



Tacky and a Tambourine:

Enhancing First Grade Literacy Through Music

BY NANCY McBRIDE ARRINGTON,
GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Abstract

This integrative lesson engages students in retelling the story *Tacky, the Penguin* through music. First grade English Language Arts Common Core Standards (ELACC) are addressed as students play instruments, create movement, sing and chant, and discuss their roles throughout the process. Students' understanding, fluency, and discussion skills are enhanced through their participation. The activity requires inexpensive hand bells and basic classroom rhythm instruments, and can be facilitated by general education teachers or music specialists with their young students. While the focus of this lesson is on the development of first grade literacy, this activity can be easily adapted to other stories and grade levels.

When teaching as an elementary music specialist in grades K-5 several years ago, I was approached by the first grade teachers in my school to contribute lessons to an interdisciplinary unit on the continents and to teach each lesson in music class during their study of each continent respectively. As one can imagine, it was easy to contribute a lesson consisting of folk songs/instruments/dances from North America. The lesson from the Asia unit brought to life many instruments and songs resonating in pentatonic modes. The Europe lesson afforded our students a rich heritage from classical music, along with French, Spanish, and German children's songs. Didgeridoos and kangaroos were at the center of the Australia lesson. African drumming rang

throughout our building during its respective lesson. The South America lesson focused on Argentine and Brazilian children's game songs, along with the Andean panpipes. When I began brainstorming about Antarctica, I asked myself the same questions as I had regarding the other continents: Who were famous composers from Antarctica? What are some folk songs from Antarctica? Instruments? Dances? Well, I obviously drew a blank!

Using my best resource (my students!), I asked the first graders what they knew about Antarctica. In unison they shouted, "PENGUINS!" So, I visited the librarian for a recommendation for a children's book. Without hesitation, he presented me with *Tacky the Penguin* (Lester & Munsinger, 1988). As soon as I saw the book, I knew it was the one to use for my lesson. I, however, had to get creative to turn it into a musical lesson. This lesson, which is described in this article, served the purpose for contributing a musical Antarctica lesson to the Interdisciplinary Continent Unit for many years at my school.

According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS, 2012), literacy instruction is the responsibility of all content areas, which includes music education. Similar themes are shared between CCSS for English Language Arts (ELA) and the National Standards for Music Education (NAfME, 2014). Some of the commonalities between these sets of standards include demonstrating independence, having strong content knowledge, comprehending, critiquing, and understanding other perspectives and cultures (Weidner, 2013). Additionally, other learning-to-read skills correlate with music literacy skills. These include phonological awareness, sight identification, orthographic awareness, and fluency (Hansen & Bernstorf, 2002). Coleman (n.d.), one of the authors of the Common Core State Standards, developed the *Guiding Principles for the Arts* and made connections between these principles and literacy. For example, principal one states, "Studying works of arts as training in close observation across the arts disciplines and preparing students to create and perform in the arts" (para. 2). This interdisciplinary connection enables students to actively participate in performance. In addition to actively participating in reading through music, concepts of literacy can be taught and/or enhanced through music. Research has demonstrated that music contributes to focused attention (Asaridou & McQueen, 2013; Tierney & Kraus, 2013) and enhances auditory processing (Saffran, 2002; Skoe & Kraus, 2012). Bernstorf (2013) reminds us that good music literacy can "provide the very same benefits as those who teach language reading, plus the enjoyment of an arts experience" (p. 2).

As I examined this lesson in the context of literacy, I discovered that the musical retelling of *Tacky, the Penguin* also served as an effective read-aloud. Therefore, in the description of this activity, I have noted the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) in English Language Arts (ELA) addressed in this lesson (GaDOE, 2014).

As stated earlier, my music students were my most valuable resource to utilize in generating creative ideas for lessons. Through the years, I had found that their natural movements led to innovative choreography and that their chants at play developed into meaningful songs for school events, etc. Therefore, it was natural for me to use their ideas when developing this activity: their contributions were invaluable, as they made many suggestions to make this activity more meaningful than I could have imagined. For example, I had initially only used the hand bells, tambourine, and drums for a select group to participate in their assigned part. I quickly learned that all students wanted a special role to play, and my first graders suggested having a "choir" and some "dancers" for the story. As a result, the Crooning Penguins and Partying Penguins groups were formed, joining the characters named in the book. Based on my experience in the general classroom and in sharing this with preservice teachers, I have found that this activity can be facilitated by a general classroom teacher. The instruments used in the activity are basic and are most likely available to borrow from the elementary music specialist. These classroom instruments are inexpensive and can be purchased easily through PTO or mini-grant funds. Vendors that provide these basic instruments at reasonable costs include local education supply stores, toy stores, and online vendors such as Musician's Friend (www.musiciansfriend.com/classroom-kids) and Music is Elementary (www.musiciselementary.com).

The following is the description of the lesson activity in which I correlated music with the book *Tacky the Penguin* written by Helen Lester, illustrated by Lynn Munsinger. Enjoy!

LESSON ACTIVITY

Tacky, the Penguin – Retelling the Story with Music

GRADE LEVEL: First

CCGPS:

ELACCKRL5: Recognize common types of texts (e.g., storybooks, poems)

ELACCKRL6: With prompting and support, name the author and illustrator of a story

and define the role of each in telling the story.

ELACCKRL10: Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.

ELACC1RL1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

ELACC1RL2: Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

ELACC1RL3: Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details. ELACC1RL6: Identify who is telling the story at various points in a text.

ELACC1RL7: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.

ELACC1RF4: Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension

ELACC1SL4: Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.

ELACC1SL5: Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

MATERIALS:

Lester, H. & Munsinger, L. (Illustrator). (1988). *Tacky the penguin*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Music Instruments:

Hand Bells – (Pitches C, D, E, G, and C1)

Tambourine

Hand Drums



Procedures for Initial Reading of the Book:

1. Share and discuss the Title, Author, and Illustrator. Use the illustrations to help students determine the type of story.
2. Ask the students what they think the story is about, what they know about penguins, etc.
3. Read the book, pausing to note how the illustrations contribute to the meaning of the story, the characters, setting, and/or events.
4. Facilitate a discussion by asking questions about key details in the text, and other questions such as, "Who told the story?" and "Which words/phrases suggest feelings or appeal to senses?"

Procedures for Retelling the Story with Music:

As a group, the class will help retell the story with music as the teacher narrates, using the following directions.

1. Assign the characters (*Companions*, *Tacky*, and *Hunters*) represented by musical instruments, as described below. Demonstrate proper playing technique of instruments. Characters:

5 Companions – represented with Hand Bells (The pitch, or note, which is printed on each bell, is denoted beside each Companion's name).

<i>Goodly</i>	C
<i>Lovely</i>	D
<i>Angel</i>	E
<i>Neatly</i>	G
<i>Perfect</i>	C'

Tacky – represented with tambourine

Hunters – represented with hand drums. Play a steady beat on thump, thump, thump, and as a steady beat accompaniment to the *Crooning Penguins'* chant. The steady beat can be related to their pulse or heartbeat in that it is evenly played (See chart below).

Partying Penguins – perform the movements in the story

Crooning Penguins – perform the songs/chants in the story

2. Assign the *Partying Penguins* their role and allow them to create the following based on the feelings elicited by the words and phrases in the story at the respective times the words are read:

- a. Performing strict marching pattern
- b. Performing haphazard marching/tripping pattern
- c. Performing splashy cannonballs

3. Assign the *Crooning Penguins* their role and allow them to practice the following based on the feeling elicited by the words and phrases when they are read:

- a. "Sunrise on the Iceberg." Sing with sweet and pretty voice. (Suggest using the pitches sol-mi, or sol-mi-la which are the pitches sung naturally in childhood songs such as "Rain, Rain, Go Away," and "Na Nana Boo Boo").
- b. "How Many Toes Does a Fish Have?" Sing with harsh and weird voice.
- c. Chant. (*Hunters* will accompany the beat of this chant with hand drums. Beat is marked with X underneath the words). The steady beat will contribute to students' fluency.

"We're gonna catch some pretty penguins, and

X X X X

we'll march 'em with a switch, and we'll

X X X X

sell 'em for a dollar; and get

X X X X

rich, rich, RICH "

X* X* X*

(All add CLAP on *. Use gradual increase in dynamics, or crescendo, which means "to get louder," on the repetition of "rich.")

4. The teacher re-reads the story, allowing the characters to play their musical instruments and

perform their movements, singing, chants, etc. at the appropriate times, as follows:

- a. *Companions* are named slowly, one at a time, to allow each student to play his/her individual bell after his/her respective name is called.
- b. Every time the name “Tacky” is used, the student assigned the tambourine shakes and beats his/her instrument.
- c. When the words thump, thump, thump for the hunters are used, the students assigned the hand drums beat their drums. Also, the drummers will play a steady beat to accompany the hunters’ chant. (See chart above for beats marked with X)

5. At the end, the teacher will facilitate additional discourse to include, “How did the illustrations, musical instruments, movement, and use of different voices help us understand the story better?” and “Compare the characters.”

It is my hope that your students (and you) enjoy using *Tacky, the Penguin* in this musical read-aloud as much as my students (and I) have. And, don’t forget ... you can always use this activity in your Antarctica lesson!

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Georgia Reading Association



GOALS

- Empower members of the GRA and local councils to become effective leaders in the field of literacy.
- Provide quality reading education services to all Georgia educators.
- Recognize exemplary individuals, local, and state literacy efforts.
- Achieve maximum involvement of members at the local, state, and international levels to receive maximum benefits.
- Promote the goals and objectives of the International Reading Association of Georgia.