

Speaking Chorus - Sight Reading & English Diction

Skills/Subjects to be learned: Reading and performing sixteenth note/rest rhythms; Using English choral diction techniques to speak texts in rhythm.

Note: This lesson would be appropriate for an in-class meeting in the second half of the school year, after students have explored simple rhythms (quarter notes, eighth notes and equivalent rests), developed their ability to sight read such rhythms, and have established a foundation of English diction for choral singing.

Objectives:

- (1) Given a discussion and demonstration of reading and performing rhythmic patterns (including sixteenth notes and rests) using the Gordon Beat Function Syllables, and guided practice opportunities in clapping and speaking such rhythms, the student will demonstrate the ability to sight read rhythm patterns including whole, half, quarter, and eighth notes plus sixteenth notes and equivalent rests, as assessed by the teacher in an in-class performance where the student will clap and speak a notated eight-measure rhythm sequence that includes sixteenth notes/rests (tempo approx. ♩ = 50 BPM) with no errors in rhythm and/or syllables. (S/NS)
- (2) Given a presentation and modelling of correct English diction for choral singing, and guided practice opportunities with the Waring Tone system, the student will demonstrate the ability to use principles of singers' diction in English, as assessed by the teacher in an individual oral test where the student will speak the text of a 4 measure line of text chosen by the teacher from the piece "Geographical Fugue" by Toch with no errors in diction. (S/NS)

Equipment & Resources:

- Stereo/sound system
- Access to YouTube track: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONJaNors_1A
- Copy of the Gordon's Beat Function Rhythm Syllable System handout
- Copy of the Sight Reading Rhythms exercises
- Copy of the Singer's Diction: English "Study Sheet"
- Copy of the Waring Tones Phonetic Spelling of "Geographical Fugue"
- Score for "Geographical Fugue" by Toch & sharpened pencil to make score notes
- Chair with no arms, suitable for singing

Methodology:

AS (For Objective #1) While "walking the beat" to the recorded song "Target" (or an mp3 of a rhythm track) students (Ss.) participate in clapping and speaking rhythmic patterns (using the Gordon Beat Function Syllables) that include half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, and equivalent rests. (Rhythm patterns include those appearing in the song "Geographical Fugue".)

I Teacher (T.) explains that this class will include sight reading various rhythmic patterns like those just explored in our opening activity, as well as learning how to sight read sixteenth note/rest rhythmic patterns. We will then be learning a new piece!

M Copies of the Sight Reading Rhythms exercises are distributed. T. introduces how to clap and speak sixteenth note/rest rhythms using the Gordon Beat Function Syllables. T. then claps and speaks various rhythms in small chunks (i.e., one measure at a time) on the sheet. T. will repeat exercises as needed.

GP Ss. will read, clap, and speak back such notated rhythms with T. monitoring for correctness. T. will provide feedback when and where appropriate. (Rhythmic patterns include those the T. has performed in the AS, as well as sixteenth notes/rests)

IP Printed scores to the piece "Geographical Fugue" are distributed. Ss. are directed to practice clapping and speaking the rhythm of the Tenor line independently from the top of page 12 to the bottom of page 13.

GP When Ss. feel confident with clapping and speaking these rhythms, they will work in pairs to perform various other lines for each other (i.e., their particular part). T. will monitor for correctness and provide feedback as necessary.

AS (For Objective #2) In a "call and response" manner, T. will give an example and Ss. will participate in speaking various consonant sounds, as demonstrated by T.

I T. explains that the second part of this lesson will include reviewing English diction, particularly consonants, in order to work on a well-articulated choral sound for the piece "Geographical Fugue".

P Copies of the Singer's Diction: English "Study Sheet" are distributed. A quick "review" of English Singer's Diction is presented by T. Any lingering questions are addressed by T.

IP Ss. are asked to independently write out the phonetic spelling for the piece “Geographical Fugue” by Toch.

GP As a class, Ss. are asked to decide (with the help of T. and their individual answers from above IP) what would be the best pronunciation of each phrase for the choir. T. will provide suggestions as needed. Once class has decided on the phonetic spelling, T. and Ss. will speak through all the text together.

IP Ss. are directed to practice speaking the text independently using the Waring Tones phonetic spellings developed as a class.

M T. continues to model the pronunciation and diction of various other lines of the piece “Geographical Fugue”. T. repeats lines/phrases as needed.

GP Ss. will repeat each line back, as modelled by T. who will provide feedback.

IP Ss. are directed to practice speaking and writing out the phonetic spelling for their particular line within the piece. T. will circulate the room to ensure Ss. are having success.

M&GP Once secure, T. models and Ss. demonstrate the pronunciation and diction of each line, but this time in rhythm.

IP Ss. are given time to practice speaking their individual lines of text in rhythm using the Waring Tones system.

GP T. will lead Ss. in piecing all of the parts together. Ss. will practice performing the piece several times while T. provides continual feedback.

C Class performance of the piece "Geographical Fugue" and teacher evaluation (as listed below).

FA On the last day of this lesson, each student will be asked to:

- (1) Clap and speak a notated eight-measure rhythm sequence (tempo approx. ♩ = 50 BPM) with no errors in rhythm and/or syllables for a grade of “Satisfactory”. (Rhythms will be similar to those appearing in the "Geographical Fugue" piece and include sixteenth notes/rests)
- (2) Speak the phonetic spelling of a 4 measure line of text chosen by the teacher from the piece “Geographical Fugue” by Toch with no errors in diction and/or pronunciation for a grade of “Satisfactory”.

Sight Reading Rhythms Exercises Sheet (Sample)

Sight Reading Rhythms Exercises

Morgan Kuepfer

The image shows two staves of musical notation for sight reading exercises in 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a double bar line and a 4/4 time signature. It contains four measures: the first measure has a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter rest; the second measure has a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter rest; the third measure has a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note; the fourth measure has a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The second staff begins with a measure rest labeled '5' above it. It contains four measures: the first measure has a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note; the second measure has a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter rest; the third measure has a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note; the fourth measure has a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. Both staves end with a double bar line.

Singer's Diction: English "Study Sheet"

Study Sheet : Singer's Diction - English

The main concerns for a native English speaker in developing "singer's diction" are: (1) to listen to and utilize the language in terms of the pure qualities of its sounds, in order to better communicate meaningfully, and (2) to avoid affectation. Development of awareness of the way a language sounds when it is sung by different performers may stimulate better facility with diction in the singer.

I. The five main factors in correct singer's diction are:

- a. Clarity If the listener can't understand the words, why sing words? Use pure vowels and pronounce them as naturally and unaffectedly as possible.
- b. Ease Relaxed face and throat muscles help make the words understandable and make it possible to sing well in tune with a minimum of strain.
- c. Expressiveness Singers must take care to put emphasis on the appropriate syllable of each word and on the most important words in each phrase.
- d. Accuracy Precise accuracy in rhythm often depends on accurate pronunciation.
- e. Uniformity (when singing with one or more other persons) Uniformity of vowel shape and consonant pronunciation results in the singers sounding "as one voice."

II. Vowel sounds

In singing, vowels are regarded as "the prime vehicles of intonation." There are ten basic vowel sounds in the English language, formed with various parts of the mouth. They are exemplified by the following words:

Front vowels:	sit - ih	set - eh	sat - a
Central vowels:	see - ee	sun - uh	sod - ah
Back "rounded" vowels"	soon - ooh	soot - ooh	soak - oh saw - aw

In addition, there are six primary diphthong vowel sounds in the English language. (A diphthong consists of two vowel sounds pronounced within one syllable.) Examples are in the following words:

sigh - sah_ee	vow - vah_ooh
say - seh_ee	so - soh_ooh
boy - boh_ee	dew - dee_ooh

In the first five examples above, the longest duration should be given to the first vowel sound; in the last example [ee_ooh] the longest duration is given to the second vowel sound:

sigh - sah_ee	dew - dee_ooh
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III. Consonants

There are two ways of categorizing consonant sounds:

1. As **voiced** consonants [b, w, m, v, d, th (as in thine), n, z, zh, l, j, r, ng, y, g, q (kw), x (gz)] and **unvoiced** consonants [p, wh, f, k, t, th (as in thin), s, sh, ch]. It is important that voiced consonants be performed at the same dynamic level and pitch as their adjoining vowels.
2. As **plosives** (p, b, t, d); **nasals** (m, n, ng); **glides** (w, j, l, r); and **fricatives** (s, zh, f, h). Each is named for the way in which the vocal mechanism is manipulated to produce the sound.

In many singing styles, pronunciation of the consonant "r" is omitted at the end of a syllable:

her voice - huh(r) voh_ees

However, the "r" is pronounced at the beginning of the syllable which follows it when the following syllable begins with a vowel:

her eyes - "huh rah eez"

IV. Syllable division

The manner in which words are divided into syllables in printed music generally differs from the way they are best divided into syllables when sung:

Printed score	Better division	Pronounced
Al- le- lu- jah	A- lle- lu- jah	Ah leh looh ee_ah
des- ti- ny	de- sti- ny	deh stih nee

For example, a pronouncing spelling of the following text:

"Don't you hear a voice"

...might be written for singers as:

Doh ntee_oo hih ruh voh_ees

Greater facility with singers diction in all languages may be acquired by learning the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet). The IPA is a symbol system used to represent the vocal sounds in all written languages.

Waring Tones Phonetic Spelling of "Geographical Fugue"

English Text

Trinidad and the big Mississippi
And the town Honolulu
And the lake Titicaca
Canada Malaga
Rimini Brindisi

Phonetic Spelling

T(r)ih nih da da ndthuh bi gmih sih sih pee
A ndthuh tah_oo h nah noh looh looh
A ndthuh leh_ee ktee tee kah kah
Ka nuh duh ma luh guh
Ree mee nee b(r)ih ndee see