

## Tips for Teachers

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### **Simple as Do-Re-Mi: Using Body Language to Facilitate the Teaching of Songs**

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In my work as an Assistant English Teacher (AET) in Japan, I essentially served as a cultural ambassador for the English-speaking world, sometimes visiting as many as 30 public schools a year. My role was to give students a positive, pleasant language learning experience in a lesson led by a native speaker of English. The teachers whose classes I visited frequently asked me to incorporate music into my English lessons. I learned that lessons involving songs are not always as easy or fun as they should be, particularly when the lyrics of the song prove difficult to understand. Teachers often resort to the problematic practice of careful translation, and soon the experience in English becomes just another lesson about English.

Over time, however, I learned that songs whose lyrics can be linked to clear gestures or body language can be directly understood, quickly learned, and easily recalled later on. While I initially used this technique with primary school children, my colleagues tell me that it would work well with beginning level language learners of all ages. These steps describe one possible procedure for using this technique. An illustrated example can be found in the Appendix.

1. Plan ahead the specific gestures that you will use with each word, phrase, or line of the song. This is very important so as to be clear, consistent, and confident when presenting the song to the students.
2. On the day of the lesson, ask the students to stand up while you introduce some new words and gestures to them. Even if they do not yet understand what you are saying, standing and moving helps them relax and feel like responding.
3. Recite the lyrics slowly, phrase by phrase, along with the associated gesture or body language movement. Encourage students to repeat and/or mimic you, but do not force them to do so.
4. Repeat if desired to give initially reluctant students another opportunity to respond.

5. Now add the music. Play the recording or sing the song to show how lyrics, gestures, and music are interconnected. Usually by this time, students are eager to join in.
6. Repeat if desired or if time permits.

A particularly effective song for introducing this technique is “Hello Goodbye” by the Beatles. It works well because it is easy to create transparent gestures for many of the lyrics and because many people are somewhat familiar with the song already. The gestures that I use when I teach this song appear in the Appendix. Other songs to try are ones that already appear in your language teaching textbooks, ones that are popular in your local setting, or ones that you personally know well and would enjoy sharing with your students. There are also many online resources with suggested songs for use with language learners. Your primary challenge will be to think of the gestures to help your students access the lyrics.

### **Variations, Extensions, and Caveats**

1. Consider teaching only the chorus or first stanza of a song rather than a whole song, particularly if the lyrics become lengthy or complex.
2. Although you may feel that a professional recording is better than your voice, recordings can be intimidating if they are too fast. With your voice, you can adjust the tempo to be comfortable for your students.
3. Sometimes, even when students are very eager to repeat the song, I tell them that we will do it again at the end of lesson. It seems to help them remain engaged with other parts of the lesson while they eagerly anticipate repeating the song at the end.
4. If you teach in a context where teachers frequently translate English into the students’ native language, it may be difficult to refrain from translating song lyrics as well. However, I have learned that if I am careful and concrete in my choice of gestures, translation is unnecessary.
5. Look for opportunities to use gestures, words, and phrases from old songs when you introduce new ones.
6. Nearly always, there is a way to connect the lyrics, theme, or music of a song to the local culture of your students. For example, body language differs from culture to culture. You or your students may enjoy changing the *hello* and *goodbye* gestures shown in the Appendix to body language that is more fitting or common in their culture. Or, if you teach in a multiethnic setting, your students may enjoy showing each other gestures and body language from their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

7. When it is difficult to think of a gesture for a particular phrase, you can create a word card such as the ones shown here so that students can still associate the words with movement.



### About the Author



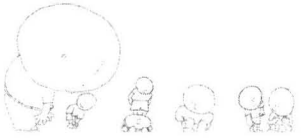
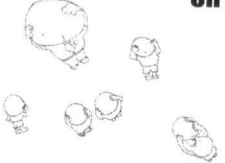
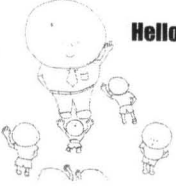
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### Appendix

Example Gestures for Use with “Hello Goodbye” by the Beatles

Word/phrase and gesture	Example
Yes: Thumbs up	<p><b>Yes!</b></p>
No: Thumbs down	<p><b>No!</b></p>
Stop: Hold hand, palm out in front of you.	<p><b>Stop!</b></p>

Appendix (cont'd) : Example Gestures for Use with “Hello Goodbye” by the Beatles

Word/phrase and gesture	Example
<p>Go: Pump fist in the air.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Go!</b></p> 
<p>High: Raise hands overhead</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>High!</b></p> 
<p>Low: Squat and touch the ground</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Low!</b></p> 
<p>Oh no!: Snap fingers and put hands overhead</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Oh no!</b></p> 
<p>Hello: Wave your right (one) hand.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Hello!</b></p> 
<p>Goodbye Wave your left (other) hand.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Goodbye!</b></p> 