

# How to Create an Exemplary Middle School Choir

By Emerick Dee

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In this presentation, I'll explain how to build an exemplary middle school choir program. I'll cover the following...

- ❖ Creating a Choir Culture and Community
- ❖ Healthy Vocal Technique & Exemplary Tone Quality
- ❖ Essential and Expressive Elements of Choral Singing
- ❖ Importance of Music Literacy and Sight-Singing
- ❖ Finishing Touches: Song Selection, Classroom Management, and Concert Planning

# Choir Culture & Community

## Attitudes Before Actions...Character for life and Creating a Choir Culture

- ❖ Your worldview and personality will shape your classroom intentionally or otherwise
- ❖ Be a lifelong learner and give your students a love for learning
- ❖ Choose carefully how you interact with students from day one

## Attitudes Before Actions...Character for life and Creating a Choir Culture

- ❖ Our worldviews and personalities will shape our classrooms intentionally or otherwise...I think we should do everything intentionally.
  - I believe that all of our actions are a reflection of the attitudes of our heart
  - I admire people of strong character and want to be like them
  - I choose to be inspired by others rather than intimidated
  - I try to inspire and encourage others to always give their personal best effort
  - I have observed the best leaders to be humble servants and not bossy or haughty

## Attitudes Before Actions...Character for life and Creating a Choir Culture

- ❖ I want to be a lifelong learner and give my students a love for learning
  - I enjoy difficult challenges and love working hard to accomplish big things
  - I treat each student with respect and dignity and expect the same from them
  - I create a safe place where students know they are loved and protected
  - I teach people with names, voices, minds, hearts, personalities, feelings and souls...choir just happens to be the name of the class

## Attitudes Before Actions...Character for life and Creating a Choir Culture

- ❖ I choose carefully how I interact with students from day one
  - I choose what kind of atmosphere I want to create in the classroom
  - I choose positive ways of establishing classroom norms and expectations
  - I tell students what I expect of them instead of what I don't want
  - I recognize and reinforce students who exemplify the character and conduct I want
  - I try to redirect with humor and enthusiasm any students who may struggle with expectations

# Choir Culture & Community

## The Choir Code and Choir Code Celebration (CCC)

- ❖ Choir Code... SING!...this is what we do...Understand it, Believe it, Live it
- ❖ CCC...We celebrate success early in the year in mid to late October
- ❖ CCC Activities
  - Team Building Challenges
  - Food & Fellowship
  - Fun & Games
  - Ceremony / Celebration with Parents

## The Choir Code and Choir Code Celebration (CCC)

- ❖ Choir Code... SING!...this is what we do...Understand it, Believe it, Live it
  - PaSsionately...Love fiercely and show compassion
  - PersIstently...Never give up / Persevere, especially when it's difficult
  - PatieNtly...Be kind to others and to yourself
  - PursuinG...Dream BIG! Chase your dreams!
  - Perfection!...There's always something that could be better. Never settle for less than your best! Always improving, never arriving.



## The Choir Code and Choir Code Celebration (CCC)

- ❖ CCC...We celebrate success early in the year in mid to late October
  - Spend an entire day together = Quality Time
  - Social Time, Team Building, Eat, Laugh, Cry, Sing, Play, Work
  - Make it FREE!
  - Hand out free t-shirts with the code on the front or back and another inspiring quote or image on the other side. Spend a little more to get really soft and comfortable t-shirts (I suggest Next Level Brand CVC) that students will want to wear a lot. Avoid white t-shirts...I love charcoal grey!
  - Invite a Motivational Speaker or Inspiring Special Guest(s).
  - Invite parents for a special closing ceremony.

## The Choir Code and Choir Code Celebration (CCC)

### ❖ CCC Activities

- Team Building Challenge Course (PDF)
  - Physical, Mental, Emotional
  - Pairs, Smaller Group, Larger Group
- Food & Fellowship
- Fun & Games
- Ceremony / Celebration with Parents
- Sample CCC Agenda from 2018
- Learn more about the Choir Code on the WMS Choirs Website
- CCC Page on the WMS Choirs Website

# Choir Culture & Community

## John Wooden's Pyramid of Success

[Click here to visit John Wooden's website for more information about his Pyramid of Success.](#)

[Click here to visit my website for more information about Wooden's Pyramid of Success.](#)



## John Wooden's Pyramid of Success



“ SUCCESS IS PEACE OF MIND WHICH IS A DIRECT RESULT OF SELF-SATISFACTION IN KNOWING YOU MADE THE EFFORT TO BECOME THE BEST OF WHICH YOU ARE CAPABLE. ”

*John Wooden*

## John Wooden's Pyramid of Success

### *The Cornerstones of the Pyramid...*

- ❖ **INDUSTRIOUSNESS...**There is no substitute for work. Worthwhile results come from hard work and careful planning.
- ❖ **ENTHUSIASM...**Brushes off upon those with whom you come in contact. You must truly enjoy what you are doing.

## John Wooden's Pyramid of Success

### *The Foundation of the Pyramid...*

- ❖ FRIENDSHIP... Comes from mutual esteem, respect and devotion. Like marriage, it must not be taken for granted but requires a joint effort.
- ❖ LOYALTY... Giving or showing firm and constant support or allegiance to all those depending on you.
- ❖ COOPERATION... Listen if you want to be heard. Be interested in finding the best way, not in having your own way.

## John Wooden's Pyramid of Success

### *The Building Blocks of the Pyramid...*

- ❖ SELF-CONTROL...Practice self-discipline and keep emotions under control. Good judgment and common sense are essential.
- ❖ ALERTNESS...Be observing constantly. Stay open-minded. Be eager to learn and improve.
- ❖ INITIATIVE...Cultivate the ability to make decisions and think alone. Do not be afraid of failure, but learn from it.
- ❖ INTENTNESS...Set a realistic goal. Concentrate on its achievement by resisting all temptations and being determined and persistent.

## John Wooden's Pyramid of Success

### *The Heart of the Pyramid...*

- ❖ **CONDITION...**Mental-Moral-Physical. Rest, exercise and diet must be considered. Moderation must be practiced. Waste must be eliminated.
- ❖ **SKILL...**A knowledge of and the ability to properly and quickly execute the fundamentals. Be prepared and cover every little detail.
- TEAM SPIRIT...**A genuine consideration for others. An eagerness to sacrifice personal interests of glory for the welfare of all.

## John Wooden's Pyramid of Success

### *The Peak of the Pyramid...*

- ❖ POISE...Just being yourself. Being at ease in any situation. Never fighting yourself.
- ❖ CONFIDENCE...Respect without fear. May come from being prepared and keeping all things in proper perspective.
- ❖ COMPETITIVE GREATNESS...Be at your best when your best is needed. Enjoyment of a difficult challenge.

## John Wooden's Pyramid of Success

*I have awed at a solo  
performance  
and spectacular flashy  
display,  
But I crave for the best  
and my eyes are more  
blessed  
when an unselfish  
team makes a play.*

*A play that's so perfect  
and simple  
with the weaving of  
role with a role,  
Every piece partly seen  
like a fine-tuned  
machine  
and you notice not one  
but the whole.*

*Like an orchestra  
tuned to perfection  
where harmonious  
beauty is found,  
Every note has a quest  
to be part of the rest  
so the whole is a  
masterpiece sound.*

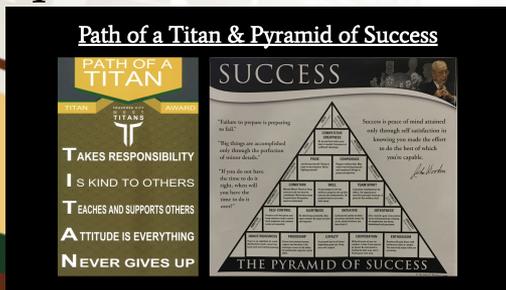
*Every wild one once  
blinded by glory  
is now cured and is one  
of the tame,  
He receives his esteem  
as part of the team  
and is eager to sacrifice  
fame.*

*It's amazing what  
teams have  
accomplished;  
it's astounding how  
much they have done,  
When the ultimate call  
is when one is for all  
and the credit is  
reached for by none.*

*~A Poem by Swen Nater, one of John Wooden's students*

## Traverse City West Middle School Path of a Titan

John Wooden's Pyramid of Success goes hand in hand with the "Path of a Titan" at TC WMS. I'm in the process of creating lessons to share with our whole school regarding these two lists of character traits as part of our school culture leadership team. [Click here](#) or click on the image below to view the first lesson including a video produced and distributed by School Specialty.



# Choir Culture & Community

## Make Connections to Inspiring People

- ❖ Superior Sports Programs...Singing is a Sport / Singing is an athletic event
- ❖ Show motivational video clips from movies and about famous people

## Make Connections to Inspiring People

- ❖ Superior Sports Programs...Singing is a Sport
  - If your school is sports-centered, connect with coaches and athletes.
  - Draw the connections to work ethic, passion, enthusiasm, teamwork, etc.
  - Ask students what teams in their school are the most successful and why.
    - It usually has a lot to do with the coach and great parent support
    - Teamwork is usually a high priority

## Make Connections to Inspiring People

- ❖ Show motivational video clips from movies and about famous people
  - Famous Failures (athletes & other famous people)
  - Facing the Giants...Leadership
  - When the Game Stand Tall...De La Salle High School Football Team

# Choir Culture & Community

Inspire them with their peers

- ❖ Watch and listen to samples of outstanding young choirs...it *is* possible to sing really well at this age! YouTube is a great resource!
- ❖ Get recordings of state honors choirs and play them for your students
- ❖ Try to find recordings of groups from small schools that nobody knows

## Make Connections to Inspiring People

- ❖ Watch and listen to samples of outstanding young choirs...it *is* possible to sing really well at this age! YouTube is a great resource!
  - Find choirs and young soloists performing a variety of genres
  - Search for the titles of songs you're teaching
    - Watch videos of great choirs
    - Watch videos of choirs that don't sound or look very good
    - Reflect together on what makes performances excellent

## Make Connections to Inspiring People

- ❖ Get recordings of state honors choirs and play them for your students
  - Don't tell them what age it is or how many voices, etc.
  - Make them guess first
- ❖ Try to find recordings of groups from small schools that nobody knows
  - Reinforce the fact that anyone can learn to sing really well
  - Remind them that not all students / choirs have “advantages”
  - Some choirs just work really hard and accomplish a lot

# Choir Culture & Community

## Make Singing in Choir Cool

- ❖ Choir Swag: T-Shirts, Jackets, Wristbands, Stickers & Magnets, Bumper stickers & Window Clings, Hoodies, Sweatpants, Socks, Umbrellas, etc.

## Communication / Website & Social Media

- ❖ Create your own website
  - Make your website the one place for all traffic (parent and student)
  - Turn your handbook into an online form
  - Make a Google Calendar
  - Post newsletters online and email them home
  - Add photos, audio, and video content (make sure to get permission first) of promotional items, rehearsals, performances, special events.
  - Post curriculum / learning goals along with music literacy information and links to excellent music websites
  - Check out [www.wmschoirs.com](http://www.wmschoirs.com) for more details

## Communication / Website & Social Media

- ❖ Create social media accounts and post regularly or get student/parent volunteers to post
  - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.
  - Texting Apps

# Choir Culture & Community

How do you learn to do all this? Networking & Volunteering

- ❖ Network with Local, State and National Colleagues
  - Invite Special Guest Clinicians and Artists
  - Attend District Meetings / Observe others teach in their classroom
  - Attend Annual Conferences & Workshops
  - Join Facebook Groups
    - “I’m A Choir Director”
    - “I Teach Middle School Chorus”

## How do you learn to do all this? Networking & Volunteering

### ❖ Volunteer & Work Paid Positions

- Volunteer to serve in your state vocal music associations
  - Host a festival
  - Coordinate an honors choir or similar event
  - Be a room monitor at a festival
  - Serve as a district manager or a chair on a board
- Work in your local area and throughout the state or beyond

## How do you learn to do all this? Networking & Volunteering

### ❖ Volunteer & Work Paid Positions

- Accompany for a variety of events if you play the piano well enough
- Go through adjudicator training and become an adjudicator
- Offer to work as a clinician with other schools
- Give private lessons
- Teach at summer camps

*Networking with other teachers has been one of my greatest joys! The old adage is true...it's not just what you know, but who you know.*

# Healthy Vocal Technique & Exemplary Tone Quality

- ❖ Choir Head Voice vs. Chest Voice
- ❖ Posturize before and while you vocalize
- ❖ Breath Management
- ❖ Vowels Tall *not* Wide
- ❖ Yawn Space for Resonance
- ❖ Warm Ups & Clarity

# Healthy Vocal Technique & Tone Quality

- ❖ Head Voice vs. Chest Voice...
  - Sing sirens down as low as possible
  - Experiment with bringing chest voice up until it breaks
  - Have students demonstrate for each other
  - Female teachers should have boys demonstrate for each other and bring in men as guests and vice versa
  - The male voice change is more obvious, but female voices changes too
  - Encourage boys to continue singing in head voice as long as it is comfortable while always experimenting with new lower notes as they develop in each voice

# Healthy Vocal Technique & Tone Quality

- ❖ Posturize before and while you vocalize
  - Feet shoulder width apart & one foot slightly in front of the other
  - Knees loose not locked & Hips over heels not cocked
  - Rib cage expanded & Sternum lifted and hooked
  - Shoulders back and down & on your head, hold a crown
  - Hands down
  - “Botox” for smiling eyes 😊

# Healthy Vocal Technique & Tone Quality

## ❖ Breath Management

- Silent, Deep, Low, Fully Expanded around the waist
- Hiss, Shush, Lip Bubbles, Zzz, Vvv, Hum, “oo” vowel, etc.
- In for 4 then out for 4, in for 4 then out for 8, 4-12, 4-16, etc.
- Reverse “How” Breath (a.k.a. “Wah” breath)
  - Say “How” and then say “How” slowly
  - Whisper “How” and then whisper how slowly
  - Say “How” in reverse by taking in a silent deep breath

# Healthy Vocal Technique & Tone Quality

- ❖ Vowels Tall *not* Wide
  - Lips Off the Teeth
  - Corners Tucked In
  - Laser Beam, not spray paint
  - Let the “oo” vowel influence all other vowels by puckering the lips
  - Modified vowels as needed
    - Ladies: The higher the notes the more open the vowel
    - Gentlemen: The higher the notes the more closed the vowel

# Healthy Vocal Technique & Tone Quality

- ❖ Yawn Space for Resonance...a flat soft palate will cause intonation issues.
  - Raised eyebrows = Raised soft palettes...the muscles are connected
  - Ways to get better space / feel the soft palate
    - Surprise breath / Reverse “K”
    - Imagine a hot potato at the back of your mouth
    - Breathe in through a straw shape after sucking on a mint
    - Don’t suck it back / Keep it forward
  - Demonstrate spacious resonant sound vs. lowered soft palate

# Healthy Vocal Technique & Tone Quality

## ❖ Warm Ups

- I do most warm-ups in descending patterns. This helps students to avoid tension that often occurs when singing an ascending pattern that starts in a range where they can sing in their chest voice
- Sirens (Think roller coaster...long fall and upside down...3 in a row)
- Do-Ti-La-So-Fa with a IV Chord
- So-Mi-Do in Key of C, then Db, then D, etc. on a variety of syllables
  - Solfege / Bwee, Bwee, Bwee / Nya Nya Nya / Paw, Paw, Paw

# Healthy Vocal Technique & Tone Quality

- ❖ Warm ups should always serve a purpose beyond just warming up the voice
- ❖ Use warm ups to teach excellent tone quality and music theory concepts
- ❖ Never let your students warm up with poor tone quality
- ❖ Focus areas
  - Rhythmic note value
  - Solfege Scales
  - Chords & Cadences
  - Suspensions & Resolutions
  - Dynamics

# Healthy Vocal Technique & Tone Quality

- ❖ Introduce concepts through warm ups that you'll be addressing in the music you're singing
  - Vowels, Diction, Rhythms
  - Range (Use your hands to represent the five lines and four spaces on the staff and teach students to know their own comfortable range and identify particular problem spots such as the passaggio or extremely high and low notes)
  - Invite and encourage students to help lead warm ups
  - Ultimately, make warm-ups serve multiple purposes.

# Healthy Vocal Technique & Tone Quality

## ❖ Clarity

- Beware of nasality
- Beware of breathiness
- Smooth fast vibrato vs. slow or thick vibrato
- Let vibrato happen; don't force it, but experiment with it
- Keep the tongue down and free of tension

# Essential & Expressive Elements

- ❖ Essential Elements
  - Pitch & Intonation
  - Rhythm
  - Diction...words tell the story
- ❖ Expressive Elements
  - Interpretation (Phrasing, Dynamics, Syllabic & Word Stress, Stylistically Appropriate, Interpretation)
  - Presentation (First Impressions, Staging, Facial Expression, Balance)

# Essential & Expressive Elements

- ❖ Pitch & Intonation
  - Out of tune singing can be one of the most frustrating things for a choir director. Never give up hope!
  - Insist on students listening carefully to themselves and each other.
  - Focus on intonation a lot at the beginning of the year.
  - Emphasize the difference between whole and  $\frac{1}{2}$  steps.
  - Remember that voice changes will affect pitch accuracy. Students will often not hear that they are off pitch.
  - Try to separate students who struggle with pitch from each other and place them next to students that have a better sense of pitch.

# Essential & Expressive Elements

- ❖ Rhythm
  - Drill rhythm (especially during sight-reading)
  - Use basic and complex rhythms from the songs you're teaching in isolation during warm-ups and sight-reading.
  - Drill basic rhythms and highlight certain rhythmic patterns that you encounter often.
  - Teach students how to count the beats with a system that works well for you and for them. I prefer numbers because they know what beat they're on (at least most of the time). *1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a*

# Essential & Expressive Elements

- ❖ Diction (Consonants)
  - Crisp Clear Consonants
  - *If I want my diction to be clear and understood, lips and teeth and tip of tongue will help it to be good.*
  - *The lips, the teeth, the tip of the tongue, thee articulatory tools*
  - Language appropriate consonants (flipped “R” vs. rolled “R” vs. no “R”)
  - Stylistically appropriate

# Essential & Expressive Elements

- ❖ Diction (consonants continued)
  - Sensitive articulated
  - Voiced consonants (B, D, G, J, L, M, N, R, Th\*, V, W, Y, Z)
    - Pitch
    - Shadow vowels
    - Unvoiced consonants (C, Ch, F, H, K, P, Q, S, Sh, T, Th\*, X)
      - Sooner, shorter, longer, louder, quieter (word meaning)
      - \*”Th” can be voiced or unvoiced (The vs. Thistle)

# Essential & Expressive Elements

- ❖ Diction (Vowels)
  - Language appropriate (pure Latin vowels vs. English)
  - Diphthongs (twisty tie)
  - Vowel modification for purity and range / passaggio

# Essential & Expressive Elements

- ❖ Interpretation
  - Phrasing, Dynamics, Syllabic & Word Stress, Stylistically Appropriate, Interpretation
- ❖ Presentation
  - First Impressions, Staging, Facial Expression, Balance

# Essential & Expressive Elements

## ❖ Interpretation

- Phrasing...usually four measures
- Shape by drawing a rainbow
- Dynamics
  - Sing more than what is written on the page following general rules
  - *crescendo* on long notes including all dotted and tied notes
  - when you *decrescendo* don't die...*intensify!*

# Essential & Expressive Elements

## ❖ Interpretation

- Phrasing...usually four measures
- Shape by drawing a rainbow
- Dynamics
  - Sing more than what is written on the page following general rules
  - *crescendo* on long notes including all dotted and tied notes
  - when you *decrescendo* don't die...*intensify!*

# Essential & Expressive Elements

- ❖ Syllabic & Word Stress
  - Usually based on time signature
  - Look for the most important syllables and words in each phrase and sing towards them
  - Be careful not to just accent stressed syllables
  - Focus on singing all of the unstressed words and syllables with great care and sensitivity rather than just thinking louder on the stressed words and syllables

# Essential & Expressive Elements

- ❖ Stylistically Appropriate
  - Articulation
  - Language
  - Genre
  - Color (Dark, Bright, Light, etc.)

# Essential & Expressive Elements

- ❖ Interpretation is all about singing from your heart.
- ❖ It is our responsibility and incredible privilege to make something as abstract as written music come alive.
- ❖ Don't let the music die by singing it without expressive interpretation
- ❖ SING! with an exclamation point...not a ?

# Essential & Expressive Elements

## ❖ Presentation

- First Impressions...Smile! 😊
- Staging, including entrance, exit, formation on and off the risers
- Know how many steps each riser has and how many sections there are
- Spread out and make sure there is only one person per window
- Make sure students know exactly where they're going
- Facial Expression & Appropriate Movement
- Balance among and between sections including accompaniment

# Essential & Expressive Elements

## ❖ Rubrics

- Much of what I've explained above is adapted from the MSVMA District Choral Festival Rubrics ([Middle School Rubric](#)).
- I also highly recommend the Choral Literacy Standards created by Geoffrey Boers (University of Washington). Click on the image to visit his website.

**Choral Literacies and Standards**  
INTRODUCTORY GOALS OF DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL LEVELS

Choral Performance Level	VOCAL TECHNIQUE										MUSICIANSHIP		
	Tonal Technique			Rhythm Technique			Artistry				Music Reading		
Performance	Skills Acquired	Performance Goals	Intonation	Music Reinforcement	Phrasing	Articulation	Ensemble	Artistic Expression	Artistic Expression	Artistic Expression	Artistic Expression	Music Reading	Music Reading
<b>Level 1</b> Beginner	Develops through vocal range and pitch.	Learn to listen to each other through matching sounds.	Sing straight and accurately.	Develop good posture and breathing technique.	Learn to breathe together and sing through the music.	Develop clear vocal lines through consistent articulation.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.
<b>Level 2</b> Intermediate	Consistent resonance through the middle voice with clear vowels.	Blend through vocal unity with clear vowels.	Clarity and accuracy of pitch and intonation through consistent use of vowel placement.	Good posture and breathing technique through consistent use of vowel placement.	Blend through vocal unity with clear vowels.	Develop clear vocal lines through consistent articulation.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.
<b>Level 3</b> Advanced	Consistent resonance through the middle voice with clear vowels.	Blend through vocal unity with clear vowels.	Clarity and accuracy of pitch and intonation through consistent use of vowel placement.	Good posture and breathing technique through consistent use of vowel placement.	Blend through vocal unity with clear vowels.	Develop clear vocal lines through consistent articulation.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.
<b>Level 4</b> Expert	Consistent resonance through the middle voice with clear vowels.	Blend through vocal unity with clear vowels.	Clarity and accuracy of pitch and intonation through consistent use of vowel placement.	Good posture and breathing technique through consistent use of vowel placement.	Blend through vocal unity with clear vowels.	Develop clear vocal lines through consistent articulation.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.
<b>Level 5</b> Master	Consistent resonance through the middle voice with clear vowels.	Blend through vocal unity with clear vowels.	Clarity and accuracy of pitch and intonation through consistent use of vowel placement.	Good posture and breathing technique through consistent use of vowel placement.	Blend through vocal unity with clear vowels.	Develop clear vocal lines through consistent articulation.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.
<b>Level 6</b> Superior	Consistent resonance through the middle voice with clear vowels.	Blend through vocal unity with clear vowels.	Clarity and accuracy of pitch and intonation through consistent use of vowel placement.	Good posture and breathing technique through consistent use of vowel placement.	Blend through vocal unity with clear vowels.	Develop clear vocal lines through consistent articulation.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.	Learn to understand and sing through the music.

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# Music Literacy = Smart Singing

- ❖ Sight-Reading
- ❖ Solfege
- ❖ Scales
- ❖ Chords, Arpeggios, and Cadences
- ❖ [www.wmschoirs.com/music-literacy](http://www.wmschoirs.com/music-literacy)
- ❖ [www.musictheory.net](http://www.musictheory.net)
- ❖ [Two Minute Music Theory](#)

# Music Literacy = Smart Singing

## ❖ Sight-Reading

- Find systems that work best for you and your students
  - S-Cubed<sup>®</sup> (Dale Duncan)
  - Sight-Reading Factory<sup>®</sup>
  - State Association Materials
  - Focus on Rhythm and Pitch separately at first
  - Count Rhythms so students know how many beats there are per measure and what beat they're on in the measure
  - Create “Readers” instead of using scores for beginning singers using music notation software

# Music Literacy = Smart Singing

- ❖ Solfege syllables for pure vowel formation
  - Hand signs for kinesthetic learning and interval recognition
    - Do = Rocky boxing above his head
    - Ti = Unicorn
    - La = Eyebrows raised (*Law not Lah*)
    - So = Hug a Tree (arms straight out / hands level with mouth)
    - Fa = Sternum (*Faw not Fah*)
    - Mi = Diaphragm
    - Re = Karate Chop Abs
    - Low Do = Fists by belly button

# Music Literacy = Smart Singing

## ❖ Scales

- Emphasize Whole Steps vs. Half Steps (Mi-Fa & Ti-Do)
- Sing in Rounds / Harmony in Interval of 3rds
- Sing in 3rds (Do-Mi, Re-Fa, Mi-So, etc.)
- Sing in two parts with suspensions (Do/Ti-La, Ti/La-So, La/ So-Fa, etc.)

# Music Literacy = Smart Singing

## ❖ Chords, Arpeggios, and Cadences

### ➤ Sing Patterns of Primary Chords (I, IV, V / V<sup>7</sup>)

- Do-Mi-So-Mi-Do (I Chord)

- Do-Fa-La-Fa-Do (IV Chord)

- Ti-Re-So-Re-Ti (V Chord)

- So-Fa-Re-Ti (V<sup>7</sup> Chord)

- Combination Cadence:

D-M-S-M-D-F-L-F-S-F-R-T-D-M-S-D-S-M-D

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Song Selection
- ❖ Classroom Management
- ❖ Concert Planning
- ❖ Fundraising

# Finishing Touches

## ❖ Song Selection

### ➤ Where to start

- Required state lists
- Honors Choirs
- Music Retailers with searchable websites by voicing, difficulty, etc.
- Festival Programs (local and state)
- Conference Reading Sessions
- Specific Composers
- Commissions

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ How to choose great music
  - Find a meaningful and moving text or something very fun / funny
  - Make sure the voicing is right for your choir
    - Unison singing is excellent for beginning choirs
    - Introduce two part singing through rounds and partner songs

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ How to choose great music
  - Make sure the range is right for your students
    - A3 – E5 is usually safe for most beginners
    - Proceed with great caution if a song stays up above the staff or below the staff for extended periods
    - Boys with changing voices may be limited to only about 5 notes
    - Look for songs that you and your students would want to listen to and sing a lot

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Accompanied vs. A Cappella
  - Make sure that you or your accompanist can play the piano accompaniment with technical accuracy and artistry. It is not fair to expect students to sing well with a poorly played accompaniment.
  - Find accompaniments that assist your students if necessary and get out of the way by not doubling their notes as soon as they are ready to sing without that help.

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Accompanied vs. A Cappella
  - Songs with additional instrumental accompaniment besides the piano can be very enjoyable as long as it adds to the performance instead of detracting from it.
  - A cappella music is wonderful!

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Language should be considered
  - English can be more difficult than foreign languages sometimes
  - Latin is a great place to start with beginners
  - Find songs with really clear pronunciation guides
  - Only choose languages that you can teach well
    - If you can't teach it well, they won't sing it well.
    - Learn the language first on your own if you want to teach something you don't know.

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Simple rhythms are better for beginners. If they can't read it or understand it when you explain it, it's probably too difficult. You'll end up trying to teach everything by rote.
- ❖ Make sure the difficulty level is right...not too easy, but not too hard

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Classroom Management...Create a safe, warm, and inviting atmosphere
- ❖ Make the choir room more like a home if possible
  - Lighting (warm or natural vs. industrial)
  - Add Fun Furniture & Provide Amenities
  - Leave open space for movement
  - Be very intentional with decorations, posters, etc.

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Make the choir room more like a home if possible (continued)
  - Greet students by name and get to know them personally and help them get to know each other
  - Meet any negativity with positive redirection in public and address it again later in private as necessary
  - Give respect to all and expect respect from all
  - Invest time and energy into getting to know more about your students during class even if it is just a little bit each day

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Fast-Paced Lessons
  - Create clear lesson plans and execute them without hesitations
  - Eliminate wasted time
  - Transition from one thing to another as quickly as possible

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Multitask and have students multitask whenever possible
  - Provide prompts for students to respond to as they enter the room
  - Words or pictures on the board or screen to discuss
  - Worksheet or activity materials on music stand by the door
  - Stretch, sight-read, or perform another silent daily task during attendance
  - Sing during transitions...if they're singing they're not talking 😊
  - Project music so that students' hands are free to move / conduct while singing

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Give students very short periods of time to complete tasks that shouldn't take very long
  - Discuss answers to questions with a neighbor for 10-30 seconds
- ❖ Let students know how long you're going to work on a particular thing
- ❖ Students will remain engaged longer if they know something will end in 3-5 minutes. Anything longer than 5-10 minutes will likely lose them
- ❖ Give students an outline of your lesson plan on the board / screen and/or verbally at the beginning of the class.

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Be Enthusiastic and Smile a LOT
- ❖ It's also okay to cry and make them cry...in a good way
- ❖ Smiling is contagious 😊
- ❖ Laugh at least once each class period each day
- ❖ Communicate with passion and compassion
- ❖ Be vulnerable when students move you emotionally...it's okay to cry

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ If there is an emotional moment that is related to the music and students are willing to show their emotions, embrace the moment!
- ❖ Apologize when you lose it. You will lose it eventually.
- ❖ Take responsibility for your attitude no matter how bad your day is going
- ❖ If necessary, take the day off...some days they will be better without you
- ❖ If there is an appropriate burden to share, be vulnerable
- ❖ Celebrate successes a LOT...even if they're small successes

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Create special days throughout the year that students can anticipate
- ❖ The day after concerts I love to celebrate the success and let students share all of the positive comments from their own observations as well as their friends and family who attended the event.
- ❖ Take time strategically to do team-building activities during class
- ❖ Occasionally have a day with no singing
- ❖ Remind students that every day is an opportunity for something wonderful

# Finishing Touches

- ❖ Concert Planning
  - Concert Length...not too long...you must know your audience
  - Location
    - Number of seats
    - Number of risers / stage space
    - Is there room for students to sit when they're not performing?
    - Transportation / Parking / Logistics

# Finishing Touches

## ❖ Concert Planning (Continued)

### ➤ Theme or no theme

- Time of year
- Holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Easter, etc.)
- Idea (Love, Air, Water, Night, Birds, etc.)

# Finishing Touches

## ❖ Concert Planning (Continued)

- Large Group Combined Song...I love doing this for several reasons...
  - If you have multiple grades / classes sing the same song together...it creates connections
  - If you perform it at the end of the concert then it gives kids and parents a reason to stay until the end
  - If there are too many students to fit on stage (or not) surround the audience in a musical hug

# Finishing Touches

## ❖ Concert Planning (Continued)

### ➤ Audience Participation

- Invite former students to sing a song you repeat every year at a particular concert
- Invite all audience members to sing along to a song they know
  - National Anthem
  - Familiar Traditional Songs
- Teach them a simple song on the spot including very simple parts

# Finishing Touches

## ❖ Fundraising

### ➤ Keys to successful fundraising

- High % Profit Margin
- CASH Incentives and
- Quality Product(s)
- Large % of Participation (cash incentives for selling only 3 items)
- Clear Training & A Lot of Cheerleading
- Great Timing (length of fundraiser and time of year)

# Finishing Touches

## ❖ Fundraising

### ➤ Traverse City Music Department Fall Fundraiser

- My favorite fundraiser ever is our fall discount card fundraiser
  - \$10 for a credit card sized discount card with deals for 15-20 local businesses... “You’ll SAVE more than you spend!” :-)
  - \$9 of \$10 is PROFIT (minus incentives)!
- Check out [all the details](#) for how to have a successful campaign

# Links & Acknowledgements

- ❖ Michigan School Vocal Music Association (MSVMA)
  - [MSVMA Website](#)
  - [MSVMA District Choral Festival Performance Rubric](#)
  - [MSVMA District Choral Festival Sight-Reading Rubric](#)
- ❖ Traverse City West Middle School Choirs (TC WMS Choirs)
  - [TC WMS Choirs Website](#)
  - [TC WMS Choirs on Facebook](#)
  - [TC WMS Choirs on Instagram](#)

# Links & Acknowledgements

- ❖ Musician's Toolkit
  - [Musician's Toolkit](#)
  - [How To Build An Exemplary Middle School Choir \(Videos\)](#)
- ❖ Music Literacy/Theory & Sight-Reading Websites
  - [MusicTheory.net](#)
  - [Rhythm Creator](#)
  - [Sight Reading Factory](#)
  - [Two Minute Music Theory on YouTube](#)

# In Conclusion

- ❖ Please visit [wmschoirs.com](http://wmschoirs.com) / [emerickdee.jimdo.com](http://emerickdee.jimdo.com) for more information.
- ❖ Please contact me at [thedeefamily@gmail.com](mailto:thedeefamily@gmail.com) with any questions.
- ❖ You can also find me on [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#).

*Thank you to all of my friends and mentors who have taught me so much! I continue to learn from you all! SING! Soli Deo Gloria! ~Emerick Dee*

**Ceaseless work, analysis,  
reflection, writing much, endless  
self-correction, that is my secret.**

Johann Sebastian Bach