

Music For Every Classroom: Make Your Own Holiday Music

by Elizabeth M. Peterson

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What would we do without music during the holiday season? Holiday music is everywhere once we hit a certain date in the calendar year. It's on the radio, in the shopping malls and it even gets stuck in our heads from time to time whether we want it there or not.

Kids LOVE holiday music because it is so exciting. It represents the anticipation of all the wonderful things the holiday season brings: family, vacation time, wonderful tastes and smells and yes, of course presents.

Here are a few ways to bring holiday music, from all kinds of holidays, into your classroom. However, instead of simply having the students listen to it or sing it, they will compose it!

The following are some ideas on how to do this. Each idea is accompanied by a task card. These task cards could be something you put in a music center (or writing center) in your classroom. You may want to use them word for word or adapt them to fit your classroom or teaching style. Each task card is divided into 3 parts: Thinking, Doing, and Performing.

After each task card, there is an example of song lyrics. These examples are for you to use in your classroom to help students get their creative juices flowing. As students make up their own lyrics and music, add theirs to the examples for other students to see.

How do you spend the holiday?

Everyone has a different way in which they spend a holiday. Have students record how they spend the holidays as they write lyrics that document their times with family and friends.

Thinking:

Think about how you spend your favorite holiday. Do you visit with family? Do you eat? Do you play?

Doing:

Pick a holiday song you like to sing and rewrite the lyrics so that the song talks about your experiences during a certain holiday. For example write about your adventures on Halloween to the tune of Jingle Bells. If you would rather, you could make up your own melody to go with your lyrics. Be sure to write your lyrics down.

Performing:

When you are ready, you may want to record your song into the tape recorder. Regardless, be ready to perform your new song for the class!

The following is a Thanksgiving song that can be sung to the tune of “Here We Go A-Wassailing”.

Every year on Thanksgiving, to Grandma’s house we go,
She stuffs us with the best of food the world has ever known.

Chorus:

Turkey’s in the oven, mashed potatoes I’m lovin’,
All the squash, corn and all the deserts that you could possibly have.
Oh, Thanksgiving is such a wonderful day!

All my aunts and uncles, my cousins all are there,
Once there even was this guy with braids all in his hair!

When we’re through with dinner, we go and watch the game,
And soon it’s time to eat desert, so many I can’t name.

Once our bellies all are full, we take a little rest,
We say we can’t eat one more bite, our stomachs passed the test.

What does the holiday mean to you?

This variation of song writing will appeal to your more sentimental students. Here students are asked to write a song about what a certain holiday or “the holidays” mean to them. They may want to take an approach of their own personal feelings or have more of an interpersonal approach of what a holiday means in general.

Thinking:

The holidays are a special time of year. There are many different holidays and each one means something a little different to each of us. What is your favorite holiday? Why? What is the meaning of that holiday? What makes it special?

Doing:

Write down some of your thoughts in the form of lyrics. Write the lyrics to a familiar tune or make one up on your own. For example, write about what Hanukkah means to you to the tune of Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel . Be sure to write your lyrics down.

Performing:

When you are ready, you may want to record your song into the tape recorder. Regardless, be ready to perform your new song for the class!

This song about family goes to the tune of Silent Night.

Christmas time, is the time,
To be with, your family.
All the people you love so dear,
Celebrate as they gather near.

Hoping, praying together,
Christmas time is time for us.

Christmas time, is the time,
To remember those left behind.
All those people who aren't with us now.
Look upon us and remember how
Much we miss them and love them.
Christmas time is time for us.

Christmas time, is the time,
To think of our family line.
It keeps growing with every year,
New names and faces bring us so much cheer.
Having our loved ones together,
Christmas time is time for us.

Make your own holiday heroes

For your students who have a funnier or more creative imagination, this is a fun activity! Students make their own versions of lyrics to the tune of "Frosty, the Snowman" (or another tune) that explains the adventures of a new holiday hero. Using the framework of another familiar song can help your students write their new lyrics.

Thinking:

How many different holiday characters can you name? Have you ever tried to make one up? This can be fun! You already know about Frosty, the Snowman and Rudolph, the Red Nosed Reindeer. Now you can make up a new holiday character.

Doing:

Think of a holiday character and write lyrics that tell about the character and some of its adventures. You may write the lyrics to the tune of "Frosty, the Snowman", "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer", another familiar tune or you may make up your own melody. For example, write about Henry, the Holiday Hippo or Cassidy McPaws, the Lost Christmas Kitty. Have fun making up your character! Be sure to write your lyrics down.

Performing:

When you are ready, you may want to record your song into the tape recorder. Regardless, be ready to perform your new song for the class!

Here are some examples of other characters you could give your students.

Eleanor the Elfish Elephant

Hoppy, the Halloween Owl who every time he hoots, he scares himself

Wart, the finicky witch, who doesn't like all the potions he can make

Gail, the Gorgeous Christmas Goose...too gorgeous to be eaten

This song about Tex, the Turkey is an example of how you can use the story structure of a familiar song to help you write lyrics for a new one. These lyrics go to the tune of Rudolph, the Red Nosed Reindeer.

Tex is a little turkey,
Who can't make turkey sounds.
And if you ever heard him,
You would surely start to frown.

All of the other turkeys,
Couldn't help but laugh out loud.
Poor little Tex would sadden,
He only hooted like an owl.

Then one starry fallish night,
The farmer came to say,
"Tex, boy, with your hoot of might,
You could give those crows a fright."

The next day Tex set out working,
Scaring all the crows away.
Tex, that ole hooting turkey,
Really seemed to save the day.

Holiday Instrumentals

Students who may not be interested in making lyrics for a holiday composition may want to make an instrumental composition. Provide them with the opportunity to do just that! They may want to compose something on an instrument that they are studying or experiment with other instruments you or the music teacher may make available to them.

Thinking:

Listen to or recall some of your favorite holiday music. What makes it sound like the holidays? What instruments are used?

Doing:

Make your own holiday instrumental composition using the instruments in the music center or some of your own. You may want to do this on your own or with a friend or two.

Performing:

Be ready to perform your holiday composition for the class.

Embellishments:

When students are finished making their new holiday songs, allow them the chance to do even more. Here are some ideas of ways students can make their compositions even more fun.

- Add instrumentation to your new lyrics.
- Perform it at the Holiday party before vacation.
- Teach it to some of your friends and perform your new song for the class as a small group.
- Publish it and give it to your family and friends as gifts...don't forget your teacher!

The holidays are already a time that's full of emotion. Now, you can channel some of that excitement into a productive and creative work of art! Wouldn't it be great to see all your aspiring composers perform their new pieces for the class during a holiday party? Or better yet, for the school? ...if you were so adventurous. No matter what, your students will enjoy getting their creative holiday juices flowing!