

# You Can Read Music!

## Part 1 Learning the Steady Beat and Rhythms



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# To the Teacher

## A Little History

In the same way that learning the names and sounds of the letters of the alphabet opens the door to reading words in a book, understanding music symbols enables a person to decode music on the printed page. It was not always this way. For century after century, music was passed along entirely by memory. Nothing was written down. If someone to whom a melody was entrusted lost it from his memory, it was lost forever.

For this reason, the gradual development of music notation nearly a thousand years ago is of great importance. It allowed new types of music to be created which would have been much too difficult to pass on by ear. Now a composer could write down the music the way he wanted it passed on. Someone literate in reading notation could look at the printed music and know the rhythm and pitch of notes, their speed and how loudly they should be played, phrasing, articulation and what instrument or voice was to be used in performance. Long after the composer's death, other musicians using the notation can perform the music as the composer originally intended.

## Elements of Music Literacy

The first element of music literacy is rhythmic notation. Primary age children have no trouble at all mastering the basics of rhythm notation. Rhythm syllables are used at first when reading the rhythms (Tah, titi, tikatika, etc.) Only later are names given to the symbols for rhythm.

The second element of music literacy is melodic notation. Reading noteheads on the staff and learning to follow from left to right, up and down, stepping, skipping and repeating makes it possible for one to recreate a tune as simple as "Mary had a Little Lamb" or as complex as "The Hallelujah Chorus." While it is important to know the names of the notes if one is to match them to the keys or fingerings of an instrument, a much lower level of understanding enables a person to sing a simple melodic line.

Finally, at the elementary level it is important to help students to understand the symbols for expression they may find in a piece, as well as symbols that give directions such as the "repeat" symbol. Simple form and harmony also may be introduced to the students.

It is important in teaching music literacy skills to give opportunities for aural learning, followed by attaching labels. It is best to introduce only one new concept at a time in a type of spiral learning, with each level building upon the previous. Mastery is important before moving on to the next level.

## Individualizing Instruction through Technology

In the average classroom, there will be some advanced students who will pose challenges to the teacher, sometimes sabotaging the careful presentation of basic concepts to the other children. For these students a commercially available product such as the *Alfred Essentials of Music Theory (EMT)* computer software program may be very helpful. *EMT* offers three levels of music theory learning and ear training practice. The second and

third levels gradually take the student into what would be considered extremely complex, high level concepts and skills.

## Rhythm Challenge

Many music teachers have found issuing a challenge to the student to be an interesting and successful way to motivate the students to learn the rhythms and common rhythmic patterns by memory.

### **The challenge:**

Read each level of rhythm challenges with no errors.

Students can practice for this challenge with by chanting the rhythm worksheets alone, with a small group or with the entire class to become familiar with the rhythms. The rhythm strips (giant flashcards) and individual rhythm card sets may be used by the teacher to give additional practice. (Just as instant letter recognition helps people to read words, instant recognition of rhythmic patterns helps students to read music.)

Included in this collection are the following worksheets:

1. Rhythm Challenge 1 - ta, titi, rest (quarter)
2. Rhythm Challenge 2 - new: tika tika (4 sixteenths)
3. Rhythm Challenge 3 - new: half note, half rest
4. Rhythm Challenge 4 - new: tika-ti, ti-tika (2 sixteenths, eighth and opposite)
5. Rhythm Challenge 5 - new: syncopah (ti-ta-ti or eighth, quarter, eighth)
6. Rhythm Challenge 6 - new: dotted half note, whole note, whole rest
7. Rhythm Challenge 7 - new: dotted quarter note (dotted quarter note, eighth and opposite)
8. Rhythm Challenge 8 - new: dotted eighth note (dotted eighth note, sixteenth and opposite)

### **The reward:**

For each level passed with no errors (chanted in rhythm with correct rhythm syllables), a sticker on a chart, or signing a poster, or a certificate could be given.

### **Recommended age:**

First grade and up as shown in learning sequence.

# Teaching Steady Beat and Rhythm

## Kindergarten -

Keep the steady beat with hands, feet, body, instruments.

Progress to clapping the "rhythm of the words".

Differentiate between steady beat and "rhythm (of the words)".

Begin showing them long and short sounds in songs. (Do not name them)

## Grade 1 -

Teach ta\* (quarter note but don't call it that!)

*"one sound on a beat"*

Teach ti-ti (two eighth notes)

*"two sounds on one beat"*

Teach rest (quarter rest)

*"no sound on one beat"*

Teach 2-meter (feel the strong-weak beats in some songs)

*"two beats in each measure"*

## Grade 2 -

Teach tika tika (4 sixteenth notes)

*"four sounds on one beat"*

Teach tie (two quarter notes tied together) - then ta-a

*"one sound on two beats"*

## Grade 3 - As they begin playing these on the recorder

Teach ta-a-a (dotted half note, found in some BAG songs, can begin calling it dotted half note)

*"one sound on three beats"*

Teach ta-a-a-a (whole note, same as above)

*"one sound on four beats"*

Teach 4-meter (will be in their recorder songs)

*"four beats in each measure"*

## Grade 4 - Continue playing recorder

Teach ti-ta-ti (syn-co-pah)

*"three sounds unevenly divided on two beats"*

Teach tika-ti, ti-tika

*"three sounds unevenly divided on one beat"*

Teach single ti and/or eighth rest if music demands it

*"only half of one beat"*

Can introduce 3-meter if music demands it

*"three beats in each measure"*

Teach "proper" names of all rhythms and how to "count" near end of year

## Grade 5 up -

If kids play in band or chime choir, or sing in choir with printed music

Teach other dotted rhythms, 6/8 meter as needed

These names are called "rhythm syllables" and they are used to make the initial learning of rhythm a more simple process. Using the "proper" names and "counting" can be confusing when for lower elementary students.

# Common Rhythmic Patterns and their Pronunciations

It is common when teaching rhythmic concepts to children to use these rhythm syllables to facilitate rhythm reading or singing. The terms below are most frequently used by music educators.



Ta



Ti - ti (or ti - ti)



ti-ka-ti-ka  
(or tiri-tiri)



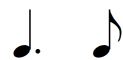
ta - a  
(or toe or too)



syn-co - pah  
(or ti-ta-ti)



ta - a - a  
(or half note dot)



tai - ti  
(or tum-ti)



ti - tai  
(or ti-tum)



ti - ti-ka  
(or ti-tiri)



ti-ka-ti  
(or tiri-ti)



tim - ka



ka-tim



ta - a - a - a  
(or whole note hold it)



rest



2 count rest



4 count rest