

Making sense of the dots; music literacy in KS1

“Are these the same notes we use when we’re playing the recorder?” asked a Y2 child on being shown the printed sheet music for a song we were learning.

We sing with young children often, but children generally don’t associate what they’re singing with written notation. We are missing an opportunity!

Music teaching should always start with sound, but by introducing children to the association of sound and symbol we can move them towards a musical literacy, we can help them develop an understanding of musical notation, both devised and formal.

This resource aims to offer ways into doing this. It isn’t prescriptive - many music practitioners already have tried and tested methods and materials for helping young children learn to read music – but by putting this resource together, we hope we can formalise the expectation that, by the time they reach KS2, children will have been introduced to the beginnings of musical notation. We also hope that there can be some level of standardisation of approach / terminology so that children can apply knowledge and understanding in a variety of contexts ie know that, yes, these are the same notes they use when playing the recorder.

“I wish I could read music!” How many adults have you heard say this? The basics of music reading are not hard, following very simple rules. Young children view music reading as code-breaking. If we can offer an effective introduction at a young age, we will be giving children an important life skill. Musical literacy enhances language development - it will also be an enormously valuable tool when children start to learn to play instruments.

But it must all start with sound - dots on a page will appear bewildering and meaningless if they are not explicitly associated with the music children are experiencing and involved in.

The aim is to make all Camden children into music readers - starting with sound, with movement, with a physicalisation of pitch, with an internalisation of pulse.

This project aims to raise awareness of what people are doing at KS1 and to encourage colleagues to share what they’re doing. The resources and activities here hopefully go some way towards this. Web-based resources will be updated and added to; we welcome comments, suggestions, additions and pointers to other tried and tested materials.

Online resources will develop over time.

To start with:-

- graphic notation cards – lots of ideas for vocal and instrumental interpretation
- standard rhythmic notation cards – using crotchets and quavers in 3 and 4 time
- a handy ladder – to promote the idea of how pitch-change can be represented
- two line stave notation - powerpoint resources to allow you to move notes
- pdfs / mp3s of songs using simple rhythms – to use with your children

By the end of KS1 children will be able to:	This may be achieved by:
Internalise pulse in both 3/4 and 4/4 time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singing songs in both time signatures NB also use “thinking voices” • Responding through movement to music in both time signatures • Taking part in activities to aid finding the strong beat in each time signature. • improvising rhythms in each time signature
Create, interpret and respond to graphic notation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating simple line graphic notation to show a sound getting higher and lower, louder and quieter, longer and shorter or staying the same. • Reading already-written graphic notation and interpreting it as particular sounds on chosen instrument/voice/body percussion • Devising and using written symbols to represent specific sounds.
Understand how pitch moves higher, lower or stays the same	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a visual ladder when playing and singing to show pitch moving up and down or staying the same • Using a two-line stave to play/sing notes that are a step higher or lower or stay the same. • Using their hand as a five-line stave • Singing simple songs following stave notation rather than just lyrics • Begin to recognise specific notes on a stave
Understand that music reads from left to right, top to bottom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following/creating graphic notation written in a grid • Using formal notation of known pieces of music as a way of learning how to navigate around a musical score. • Singing songs using stave notation • Playing from extended written rhythm patterns including word rhythms.
Be able to recognise, play and create rhythms made up of crotchets, quavers and crotchet rests in both 3/4 and 4/4 time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of word rhythms (Spider / Mouse; purple circle etc) • Using stick or standard rhythmic notations • ta ti-ti etc