

Cobbler Cobbler Mend my Shoe

A six-step progression to basic (rhythmic) music literacy

an illustration of Kodaly teaching by Len Tyler

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s s m m s s m s s m m s s m
Cob - ble cob - bler mend my shoe, get it done by half past two.

s s m m s s m s s m m s s m
Half past two is much too late, get it done by half past eight.

Cobbler Cobbler is a traditional children's song that is ideal for introducing children to the basics of music reading. The technical content is quite simple and as a result this song lends itself well to teaching basic musical elements to children. Before any musical element can be extracted at a conscious level the song needs to be learned thoroughly first ensuring that the unconscious performance of the various elements is done accurately and with good quality. With this in mind the following activities can be used to help establish this song.

1.	Sing the song for its own sake. <i>Possibly the most important activity of all. A good song will always do well with the children if it has quality and depth.</i>
2.	Sing the song while the children hammer one fist onto another to a crotchet (Ta) pulse. <i>(Banging in big nails) The children can be told that this is the pulse of the song and can be linked to the heartbeat. In people (or animals) the heartbeat can be fast or slow but is usually constant. The same goes for the heartbeat of a song. Sometimes fast, sometimes slow, but it usually remains constant.</i>
3.	Sing the song while the children hammer one fist onto another to a quaver (Te-te) pulse. <i>(Banging in little nails)</i>

4.	Children walk round the room to a Ta pulse while singing the song. <i>It is not so easy for very young children to keep their feet in time with the music initially.</i>
5.	Sing the song while clapping the rhythm (words) of the song. <i>Make sure that there is a clap for every syllable in the song, and just one clap on the last note of each line.</i>
6.	Sing the song while walking the pulse and clapping the rhythm. <i>Care must be taken here to ensure that the different elements are performed accurately.</i>
7.	Sing the song while half of the children hammer the pulse (Ta) and half clap the rhythm. <i>This activity is good for two-part hearing and general ensemble work. There can be many variations on this idea.</i>
8.	Repeat item 7 and change roles at a given signal
9.	Clap the rhythm of the song while silently mouthing the words. <i>This activity helps to develop the internal hearing and musical imagination of the children. They should be hearing the song in their minds during this activity.</i>
10.	Sing the song in canon. <i>This works at virtually any interval. If done at one beat interval the sound of the two notes together creates a pleasing effect. This is not so easy for younger children.</i>
	Be imaginative and creative. There are lots of other activities that can be done with this or any other good song. Don't be afraid to experiment or ask the children for ideas.

The basic technical content of the song is as follows:

Rhythmic	Ta, Te-te (crotchet and paired quavers)
Pitch	5 th and 3 rd degree of the major scale (so and mi). This is the easiest of all intervals for children to sing.
Format	AAAA – every line has the same musical content

Once the song is well established and solidly known the technical elements can be extracted and brought to consciousness leading to music reading with understanding. The accompanying flash cards are intended to support a six-step progression leading to basic music reading as follows.

Step 1. **Heart cards** – the song is sung while the teacher (or a child) taps on the card indicating the pulse. A series of four x four-beat heart cards can be laid out thereby showing the underlying structure of the song – four lines of four beats each.

Step 2. **The Boots Cards** – the song is sung while the teacher (or a child) taps on the boots. Again a series of four cards can be laid out thereby showing the format of the song. It can now be seen that each line is the same rhythm giving the song an AAAA form. Each line is the same. Heart and Boot cards can be placed next to each other to illustrate the difference between pulse and rhythm. It can take young children longer to learn this difference than many teachers realise.

Step 3. The **Boots on Heart** cards – the song can be sung and the teacher (or a child) can tap on either the heart of the boots. This makes the link between pulse and rhythm more obvious.

Step 4. The **rhythm notes on hearts** – the song can be sung and the children read the notes as Ta or Te-te. Each line would then sound Te-te Te-te Te-te Ta. They are now reading music.

Step 5. The **rhythm notes with small hearts** are used as a natural progression. The children should now be able to read these rhythm notes using rhythm solfa (Ta Te-te etc.)

Step 6. The final **rhythm cards** are provided without hearts. Once the children are able to read these with a good level of rhythmic accuracy and with a steady pulse then the children will have been given a solid introduction to basic music reading.

N.B. The above sequence is intended to take many weeks if not months to achieve properly. Only move to the next step when the previous step is solid. **“Anything not taught properly first time round is likely to take its revenge later!”**

Further elements can be extracted (e.g. pitch content). Please note that the pitch solfa is shown immediately below the staff for this song. Just the initials are used (s = So, m = Mi etc.)











