

Chapter 7

Musical Notation
Reading and Writing Music

Children become interested in reading and writing around four and a half years of age. Before they can write, however, they need to refine the use of their hands, and refine their eyes ability to discriminate size, shape, and position in space. The Montessori sensorial materials help the child develop all of these abilities. The exercises for the insets for design help further prepare the hand for writing.

After the child has developed a basic ability to read and write, and can write short sentences, the child becomes ready to learn to write and read musical notation. Often times, after children have learned to play a number of songs on the dulcimer, they express interest in having the songs written down to help them remember all the songs they have been learning. The teacher can respond by saying, “That is a great idea. I’ll show you how to write your songs down so you can keep track of all the songs you have learned to play.”

For this, it is helpful to have some blank sheets of manuscript paper that has musical staves already printed on it, plus a pencil, and a dulcimer.

At this point, you want to have the music for the two note songs in your head so that you can play them, sing them, and clap to them for reference. In addition, it is helpful, ahead of time, to have looked the music as it is written down in the “Singing with Young Children” book.

You will use the 2, 3, 4, and 5 note songs to teach the children about musical notation. This will provide you with a step by step sequence of concepts to introduce one at a time to the children. Another advantage of these songs is that the child should already have the songs in his or her head and can sing and play them. Because of this, the child can use the dulcimer as a concrete reference.

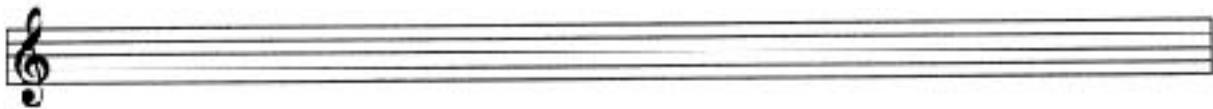
Note: The children have been playing the dulcimer in the key of C in the ionian tuning. In this tuning, they have been taught that the first fret

they put a finger on is A, the second fret is B, the third fret is C, and fourth fret is D, the fifth fret is E, the sixth fret is F, and the seventh fret is G. The teacher can ask the child if he or she remembers the names of the frets before you start the lesson. If not, the names should be reviewed.

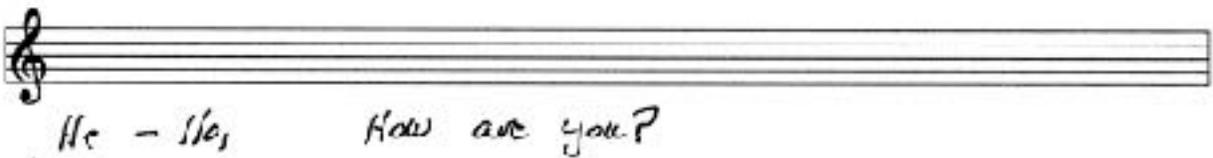
Lesson 1 - Writing Notes

And so, beginning with the two note songs, the first song to write is “The Greeting Song.” The teacher can ask, “Do you remember the “Greeting Song?” Can you sing it?” (The child then sings the first verse of the song.) (Below are all the steps in one lesson. These are actually done as separate lessons - I’m going to re-write this.)

This is called “staff” paper. This is a musical staff. (point to the staff).



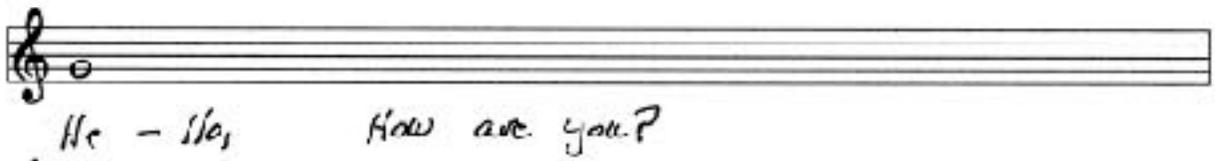
“The first step is I will write out the words for you. You tell me each word one at a time.” Then, as the child says each word, the teacher writes the word below the staff until we have the first verse.



“Next, I will show you how to write the notes. For that, we need to see what notes you play. So, what is the first note you play to start the song?”



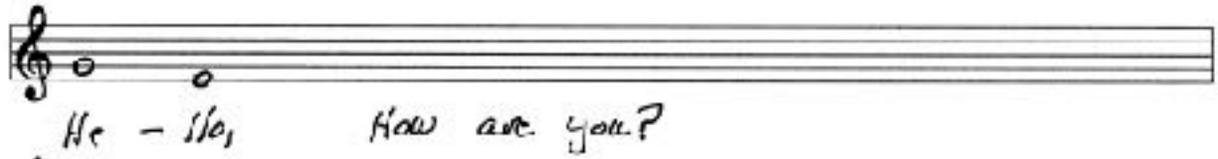
“That is “G.” So, I will show you how to write “G” on the staff.”
“ To do that, you draw a circle on the second line from the bottom of the staff over the first sound you make - which is “He””



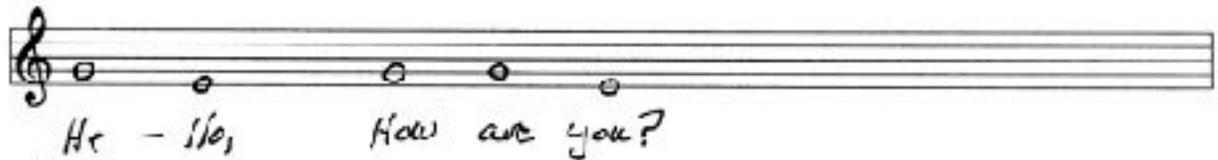
“Now, what is the next note you play?”



“That is “E.” You write that as a circle on the bottom line of the staff.”



Now, you see if you can figure out where to write the notes for “How are you?”



“Ok. You now know how to write the notes “G” and “E” on the music staff.”

“Would you like to try another song?” If the child would like to write another song, give the child “Cuckoo.” Write out the words for the child and then have them see if they can notate the song by placing the notes on the staff.

You can then set out more songs for the child to notate whenever they want to notate more songs. For that purpose, write out the lyrics on staff paper for all the rest of the two notes songs except for “Peas Porridge Hot.” I like to prepare one song per sheet of paper. Since the songs are short, I cut a page of staff paper in half. I place the songs prepared for notation on a shelf and show the child where the child can find them.

Therefore, the child can take a prepared piece of staff paper and write in the notes. Each prepared piece of staff paper has the title of the song and the lyrics. The child then has access to staff paper for the following songs:

Cuckoo
The Counting Song
Clap, Clap
Hey, Hey
Starlight, Starbright

As the child notates songs on the staff paper, show the child how to put his or her collection of notated songs together in a collection to keep and designate a safe place to store the work. The simplest way to do this is to have the child put his or her work into a folder.

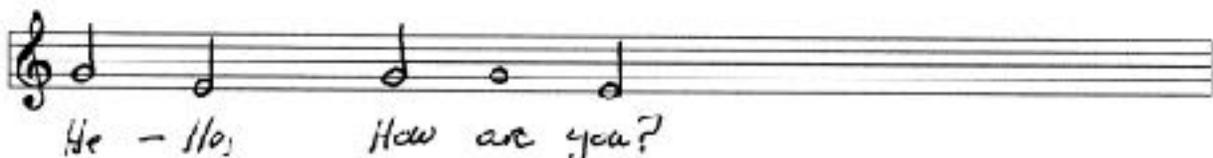
Lesson 2 - Notating the Rhythm

In the next lesson, point out that all the notes look the same. But, some notes are faster than others. We need to show that.

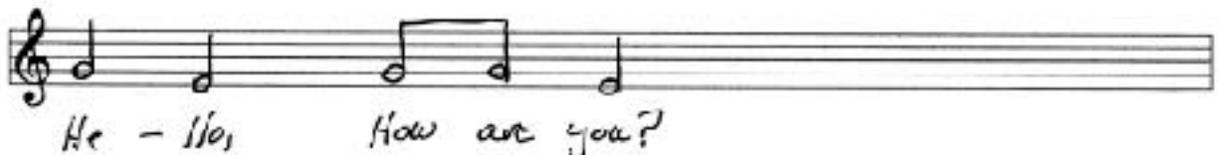
Start with “The Greeting Song” using the staff paper that the child has already notated.

First we have to figure out which notes are faster. Since the child has already learned to clap the rhythm of the words as well as to clap the beat, you can use this knowledge to help the child work out how to indicate the rhythm of the notes.

First have the child clap the rhythm of the words to hear the rhythm. Then have the child clap the beat while singing the song. Now, have the child clap the beat while singing again and draw a line down on the staff to each note that falls on a beat.

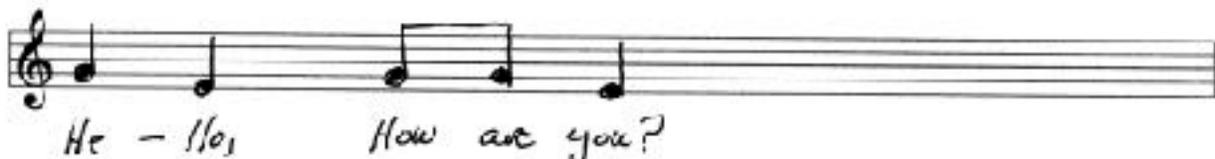


“There is one note that doesn’t fall on a beat. That means that two notes occur in one beat. To show that, we draw a line to that second note and connect that line to the line of the note before it to show the two notes are in the same beat.”



“Now, since all those notes fall within a beat, we fill in the circles. In later songs, you may find some notes that last longer than a beat, in that case we don’t fill in the circles. So, we don’t fill the circles in until we know.

So, fill in the circles. The notes with just a line are called quarter notes and the connected notes are called 8th notes”

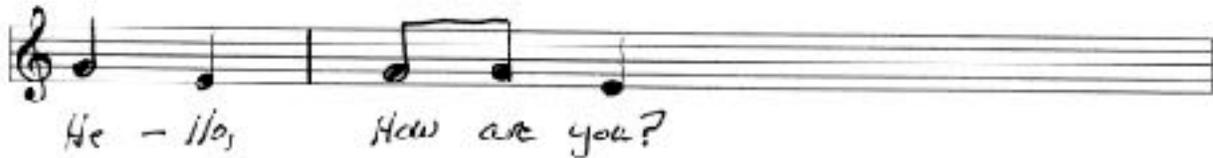


The child is now welcome to add this new component to the notation the child has previously created.

Lesson 3 - Introduction to the Measure and Measure Bar

“In this lesson, we will use “The Greeting Song” to decide where the main beats are in a song. Some words are accented. That means they are slightly louder. In the “Greeting Song,” When you say, He- llo, which part is slightly louder—the He or the llo? Yes, the “He” is

slightly accented. Which word is accented in “How are you?” Yes, “How” is slightly accented. So, we put a line across the staff in front of the accented beats.



The space for each group of beats is called a measure. Notice, we have 2 beats in each measure.

Next, invite the child to see if he or she can find the accents and place the measure bars the next two note song “Cuckoo.” The only thing that has changed are the words—but don’t tell the child that. Let the child figure it out. The child can then start putting in the measure bars in the other two note songs that the child has already notated. Leave the child to work. If he or she has a question, the child can come and ask. Tell the child that you are interested to see what they have done when they are finished.

When the child chooses to do more, the next song is the “Counting Song.” Once again, the only difference is the words. In this case, not only do we have new words, but there are more verses and therefore a lot more words. That will give the child a lot of practice.

If the child is successful, they will want more and can move on to the other two notes songs.

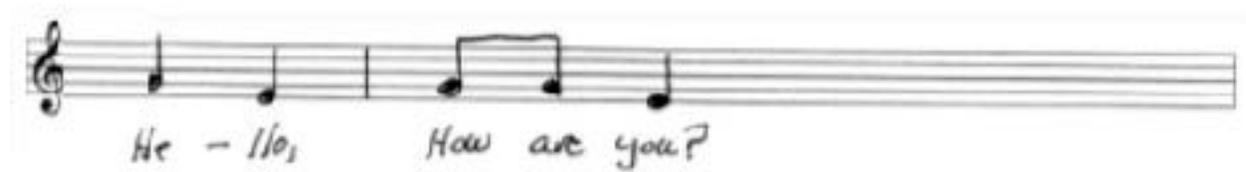
“Clap, Clap, and Hey, Hey (Look at Me)”, have the same two notes, but the rhythm changes by having more 8th notes. That provides a new difficulty to figure out.

“Starlight, Starbright” has even more variation and more to figure out. However, children know everything they need to know. They just have to work at applying what they know. They can always ask questions.

Lesson 4 - Time Signature

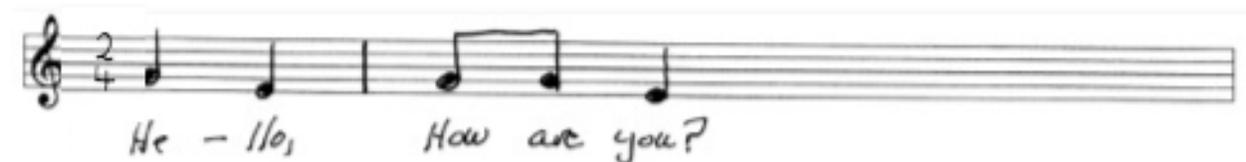
Now the child knows everything they need to know in order to be introduced to writing the time signature for each song.

We will start with the notation of “The Greeting Song” that the child has already done.



Have the child count how many beats there are in each measure. There are two beat per measure. So, in the top of the first measure, before any notes, and after the treble clef, write a 2.

Point out that it is the quarter notes that show one beat. The quarter note can be represented by a 4. And so, write a 4 under the two at the beginning of the first measure.



We call this 2/4 time meaning that there are two beats in a measure, and quarter notes represent 1 beat.

Lesson 5 - Introduce the rest and half note.

Peas Porridge Hot introduces two new items.

- 1) It introduces the rest—a beat that has no note.
 - 2) It also introduces a half note—a note that lasts 2 beats.
- So, there are places where a person claps a beat and there is no note.
The last note in the piece lasts the whole measure of 2 beats.

Peas Porridge Hot

c



Peas
Some

por - ridge
like it

hot.
hot.

Peas
Some

por - ridge
like it

cold.
cold.

Peas
Some

por - ridge
like it

in the pot
in the pot
pot

nine
nine

days
days

old.
old.

So, you can use this song to teach the new elements. You can see the new elements represented in the book, “Singing with Young Children”

Children are only being told things they need to know for the moment. It is important to try not to swamp the child with too much information. This means that certain ideas will be refined when that knowledge becomes needed. Many people have never learned to understand how rhythm in music is represented because there is a lot to know, it is mathematical, it can be complicated, and things can change depending on a number of factors. An adult may ask, for example, why is it called a half note if it represents two beats? You’d have to be told about whole notes, half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, etc. and fractions to understand the answer. However, children don’t know enough to think that question. For them, a name is a name. It is called a half note, and for now, that is all they need to know.

After a child has learned how to write “Peas Porridge Hot,” you can have them go ahead and write any of the 3 note songs. You will need to show them where to write the new note A. They won’t encounter anything else new until they get to “A-Tisket, A-Tasket,” and “It’s Raining, It’s Pouring.” You can see the new rhythmic elements for those songs in the book. “It’s Raining, It’s Pouring” introduces two passages with 16th notes.

I generally skip having the children write the “additional songs” sections in the book. If you don’t, they will encounter new difficulties in “Oliver Twist” and “Mother, Mother.” “Oliver Twist” is in 6/8 time which is better left to later. “Mother, Mother,” has a lot of 16th notes which could also be left to later.

Some children like to write songs on individual pages which they put together into a book. Some like to write their music on pages in a notebook. They should be given some choices as to how they want to

keep their songs. Choice is important. It enables them to feel that it is their project and their idea. A sense of ownership fosters engagement in the activity. We are wanting to encourage intentionality. We want children to be able to have ideas, establish goals, and engage in what they feel are their own projects. In this way, they have things they can show that reminds them of what they have done and what they can do.

There is an art to teaching. Part of it is getting children inspired and excited. Part of it is enabling them to feel that they can have ideas and can carry them out, and that the ideas and projects are theirs and are valued. There is a significant difference between the children doing something that they have decided they want to do, and something they are told to do. You want children to feel that activities are something they want to do and have chosen to do. That is the key to having them engaged in activities. And, the more they are engaged, the deeper the learning. We don't know what the limits are of what children can achieve if they become deeply engaged and passionate about what they are doing.

Children can proceed on through additional three note songs and four note songs without encountering anything for which they aren't prepared (if you skip the "additional song" sections in the book). There are a number of variations that pose different patterns. But, the children should be able to figure those things out with what they know. If they have questions, they can put their heads together and try to figure it out, and they can always ask questions.

The first song that introduces a new element is "Bells in the Steeple." The new element is that there are 3 beats in each measure instead of 2 beats a measure. It is in $3/4$ time which means there are 3 beats per measure and each quarter note gets one beat. Previous songs were in $2/4$ time with 2 beats per measure with quarter notes getting one beat. So, you can introduce the child to a new time signature.

The next song, “Tidy-O” has 4 beats to a measure. When you point out the 3 beats to a measure for “Bells in the Steeple,” you might point out that “Tidy-O” has 4 beats per measure and the time signature is written as 4/4 time. The C can be written at the beginning of the piece to stand for Common time.

“Mother, Mother,” contains a lot of 16th notes. This one can be a challenge. It is helpful for children to work together on this one. But, you might want to leave it for later.

In the five note songs, “Fair Do Do” is in 3/4 time with 3 beats per measure.

And so, if you leave out the sections titled, “Additional Songs,” the children should be able to work through all the songs without needing too much new information.

From here, you can choose music that introduces new elements that children may encounter. I think this is easiest done by addressing new elements as they arise in music they are learning. So, eventually, for example, they should tackle a song like “Oliver Twist” which is in 6/8 time, and “Mother, Mother” which contains a lot of 16th notes.

So, the children are introduced to writing music before they are introduced to reading it.

However, as they proceed through writing the music, they can then practice reading it back.

If you have a projection system, an overhead projector, or can wirelessly send images from a phone, tablet, or computer to a large TV screen, it is fun to put 4 simple staves of music that contain no words up in front of a group of students and try to have them figure out which one you are singing, or to point to one to have them sing.

But, if they are not singing words, what should they sing? Of course, you could have them sing the names of the notes. On the other hand, you could have them sing any syllable such as “LA” or “OO”. You could have them number the notes according to their position in the scale and have them sing 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. In this case, in the scale of C, the notes G and E are 5 and 3. However, over the years, children have been taught to sing the notes of the scale by singing the corresponding syllable Do, Re, Me, Fa, So, La, Ti, Do. Singing the syllables is called Solfege. It is often referred to as using a “Moveable Do.” To use it, children have to learn the syllable names. This takes time and is an extra step. However, Solfege is a system for teaching music that is in widespread use and it is helpful to know when auditioning for choirs or entrance to music programs. So, in the long run, it is advantageous for a child to have learned solfege early. However, there are people who prefer to teach a “Moveable Do” approach to reading music by using numbers because it is easy to understand and the names for the numbers are already known by a child. (On the other hand, there are also some people who advocate using a “Fixed Do” system which is another way to approach referencing notes in music. In “Fixed Do,” each note is a name that remains the same no matter what key is being used.) In “Moveable Do,” the name Do is always applied to the first note of the key of the current music. So, if you are in the key of C, Do would be C. If you are in the key of D, Do is D. Whereas, if you are using a fixed do, in the key of D, the note D would be referred to as Re with C still being Do. So, fixed Do requires development of good tonal memory and works well for people with perfect pitch. This becomes more difficult to learn as a person gets older, and appears to be impossible to learn after the age of 10.

So, what should you use? The question really becomes, in the beginning, should you teach the children names, and if so, which names do you teach for the notes? For a young child, it becomes confusing to teach the child this note is G and, if we are in the key of C, we call it

Sol, and it is the 5th note in the scale. However, if we are in the key of D the fifth note is still called Sol, but the name of the note is A.

Personally, for young children, I think it better to not overwhelm them with too much information at a time. It is better to teach one thing at a time and keep the focus on the point being introduced. So, in beginning to sight sing music, I like to focus on the sound, where it is played, and where it is written. The child can learn what to call it later. So, I have the children sing the sounds on a syllable like “LOO.”

To start, the teacher can then copy a line from each two note song and put each line on a different staff line. Each staff should be numbered.



Challenge 1 - Which staff is being sung?

The activity is to sing one of the 4 lines and ask the children which line you are singing. When a child gives an answer, see if the others agree. If they disagree, sing it again, and again until they reach an agreement. Then, proceed by singing a different line. When they pick out the staff

line that you are singing correctly, sing other lines until they have met the challenge enough to feel successful.

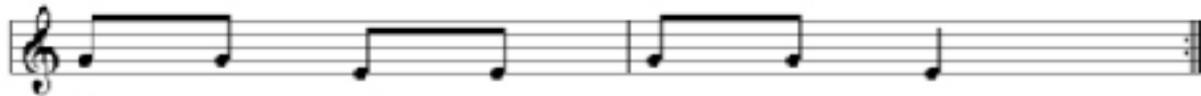
Challenge 2 - Can you sing line 3?

Then, you can present a new challenge by asking the children to sing one of the staff lines. Since you have not put up the words, have them sing on “Loo.”

Put up different samples each day by drawing from different lines from any of the two notes songs (Other than Peas Porridge Hot). You can also make up different lines that are not part of any song to provide further variation. The lines should be numbered so the children can call out the number that you are singing, or will know which line to sing if you ask them to sing a line. (The samples on the previous page have just been copied from the book “Singing with Young Children and then pasted. That makes it easy to put together little exercises for the children.)

Challenge 3 - Which song is this?

After children have mastered Challenges 1 and 2, place a whole song, without words, up in front of the children and have them try to figure out which song it is. At first, they will probably need to sing through it. Later on, after identifying a number of songs, they may enjoy the challenge of trying to identify a song by reading the notation silently in their head and trying that as a way to identify the song. Some children may be able to do this right away. Below is an example.



So, that is the format for the sight singing lessons.

1. Challenge 1 - which staff is being sung?
2. Challenge 2 - Can you sing line 2?
3. Challenge 3 - Which song is this?

You should do variations of the two notes songs for at least a week.

Then, you can move on to three note songs. Use only 4 of the three note songs at a time and gradually progress through all the three note songs.

Then, progress to the four note songs and eventually to the five note songs.