

Introducing a Song: Ways to Capture Attention

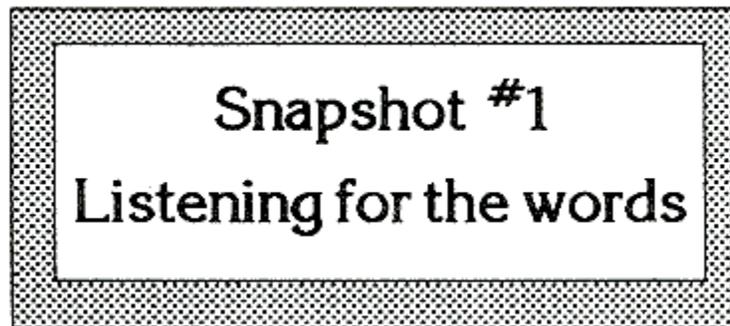
By Dr. Peggy Bennett (Ohio)

“Listen!”

When we introduce a song to our students, whether as a new song or as a reintroduction, we want our students to listen. Active, focused listening can be generated by asking students to solve a puzzle, answer a question, find a clue, recognize a pattern, or imagine an idea.

For the purposes of this article, song introductions that elicit listening will be described in four categories called snapshots. The categories are:

1. Word Focus
2. Secret Song
3. Notation
4. Recording

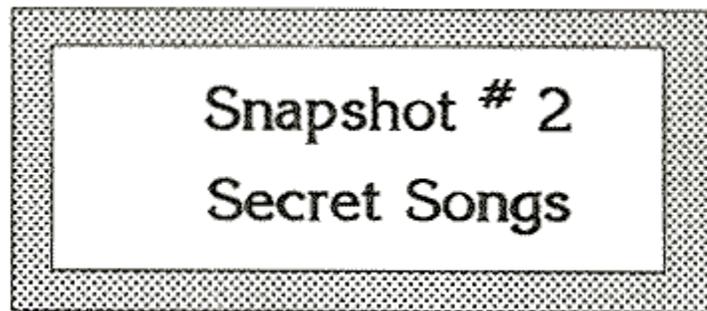


For many learners, words of a song are the most obvious and most easily identified component. For some, the words are the song. Listening may be stimulated by a question or challenge to focus on the words:

- “Here’s a new song, Listen as I sing it, and I’ll ask you what word or words you heard.”

- “This song has some words that may be new (or unfamiliar, nonsensical) to you. As you listen, consider what word or words you would like to ask a question about.”
- “Will you hear any rhyming words (or nouns, adjectives, verbs) in this song? As you listen, collect any words you hear that might fit this category.”
- “What does the song ask (or tell) us to do? How would we do that?”
- “The words of this song can paint a picture (or show a movie, create a scene) in your mind. With eyes open or closed, see what your imagination shows you as you listen to this song.”

Such questions and prompts as these are intended to stimulate responses—both verbal and nonverbal. The development and follow-up questions that seek elaboration, description, explanation and connection from student can enrich the song learning process. All answers are valued responses to the listening task, and therefore are treated with curiosity and interest from the teacher. Time constraints and student interest will determine how much follow-up discussion can accompany any song introduction.

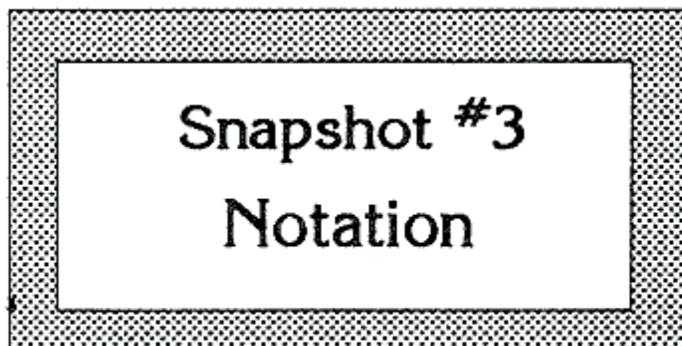


Presenting a song as a secret seems to trigger students' fascination with solving puzzles. In order for the secret song process to work, students must already know the song therefore secret song strategies should be used to reintroduce rather than to introduce a song. Non-notation presentations of secret song may include:

1. Chinning the melodic rhythm of the song.
2. Tapping the rhythm of the words.
3. Acting out the motions.
4. Showing hand signs for the melodic contour.
5. Speaking the rhythm syllables.

Each of these means may be performed for the whole song or for specific units within the song. Sample listening prompts to introduce these strategies could be?

- “Listen as I chin a secret song to you. I’ll be singing the melody on ‘look’. Do you hear a familiar song?”
- “My hands are going to ‘sing’ the words of a song you know. Listen as I tap, and when the secret song is completed, raise your hand if you can tell us what song you heard.”
- “I will be singing a secret song in my inner hearing. As I sing, I will let my song tell me when to do certain actions that match the song. As you watch, let your inner hearing suggest a song to you. Keep it a secret until I ask those with hands raised to name the song they heard.”
- “As you watch my hand signs, see if a song comes into your inner hearing. My hands may be showing you the whole song or only certain parts of a song.”
- “Listen to the rhythm syllables I am speaking. Although you’ll hear my voice change in pitch and dynamics as I’m speaking, I won’t be singing the melody of the secret song. When a song comes to your mind, keep it a secret until you have several opportunities to hear the rhythm syllables and to compare your ideas with the song I’m presenting.”



A variety of notation schemes are possible for introducing a song, and these lend themselves to secret song formats as well as study formats for

new and familiar songs. Notation presentations may be prepared prior to class and displayed on a chart or transparency, or they may be planned prior to class and created as the class observes. Through notation, songs can be introduced as:

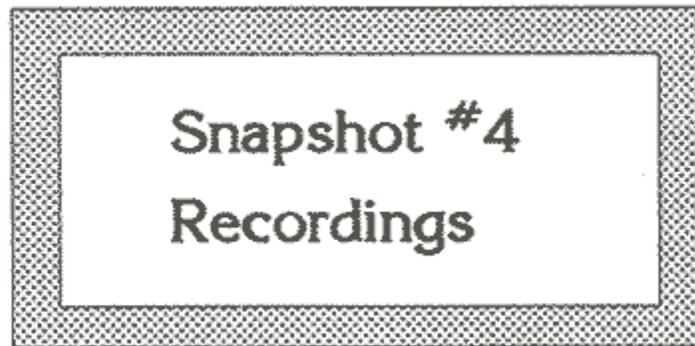
1. Drawings of characters or images from the song (as in a fox in a box, for example).
2. Song dots spaced according to chunks and phrases,
3. A song map that shows specific structural features (anacrusis, repetitions, contrasts),
4. A solfa score (M R D R MMM, for example.)
5. A melody graph of dots showing the melodic contour,
6. A rhythm score using conventional symbols (eighth, quarter, and sixteenth notes, for example.)

Notations for introducing or reintroducing a song may represent the whole song or selected portions of the song. Also, the notational presentations listed here can be combined for study of a whole song (maps combined with dots, rhythm symbols combined with dots, melody graph combined with solfa score, for example.) The following comments challenges are examples of Snapshot #3.

- “As you observe my drawing unfold, what do you think this song might be about?” (For example, draw a tree then a branch then a nest for “Fly away Little Birdie” or draw a hat, man’s face, and a pitchfork for “The Farmer in the Dell”.)
- “As you study the song dot score for this new song (or a familiar song), what do you predict you will hear in the song?” (Students comment on some dots looking faster, more sounds in certain chunks, some chunks looking as if they repeat.)
- “Study the solfa score for a few moments. Use what you know to help you read and hear what you see. Hand signs can help your mind hear a melody, so, using one or both hands, feel free to read the solfa syllables for this song with you hands and your inner voice.”
- “Here you see a score for a song that shows only the rhythm symbols. What will you say as you read the symbols (DU DE or TITI, for example)? What types of note values appear in this song? A sequence that music makers often use to sight-read rhythms is to

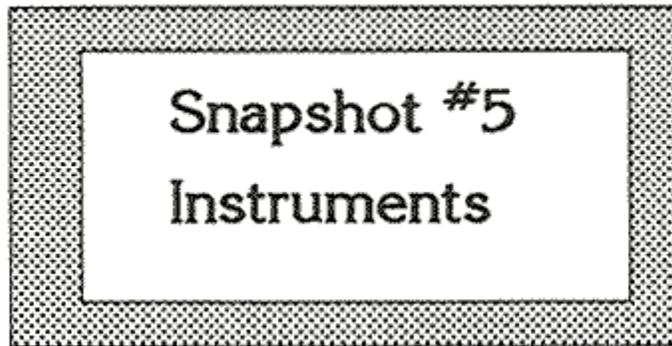
say the rhythm, then say and tap the rhythms, then tap the rhythms while saying them in inner hearing. Experiment with this sequence as you study and read this score.”

- “This melody graph outlines the changes in our voices from pitch to pitch during the song. Note which dots are vertically closer together and which are farther apart. Notice that musical steps and skips make up this song. Trace the graph with your finger and your voice. Do you hear a melody?” “Is it new or familiar?” “Raise your hand when you are ready to let us hear the melody you are reading.”



A familiar song can seem new again when it is heard in a new context. And, for some classes, hearing a recording or a song with its embellished accompaniment or special effects can provide students with motivation to learn the song. Recordings can offer refreshing means for introducing or reintroducing songs. You can introduce a song by listening to the recording first or reintroduce a familiar song by comparing similarities and differences between recordings.

- “There is a very sad story in this song. As you listen, imagine why the people producing this recording made the choices they did of instruments, of singers, of tempo, of dynamics, and of sound effects. Do you hear any change of mood in the recording?”
- “Your may recognize a familiar melody in this recording. After you listen, I’ll ask you what was the same or different from the way in which you normally hear this song. You’ll have opportunities to describe what you hear.” “Does this recording seem to invite you to sing along, or does it seem to suggest that we just listen and not participate as singers?”



Snapshot #5 Instruments

Instruments can provide novel ways to reintroduce familiar songs. Songs may be performed on recorder, guitar, tone bells, hand bells, barred instruments (xylophones, glockenspiels), piano, or any other musical instrument, including band and orchestra instruments as well as synthesizers. Consider capturing the vitality and spirit in the song through the instrument as you perform the song. Is the shape and flow of your instrumental performance as full of nuances as your singing of the song would be? The following teacher quotes reflect possibilities for introducing or reintroducing songs through instrumental performance.

- “Here is a new song that we will learn. Before you hear the words, I’m going to perform it for you on the recorder. As you listen, consider this question: What do you think the song is about?” (or “Can you guess the mood of the song? Do you think the song has actions?” “What do you hear in the melody: repetitions, anacrusis, a familiar tonal pattern, a familiar rhythm pattern?” “If you were to make up words to the melody, what would they be?”)
- “I’m going to perform a song that is familiar to you, but I’ll perform it in a new way.” (Perform a familiar song on the xylophone, but vary the melody of the cadence phrase. For example “Hot Cross Buns” could end with DO ME DO rather than MI RE DO or “Skip to My Lou” could end with SO SO SO FA RE DO DO rather than RE MI FA MI RE DO DO.) “As you listen to the xylophone, what words come to your mind? Am I performing the song exactly as you know it? If not, what is familiar and what is new?”
- “Your ears and memory may be really challenged to guess this song. On the piano, I’ll be performing a song we all know. But it may have a new melody or may not seem to have a melody at all. Can you

hear a song? (An arrangement of a song may be performed that adds several embellishments such as trills or mordents on select pitches. The rhythm of a song may be the foundation for atonal chords performed in rhythm. Select pitches of a melody may be changed. The rhythm pattern of the original song may be performed with pitches or chords that approximate the melodic contour.)

- By varying the ways in which we introduce and reintroduce songs to students, we aim for musical responsiveness: we endeavor to help our students connect to what they are hearing in a manner that paves the way and fosters the incentive for them to respond. Musical responsiveness is not only a major goal for music teaching and learning, it is key to other goals for education: listening skills, and understanding. So, although the strategies suggested here for introducing songs may absorb valuable class time, they may also supply fundamental and lasting perspective for students to view songs and singing as meaningful music education.

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