

This Old Man Gets a Valentine

By Tomi Kent (Montana)

For my first grade music classes, the time to meet the TI TI TA rhythm pattern seems to happen each year at the time that January is giving way to the ritual of red and pink hearts. So my students and I enjoy the excitement of a simple Valentine song game and let the fun catapult us into the study of rhythm.

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Words by Tomi Kent

Tune: This Old Man

Val - en - tine. Val - en - tine. Who will be my
val - en - tine? Num - ber one num - ber two num - ber
three it must be you! Take this val - en - tine with you!

Game Description: The children are seated in circle formation. One person carries a large paper heart and walks around the outside of the circle. As each number is sung, the individual closest to the moving person is tapped, one individual per numeral. The third child is not only tapped but is handed the heart as well. That child stands and takes the next walking turn while the person who was just “it” sits in his empty spot. The valentine is passed from one child to another in this manner.

Preparing to Play the Game: First, I prepared the students for the tapping action of the game. While singing the song, we highlight the words “one,” “two,” and “three” with a movement such as clapping or tapping. I watch to see if the

children can do this independently and if not, I allow more practice with movements they suggest. (For example, jumping, or jumping and turning on each number.) Next, as we sing the song, I model the first turn in the game.

Study: The music study that follows can be a part of several lessons. It begins by shifting the focus of study to the rhythm of the word “valentine”.

Teacher dialogue:

- “Let your hands ‘say’ the word ‘valentine’.... It sounds like this...” Simultaneously, I speak and tap the word then the children try it.
- “How many taps are in the word ‘valentine’?” (The issue of syllable accents will be addressed later in this article.)
- “This time, can we let our toes tap ‘valentine’?”
- The children are drawn into the decision making process with questions such as:
 - “Is there another place we could tap the word, ‘valentine’? How will that look?”
 - “Is there a way that you and a friend can move to ‘valentine’?”
- Then the word substitution fun begins! The children are drawn into the thinking process
 - “Think of an animal whose name has three syllables.”
 - “Share your answer with your neighbor.”
 - “See if the two of you can think of two more animals with three syllables in their names.”
- Partner work enables each child to work at a comfortable pace as well as to have an audience for their answers that is not likely to occur for everyone in the large group. It also gives me the opportunity to spend time with individuals hearing their answers and assisting when help is needed.
- The large group then gathers once more to hear the test some of the animal suggestions.
 - “Let’s say ‘ dinosaur’ in our hands. Are your hands ready?” Speaking the name of the animal is accompanied by soft tapping to feel the syllables. “Dinosaur.... Dinosaur...” Eventually I stay out of the checking process.
- “With your partner sing your two animal names in your hands.”

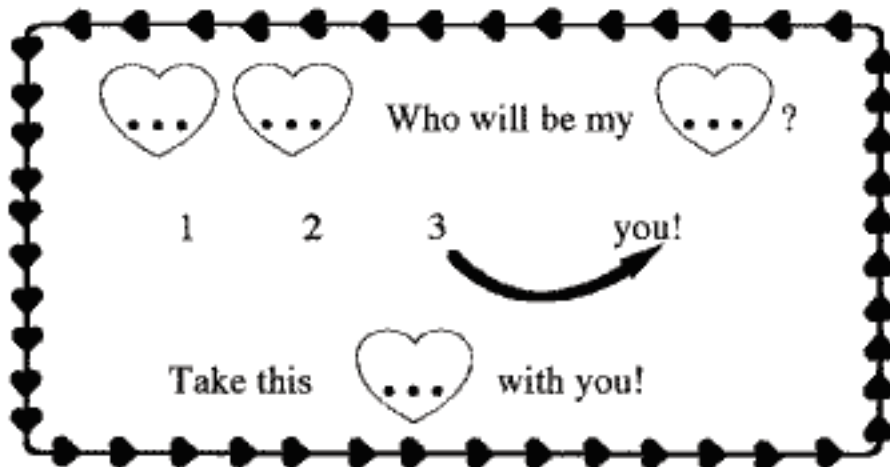
- “Check those two animals. Do they each have three syllables?”

I wait and give confirmation to their findings. Interspersed with the checking process we enjoy singing the song by incorporating some of the three-syllable suggestions, such as “Humpback whale, humpback whale?... Will you be my humpback whale?...” As time allows, we share, check and sing many animal names in our valentine song. The activity easily engages everyone with its balance of challenge, humor, and singing.

In this activity, there will be some animal names offered that won’t work well because a syllable other than the first has the accent. If a class has had prior experience locating accents in words, they can look at accents and syllables simultaneously in this lesson. But they can accomplish the lesson objective, becoming familiar with TI TI TA, without an understanding of accent. A response to an answer with the accent of syllables other than the first might be, “Jason, we’re going to save ‘gorilla’ for another day. It has a little trick in it so I’m going to write it on the this paper to remind us to come back to it.

When students seem to be comfortable with the process of word substitution, I let them know that there are music words that can be used for the three-syllable word. They join as I start singing “TI TI TA, TI TI TA, who will be my TI TI TA? Number one, number two, number three it must be you! Take this TI TI TA with you!” The sound of TI TI TA appeals to them, so we spend some time practicing this new language. We extend our practice by creating movements to accompany our new “music words.”

On another day it is time to make the connection between the sound TI TI TA and its symbol. I present a chart on large poser board.



“Here is a puzzle of a song you know. What do you see?”

Allow them to study the puzzle, identifying what they know. This is an important minute of chatter. Then one student is invited to discuss and show what he or she found in the puzzle. I help them connect the word “valentine” to the three dot patterns. “Look how my finger ‘reads’ the dots.” As I sing the valentine song, I touch each dot to coincide with each syllable of “valentine”. I continue by touching all the words and numbers of the song. The text “3, it must be you!” is sung while my finger touches “3” and sweeps along the arrow ending at “you”.

Students are drawn into the exploration with the following dialog. “Can someone else follow the song?”

One or two students take turns leading the song while the class watches. Because the kinesthetic aspect of rhythm needs to be reinforced, it is important at this beginning stage of music reading that each student sings and touches the symbols, especially the dots.

- “ Let’s all take a turn. I have this chart on a paper for each of you. When you get your paper, you can work on your own. Go ahead and sing the song while you follow it on your paper.”
- After all have had some time to work by themselves, we ‘re ready for a turn all together. I focus the class with the following dialog:
 - “Everyone, put your finger on the number ‘1,’ ... the number ‘3’...the word, ‘take’...the first ‘valentine’.”
 - “Let’s start with the first ‘valentine’ and follow the whole song as we sing. (In my singing voice), “Ready...Valentine, valentine...”
 - ”Remember the three-part pattern of music words TI TI TA? Let’s sing through the page using those sounds instead of ‘valentine.’”

Formal Rhythmic Notation:

The students often recognize these symbols as music notes. Now, it’s time to draw the stem-flag notation onto the dots. It is important not to rush into this step. It can easily be presented on another day. I provide an example, and then the students draw the symbols on their own papers.



- “When we see these notes and say ‘TI TI TA’, we’re reading music!”

With this simple little song game we had fun and the students were well into reading the rhythmic notation.