachers in the room - I have sometimes been frustrated because the teachers often seem to sit around the room (some holding children, some not) and leave the management of the songs, the props, and the 30 nursery kids to me. I have realized that I have to explicitly state what I need them to do. For example, "Now Sis. So-and-so is going to take this bag and collect all your egg shakers while Bro. So-and-so and Bro. So-and-so pass out these pictures for me."

8) Plan LOTS of songs and activities - Most children at the age of 2 have an attention span of about 2 minutes. So that means I need to switch activities every two minutes (sooner if I see I am losing them) in order to keep them engaged. That means if I have 20 minutes with them, I will plan at LEAST 10 activities. As others have noted, they do really well with things they can hold.

However, I have learned that they do NOT do well if you want them all to take turns or if you want them to hold different things. So I try to have one of the same item for every child (or if they are not identical, at least a finger puppet for every child, for example). Some of the

manipulatives they like are:



Colored Scarves - They are inexpensive (12 for \$4 or so) and the Nursery children LOVE them (so do the Primary children). We use them for Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam, and for any other song that is slower, more lyrical, or reverent.

Egg Shakers (colored, heavy plastic) - Worth every penny. I have also made shakers out of plastic bottles by putting beans or rice in them, hot-gluing their lids on so the children can't open them, and then covering them with wrapping paper (Great for any song, but especially good for acting out Birds in the Nest from the Children's Songbook, Do As I'm Doing, or any songs with strong rhythm patterns like Choose the Right or The Wise Man and the Foolish Man).

Finger Lights - Very popular, but the children need help turning them on. We use them for any song about light (I Am Like a Star, Teach Me to Walk in the Light, etc.)

Finger Puppets (or puppets of any kind) - You can buy them at Dollar Tree, make them from socks or paper bags, or buy them at more expensive stores.

Hand Bells - I tried these this month and they worked great. I used @SharlaDance's ideas about modeling how to use them (and how to quiet them on their tummies) first, and then every child got one and we just all jingled them simultaneously after the end of each phrase of Christmas Bells are Ringing. The teachers were glad when we were done with them, but the children had fun!

I Spy Tubes - Made out of a toilet paper roll covered with wrapping paper (I put big pictures around the room and then we all try to find the picture we are singing about. I think I might use them for My Heavenly Father Loves Me this year.)

Jingle Sticks (6 different colors, heavy plastic, much safer than jingle bells) - Worth every penny, bought them in a 12-pack at Zurchers. These work great for any song with strong rhythm patterns.

Maracas - I bought the tiny little party favor maracas they sell at Zurchers. They are cheap and functional. Be forewarned that the 18 month-olds do like to put them in their mouths (like a pacifier), so you'll need to watch them and disinfect them periodically.

Nativity Finger Puppets (heavy plastic) - I ordered these online and the kids love singing a Shepherd's Carol with them.

Paper Plates (heavy duty ones) - They can bang them like cymbals. Primary children like these too.

Rhythm Sticks (4 different colors, heavy plastic) - I wouldn't use these until near the end of the year after the children know you and you know the children. You have to be really clear about expectations, model how to use them, tell them you will take them away if they throw them or hit others, and have teachers supervise. That said, I used them for the first time last week and the children did great with them.

Sunbeam Cut-outs - I cut the center out of some cardstock sunbeams I found at Dollar Tree and gave each child one to put in front of their faces as we sang Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam. You can use the same idea for other songs.

Sparkle Wands - I bought these at the Dollar Tree. We use them to lead the music.

Star Glow Sticks - The children don't care that they don't glow any more. We use them for songs like I Am Like a Star.

Tambourines - I bought the red and blue superhero tambourines they currently have at Dollar Tree, and then covered the superhero part with heavy, solid colored paper.

Wind Wands - I made mine out of the little colored plastic star wands they have at Dollar Tree and cheap curling ribbon. I use these for When I Am Baptized and any other songs that are lyrical or reverent

P.S. I should also say that you don't have to buy things to engage the children. You can make all kinds of musical instruments from food containers like spice bottles and oatmeal containers. You can have them hold pictures or just objects or toys from around your house. I choose to invest in these things because I am a teacher by trade, so I can use them for lots of other purposes as well.

9) Use Actions - The children do really well with actions, as long as they aren't too complicated and don't require a lot of fine motor skills. Any Primary songs that have natural actions work great - When I Am Baptized, Birds in a Nest, Book of Mormon Stories, Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam, My Heavenly Father Loves Me, and all the activity songs (Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes; Roll Your Arms; My Hands, etc.)

10) Use Primary songs for NEXT year - I personally prefer to teach only Primary songs because I figure they will have opportunities to learn all the secular ones like Itsy Bitsy Spider at preschool or in Kindergarten or at home, and I really view my time with them as sacred time that I can use to prepare them to develop stronger testimonies and to transition more easily into Primary. Although it is easier to sing the Primary songs from this year, it is better for them to learn the Primary songs we will be singing NEXT year. So I try to include one or two of the easier welcome songs (Hello Song; Hello Friends; Here We Are Together; We Are Different), most of the wiggle songs, and then a couple of the program songs for next year. If my calculations are correct, that means they would be the same songs that are on the 2014 list:<https://www.lds.org/callings/primary/sharing-time/music...>

Hope this helps!