



Chinning

Chinning is the act of singing a song on a neutral syllable such as "loo", "la", or "doo". This valuable teaching strategy originated in the Maritime Provinces of Canada and was used to provide dance music when no instrument was available.¹

Explanation of the Term to Your Students

When we sing "la" or "loo" or other neutral syllables or sounds in the place of the words of a song, we call that "chinning". Although it has nothing to do with our chin moving, the word is a very old one that describes singing without words.¹

Why it is Used in Education

- To neutralize the effect of vowels and consonants on melody so that elements of the song can be heard more clearly. Ex.

"Let's sing the song 'Old MacDonald'. When we come to the words 'Here a chick, there a chick, everywhere a chick, chick,' in place of the words, chin on the syllable 'pop'." Students and teacher sing and chin the song. "What did you notice about the chinned chunk of the song?" Yes, it is all on the same pitch.

- To engage the students in careful focused study.
- To sharpen and hone listening skills for a whole song or parts of a song.
- To vary the practice of a particular song. Example:

Sing a song. "Let's go through the song once more by chinning it on 'doo'." Then ask, "Angie, this time what syllable or sound shall we use for chinning the song?" Other children are invited to give ideas for the syllable/sound to be used. Children will play with this kind of activity for more time than we think.

- To hear the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables in the English language. Example:

"How would George Washington's name sound if we chinned it?"

“How would we chin Booker T. Washington's name?”

“What do you notice about the syllables in each of these names?”

“Do you hear one of the syllables more than the others?”

In the English language some syllables are emphasized more than others. Where the emphasis is placed helps us determine the meaning of the language. (For more information on this subject see, [Stress Patterns in the English Language](#).)

Introducing “Chinning” to Your Students

- Sing a song using the words. Then, "Let's sing the song again. Instead of singing the words, sing "doo" for every sound (syllable) in the song."¹
- Teacher chins a song. "What did you notice about the way I performed the song that time?" Students describe and practice chinning the song.
- Using a song that is known to the children, introduce a lesson with a [secret song](#). "Listen as I sing a song." Teacher chins the song. "What did you notice?" Teacher chins the song once more. "Raise your hand when you can name the song I am chinning." Teacher and students repeat the activity until the answer is revealed.

Bibliography

Bennett P. D. & Bartholomew, D.R. (1997). SongWorks I: Singing in the education of children. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, p. 87.