Words to Rhythms - A Natural Collaboration

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Using words to create rhythmic patterns is one of the easiest ways to have students create rhythmic patterns of their own. It also is an immediate way for students to play patterns as a group. Poems, single words, short phrases, simple stories, stories with reoccurring phrases can all be used to play together as a group. Of course it also enhances language arts, reading and vocabulary skills.

Kindergarten: Iconic pictures – I begin with pictures; students create own rhythmic patterns using iconic notation - Poem/Song: Teddy Bear;

1st grade: I begin using words – 1 syllable and 2 syllable words. I arrange them into patterns. Students read the words; clap the rhythms; create their own patterns. End of 1st grade students begin matching notation to the words. Use same songs and poems as in Kindergarten to transfer to word pattern.

Match iconic patterns to word patterns – Apple, Tree; Choo-Choo, Train; Froggy, Frog;

2nd grade: Take poems/nursery rhymes, playing the pattern of the words; creating instrumental pieces on Orff instruments and percussion; some matching notation to poems. First perform using aural patterns, and then perform as read the visual version. Convert patterns to traditional notation. Final step would be to have students, on their own, convert the words to traditional rhythm notation. Engine, Engine Number 9; Pease Porridge Hot; Diddle Deedle Dumpling; etc.

3rd grade: More challenging poems/ nursery rhymes/books – playing patterns; notate the patterns or the words. By this time students should be able to convert words to notation.

4th & 5th grade: compose own songs using notated poems/nursery rhymes/books – notate rhythmic patterns and pitch notation; play and arrange accompaniments for composed songs.
This simple poem can be used with grades 2 – 5 by just increasing the level of difficulty.

Have a visual of this poem for students to follow:  Meter is 4/4 (would first show poem without the rhythm)

1. Have students pat the steady beat while you say the poem. Do this step several times until all students are patting the steady beat as you say the poem.

2. Have students identify the rhyming words.

3. Now have students echo the poem line by line and clap the rhythm of the words. Do this step several times until all students are able to say the poem and clap the rhythm.

4. Divide the class into two groups one group pats beat one group claps the rhythm of the words. Then switch groups. Extension with older students: have students face a shoulder partner – one student claps the rhythm, the other pats the beat. Switch

5. Say poem again have students listen for the rests and identify where the rests are located – have students talk to a shoulder partner and identify where they think they are located.

6. Reveal the rhythm – divide class again – half clap on the rest other half on the words.  (2nd grade)

For upper level elementary – students should be able to notate the poem – students can work in small groups with marker boards. Do one line of the poem at a time, to check for understanding during the process

7. Take it to the instruments – have students play rhythm of the words on the drums, Orff instruments, boomwackers – whatever you have available. Divide the class – some on the beat, some on the rhythm of the words.
**On another day review the poem and the activities during the last lesson and continue:

8. Now have students say and clap their name – whatever they are usually called. You can have them clap their names in a 2 beat pattern.

Now the game:

Choose a group of students to play the poem on the drums or other instruments as the rest of the class moves around the room saying the poem with the drums, when the poem is done students hand up pair up – find a partner. Each partner claps his/her name and the team decides whether they have the same rhythm or not – if they do they stay together if not they separate. The drummers start the poem again, students move about the room – some now in groups of 2. When poem is finished stop, hand up pair up. Students go through the process again until everyone has at least one partner.

Students should now be in small groups of 2 or more. Students can remain in their groups. Drummers play poem again as class says the poem, then play steady beat as each group claps their pattern in a predetermined order – 16 beats worth of name patterns – then do poem again (form ABA). Do it as many times as it takes for all groups to clap their pattern during the B section. Each group will then notate their pattern.

Extension;

Take to the Orff instruments or other pitched instruments. Follow same procedures for drums. Can have Basses play steady beat; soprano and altos play the rhythm of the words and glockenspiels play on the rests.

Again create a B section by using the name rhythms patterns – place these patterns on the board in an order that creates a 16 beat pattern (4 measures). To play the B section, have students play the pattern that matches their name in the order it has been placed on the board.

When putting it all together, you can have everyone play the rhythm of the names for the B section or you can continue to have the basses play the steady beat and the glockenspiels play the rests while the rest of the group plays the name rhythms.

4th and 5th graders can also create a melody for the poem and notate – play on recorders, Orff, Boomwackers.