



Call and Response Singing

Introduction

The simplest way to get people singing or playing music together is to use “call and response.” Call and response is a bedrock feature of African, African American, Latin American, and Caribbean music, including soul, gospel, salsa, jazz, blues, and R&B — and even in Western classical music in the form of antiphony. Call and response is an inviting opportunity for children to participate, interact, and quickly learn how to lead a group on their own.

Supplies

- Laptop or computer so that you can view the videos together (see next page for links)
 - Any book or poem you would like to use (you’ll be reading a line to kids and they’ll be repeating that line back to learn the concept of call and response). Rhyming books are perfect for this.
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Get kids thinking

Ask: What do you think call and response means? Demonstrate the call and response technique by reading a line from a book or poem out loud. Ask kids to repeat your line. Remind them to match the cadence and rhythm of your speech. For example, if your voice has a happy lilt, their voices should echo that. If you pause before a certain word, they should pause before that word.

Ask: What is an echo? Can you think of ways we echo or mimic each other?

In conversations, did you ever notice that you unintentionally imitate another person’s accents and body language.

Consider playing the mirror movement game. To play this, team up in pairs and face each other. One person is the leader and makes slow movements, the partner tries to copy the movements as if they are the mirrored reflection of the leader.

You can add gentle music so the players aren’t tempted to get too hectic.

Remind kids to try imitating large movements, small movements, facial movements. Paying attention is a vital part of good communication. Call and response helps us practice that.



See the complete “Tune In!” music toolkit at: www.startwithabook.org

Let's get started!

Step 1

Echo, echo. Think of call and response as echoing. Start with rhythms. Ask each kid to create a rhythm and have everyone repeat it back the same way. Here's an example of a simple rhythm:

Slap your thighs with your hands.

Clap your hands.

Snap your fingers three times — left hand, then right hand.

Repeat.

This can be fun in a circle so everyone can echo each other and 'pass' the turn around the group. Next, try with vocalized sounds. The sillier, the better (within reason). You can say things like "boom, boom, boom," or meow like a cat, or sway your arms and howl like the wind.

Watch this video for an example of how this game can be played:

"Call and Response 1: Echo Echo" (thisisLea) https://youtu.be/6qXpt_JSvro

Step 2

Lots of songs already lend themselves to call and response. Here are a couple of songs to listen to, learn and practice with your group. You may also invite a pair or small group of kids to try while the rest of the group watches and encourages. Or you may select confident or eager singers in the group to lead the songs.

Watch these two examples:

"Call and Response 2: 'You'll Sing a Song' and 'Jambo'" (thisisLea) <https://youtu.be/WFPHhJh74nl>

Can you turn other, familiar songs into call and response by singing a line and leaving space for someone to echo it back? For example, try with "You Are My Sunshine" and "Twinkle, Twinkle."

What are the results?

Step 3

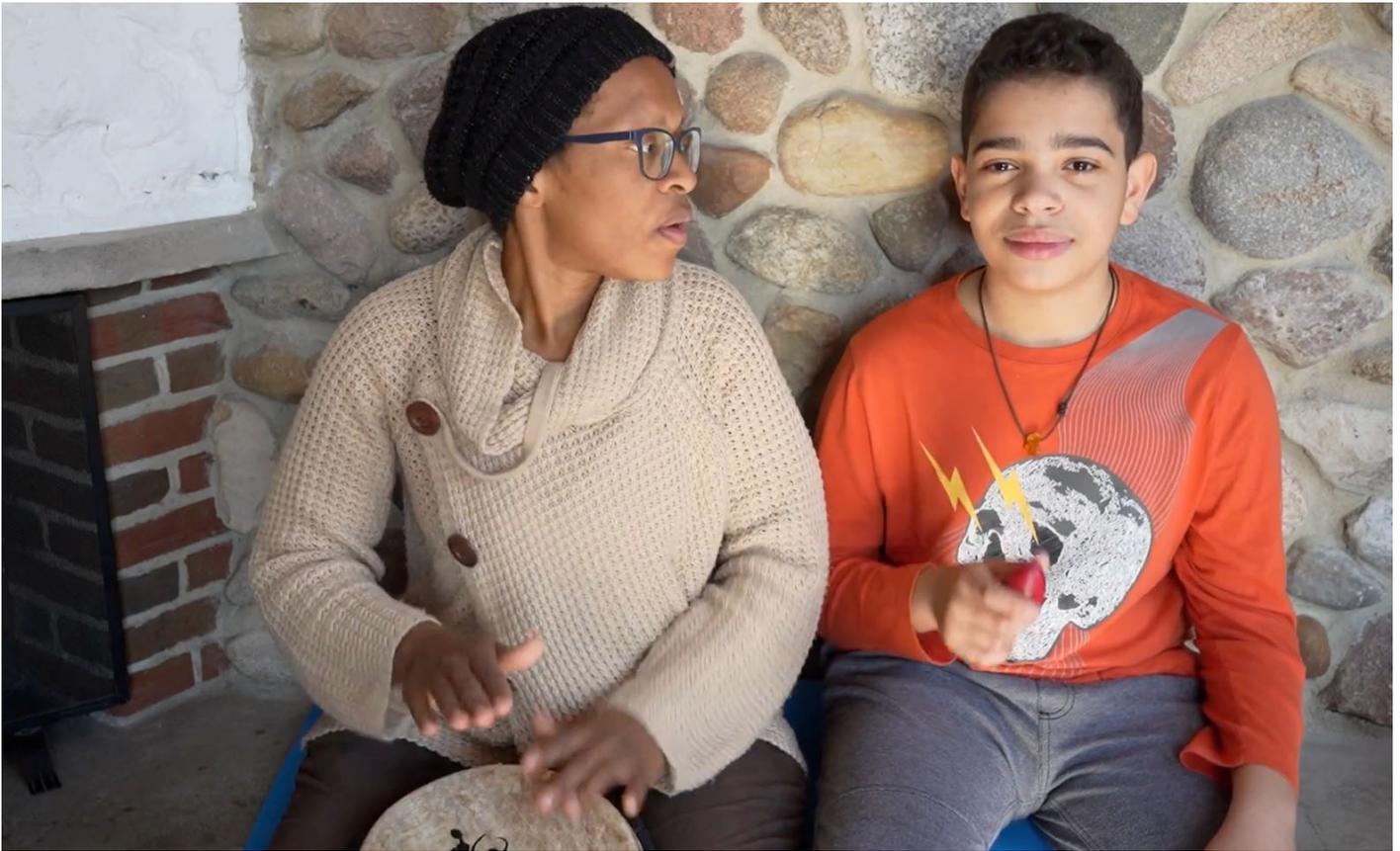
Make up your own call and response songs. Greetings are a great place to start because real conversations often start with a bit of repetition.

Feel free to branch out. How would it be if your conversation got silly with repetition?

You may choose to pair up the kids to call and respond back and forth. When they've come up with a musical conversation they like, each pair can present — or save it for the Open Mic! Or you may want to ask one kid at a time to lead the whole group.

Here is an example of an improvised, nonsense call and response:

"Call and Response 3: Make Up Your Own" (thisisLEA) https://youtu.be/OCC_qb_0IN0



More examples of call and response

“Sesame Street: Shake Shake The Mango Tree”

Call and response during play

<https://youtu.be/h4war7sLnuQ>

“Cab Calloway: Minnie the Moocher”

Call and response in popular music

<https://youtu.be/8mq4UT4VnbE>

“Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell: Ain’t No Mountain High Enough”

A conversation song

<https://youtu.be/IC5PL0Xlmjw>

“Christylez Bacon & Steve Hickman — Beatbox meets Hambone 2013”

Watch how two musicians connect by passing the turn to play back and forth.

<https://youtu.be/jBW9IWHkDRw>