

Legacy Project Choral Syllabus and Lesson Guidelines for Choir Conductors

Lesson 1

Establish a register of students ensuring there are no more than 60 students. If there are more than 60, choose a combination of gender, age and voice groups to provide a balanced choir. Arrange students in rows, based on voice group and ensure they memorize where they stand. Correct their posture so all are standing correctly, with a gap between each student. Ensure every student can see the conductor. Play some games that enforce 'eyes on the conductor'.

Unison singing: Warm up exercises in unison: Zee-ah-ee glissando; 'the trees are green', etc. Learn melody for "The Lion sleeps tonight", correcting all pronunciation and explaining all vocabulary.

Lesson 2

Students to line up outside the classroom and lead in in an orderly fashion in their correct rows. Check posture and do some breathing exercises ensuring deep breaths into the belly. Sol-fa warm up with hand signs and vowel exercises. Zee-ah-ee to engage the abs. Listening skills high/low, soft/loud, smooth/jumpy to help students hear and understand new sounds.

Sing "Doe a deer" with actions.

Recap "Lion sleeps" melody, ensuring good quality tone is achieved.

Lesson 3

Check posture and lines, recap all previous content and continue learning "Lion Sleeps". Learn alto part (Whimowe) and sing together, using a student leader or another staff member to help lead the second part. This will reinforce following the conductor, as each group must pay careful attention to the leader at the front. The boys can give a big lion 'roar' at the end of the line 'lion sleeps tonight'. Girls can mime trembling in fear from the roar of the lion.

Lesson 4

Start with Sol-fa and then make up tunes with Sol-fa for students to correctly pitch. Get students to lead some of these.

Octave vocal warm up to engage breathing and the body – Yo, yo. Sing the canon "Row, row, row your boat".

Teach "Jabulani Africa" taking English lines slowly, with repetition to ensure students grasp all lyrics. Ensure all movement is in unison. The general rule is to start all movement to the Right to ensure unison of movement. Play some simple games with gestures of Right arm and leg, hand, foot, etc to reinforce this.

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Lesson 5

Begin with warmups and the canon, and recap songs, ensuring Jabulani echo's are held and all pronunciation is correct. Correct any movement that begins late or going to the Left first, so that all movement is in unison. Ensure the students are always producing a good singing tone and there is no 'shouting' sound.

Lesson 6

Start with Sol-fa and "ooh-wa" exercise (arpeggio's). Sing the canon "Alleluia". Learn separate girls and boys parts for "Love is an Open Door", ensuring they are aware when their part is lower or higher than the other.

Lesson 7

Recap all from lesson 6, ensuring girls and boys know their parts well, before putting the song together. Many students will already be familiar with this well-known song from "Frozen" and some simple gestures can be included in the singing of the song. Encourage students to perform with animated faces and to engage with the humour in the song.

Lesson 8

Recap all exercises and songs, focusing on good tone, engaged faces, eyes on the conductor and unison of movement. Encourage students to verbalize in short sentences all that they have learned thus far. Everyone should repeat questions and answers to reinforce English language learning and allow students to become familiar with sentences, vocabulary and pronunciation. Have fun with the 2 canon previously learnt, letting students lead them, conducting loud, soft or crescendo. Students can also take turns conducting the songs.

Lesson 9

Begin with humming unison on one note, softly. Open to ooh, then ahh, practicing crescendo without changing pitch, following conductor to forte, returning to piano. Try this at a few different pitches. Sing the scale up and down on numbers – 1 1,2,1 1,2,3,2,1 etc. This can also be sung as a canon, in 2, 3 or 4 parts.

Learn "Instruments of peace" chorus - Alto part first, then soprano, using sol-fa.

Lesson 10

Warm up with Sol-fa as a canon in two groups. Recap Instruments of peace, using student leaders to lead each voice group. Allocate soloists for verses. Create your own interesting arrangement of the song by experimenting with solo voices or duets, perhaps some lines have the choir humming to back soloists, etc. Allow the students to select the version they prefer. Ensure the song is sung warmly, beautifully and gently. There must be a steady flow of sound, without dramatic loud or soft sections.

Lesson 11

Start with the “Alleluia” canon to warm up voices, encouraging students to listen carefully to the sound they are producing. Play with dynamic changes and mood. Continue working on “Instruments of peace” to ensure secure melody and harmony, good tone, and that lyrics are memorized.

Lesson 12

Begin with Sol-fa in canon and then, “We have a band” with actions. Do the consonant exercise B P T K, bouncing in abs. Teach “You gotta have music” line by line. Teacher to sing a line, students echo back. Focus on a strong ‘k’ consonant in ‘music’. Second verse is sung *staccato* and *piano* so explain these concepts and words.

Lesson 13

Start with Sol-fa canon and recap consonant exercise. Recap “You gotta have music” and *staccato* and *piano*.

Teach “Music is Everywhere” verse 1, line by line. Go over body percussion very slowly to ensure everyone is together.

Lesson 14

Warm up voices with glissando exercises.

Recap “Music is Everywhere”, adding Chorus and 2nd verse. Rehearse body percussion carefully to ensure everyone is in unison. Recap other songs, focusing on good diction, unison movement and a good quality sound.

Lesson 15

Warm up voices with glissando exercises. Recap all songs, ensuring harmonies are secure and all lyrics have been memorized. Make sure students understand the lyrics and message of each song and are giving an emotionally engaged performance.

Lesson 16

In preparation for the Siyacula concert (or ABRSM exam), rehearse leading on and off stage in the correct order, and explain to students what is expected of them – behavior, respect for the facilities and other visitors, being punctual, workshops, etc. Rehearse with students who are introducing songs on what they will say, how they will walk forward and stand and how to hold a microphone. Rehearse conductor’s bows and what is expected of students on stage. Recap all songs ensuring a polished and engaged performance.

NOTES:

The Tonic Sol-fa with hand signs helps students visualize the scale and hear the notes. Teaching harmonies becomes much easier. Make up games, with rounds, students taking it in turns to make up a tune, etc. To begin with, students should watch and sing, keeping their hands down. Semi-tones are problematic. Encourage good intonation, but semi-tones may need to be learnt over time.

Always insist on a good sound, no shouting or harsh tone allowed. Mimic their sound and then sing how you'd like them to sound.

Boys: Boys are frequently placed in the Alto section whether they are alto's or not or attempt to harmonize below the melody and try to sing very low. Explain that some boys are soprano's and have high voices. Encourage boys to sing higher by having a competition "who can sing the highest". Ensure there are boys in the Soprano section.

Unison singing: Encourage unison singing by matching their note and then asking them to match your note. Singing close to their ear may help, and I use my fingers to show that we're singing together. Also asking students to place their hands on their chest for low notes, and top of the head for high notes can help them feel where the notes sit. Glissandos are useful to encourage the use of the head voice.

Following the conductor's gestures: Choirs need to learn to start with the conductor, follow dynamics and tempo, and come off together. Make a game of 'eyes on the conductor' as well as following dynamic instructions.

Choreography: Attention to detail by working on moving right, left in unison, for example, is unfamiliar, and an excellent skill for these students to work on. Details like this have impacted their discipline, focus and spatial awareness in the classroom, and of course, are essential for a well-presented performance.

Language Barrier

Use short sentences, tell them everything you're doing and then get them to repeat, for e.g. 'Phew, its hot today'; 'I need a drink of water'. When asking a question, help them to give a full sentence answer, e.g. 'What is your favourite fruit'? Wrong answer: 'A banana'. Correct answer: 'My favourite fruit is a banana'. Once one child has answered correctly, everyone repeats the answer. The chance for students to practice saying even the shortest sentences or phrases has a remarkable effect on their confidence to speak English in the classroom. Simple rhythm games and action songs are effective. Teach phrase by phrase. Correct pronunciations are important and explain or translate difficult words.

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