

Miss Mary Mack

African American
Clapping Game

The image shows two staves of musical notation for the song 'Miss Mary Mack'. The first staff is in G major, 4/4 time, and contains the first line of the melody. The second staff continues the melody and includes a D7 chord. The lyrics are written below the notes.

1. Miss Ma - ry Mack, Mack, Mack, All dressed in black, black, black,
With sil - ver but - tons but - tons, but - tons, All down her back, back, back.

LYRICS:

1. Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack,
All dressed in black, black, black,
With silver buttons, buttons, buttons,
All down her back, back, back.
2. She asked her mother, mother, mother,
For fifteen cents, cents, cents,
To see the elephants, elephants, elephants
Jump over the fence, fence, fence.
3. They jumped so high, high, high,
They touched the sky, sky, sky.
And never came down, down, down,
'Til the fourth of July, 'ly, 'ly.

SINGING

Another standard in children's song literature "Miss Mary Mack" is an African American children's hand clapping or street game. The melody line is simple and the lyrics are repetitious which makes learning the song quick and easy. Help the children understand that the lyrics are "fantasy" words with the primary value contained in the rhythmic delight young children having when performing this song and clapping activity.

PLAYING

Body percussion or hand clapping activities are favorites with young children and help them develop rhythmic accuracy without the complication of instruments in their hands while they are learning the patterns. This clapping activity uses an 8-count pattern that actually begins on the three pick-up notes of the song. The actual down beat of the song comes on the word "Mack" in the first verse, but the clapping begins on "Miss", right at the beginning. This takes some practice. (1) pat your lap, (2) pat your chest, (3) clap your own hands, (4) right hand to your partners right hand, (5) clap your own hands, (6) left hand to your partners left hand, (7) clap your own hands, (8) clap your two hands to your partners two hands. Practice the pattern slowly until the children are confident with their coordination of the sequence. Then pick up speed and watch them go. The objective is to sing and move at the same time.

CREATING

Once the children get going, they like to keep the magic happening. The song can be extended by creating (individually or as a group) additional verses on the same theme. Since the whole song is fantasy, anything the children dream up should be workable as long as it fits the pattern.

LISTENING

The fun of doing street games is the "unofficial contest" of going faster and faster without losing the sequence or messing up the game. After the children have learned the hand game, put the students into small groups of 6 and let them find a working tempo together that is comfortable for their group. This will require listening sensitivity directed toward each person in the group. Once the children are working together allow them to slowly pick up the tempo, at their own timing, as they try to outdo the other children in the group.

INTEGRATION (Social Studies)

Street games are the creative product of children who live in large urban areas of the United States where the homes and often the schools have no yard or playground for physical activity. The games are played on the sidewalks or in the alley ways. Have the children in your class compare their neighborhood and play activities to those of urban children. What is different? What is the same? Have the children in your class try and make up a singing game or hand clapping game that is reflective of themselves and their neighborhood. Discuss it afterward.