MUSIC -- It’s More than Meets the Ear

A gazillion times! Is that how many times you’ve sung “Itsy, Bitsy Spider” and Wheels on the Bus”? I know it’s not easy to keep finding the energy and enthusiasm to sing the same songs over and over again, but I hope you know what an important teaching tool they can be.

Those simple traditional children’s songs are giving you a great way to promote some really important school readiness skills -- not just for language development, but also for understanding math and science concepts, and even social-emotional development.

One of Fred’s favorite Neighborhood visitors was Ella Jenkins who was a master at using music with children. When I watch Ella at work, she always gives me a new appreciation for how much children can learn from those traditional songs. And I
love the way Fred added his own creative fun to extend the learning even further, just as you can.

Here are some ideas that can remind you of how important those songs are for school readiness -- and may even help you find the energy to keep singing them a gazillion times!

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- Through those fun traditional children’s songs you’re helping children “looooove” the sound of words -- a key motivator for wanting to learn to read and write. You’re building a real understanding of new vocabulary, too, like when they use their hands to show their understanding of WIPERS (Wheels on the Bus) and “Here’s my HANDLE and here’s my SPOUT” (I’m a Little Teapot).

- Songs are full of rhyming words, so they help you strengthen phonemic awareness in a natural and fun way. Rhymes in lyrics help children with that skill, letting them hear we can make different words when we change some of the sounds. On the video Fred showed us how to take it one step further when he made up his own “Miss Mary Mack” verses -- “Miss Mary Lou...all dressed in blue and Miss Mary Jean...all dressed in green.”

SCIENCE AND MATH CONCEPTS
• Maybe you never thought about it, but some of the songs you’re using can help children understand science concepts. For example, on a rainy day that’s turned sunny -- when the warmth of the sun has evaporated the rain, remind them of the lyrics, “Out came the sun and dried up all the rain.” When you’re talking about parts of the body, you can start with “Head and Shoulders” -- and ask what other parts can they name. Or when you’re talking about how plants grow, you can sing “The Farmer Plants the Seeds” (to the tune of The Farmer in the Dell).

• We all know counting songs help with numbers, but songs can also help with a different math concept -- spatial relationships, like when you have children use hand motions for “UP the water spout” and “DOWN came the rain”...“The driver on the bus says move on BACK”... or “Put your right hand IN” for the “Hokey Pokey.” You’re also giving a geometry lesson when you show children how to make a diamond shape with their fingers for “like a diamond in the sky” (Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star).

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

• Fred certainly understood how songs can help children express their feelings. Remember his Neighborhood song, “What Do You Do with the Mad that You Feel”? I also heard about a teacher who always started the day singing “Hello, hello, I’m fine and how are you?” But one day he wasn’t feeling so fine and changed it to “Hello, hello, I’m frustrated and how are you?” What a helpful way, through a song, to help children know feelings are natural, normal, and something we can talk about.

• Through songs, you’re helping children develop one of the most important school readiness tools -- self-control, like when you cue them to sing quieter and/or slower at the end of a song or at the last verse, like Ella Jenkins did on the video.

The other great thing about those traditional songs is that most of them are simple enough musically that you don’t need to be able to sing well. Children love singing so much that they’ll be forgiving if you can’t carry a tune. Just enjoy singing along with them, knowing you’re building important skills for their future.
Thank you for being our neighbor,

Hedda Sharapan
M.S. Child Development
PNC Grow Up Great Senior Fellow
hedda.sharapan@stvincent.edu

Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers

"Music is sometimes called the beginning of language, because the early communication with babies often includes lullabies and lap games, like pat-a-cake."

MORE QUOTES
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