

# WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE:

Eric G. Johnson

Strategies for  
working with  
the Middle  
School Choir

**LETS START AT THE  
VERY BEGINNING**

## Noise Level

# 1

Whisper

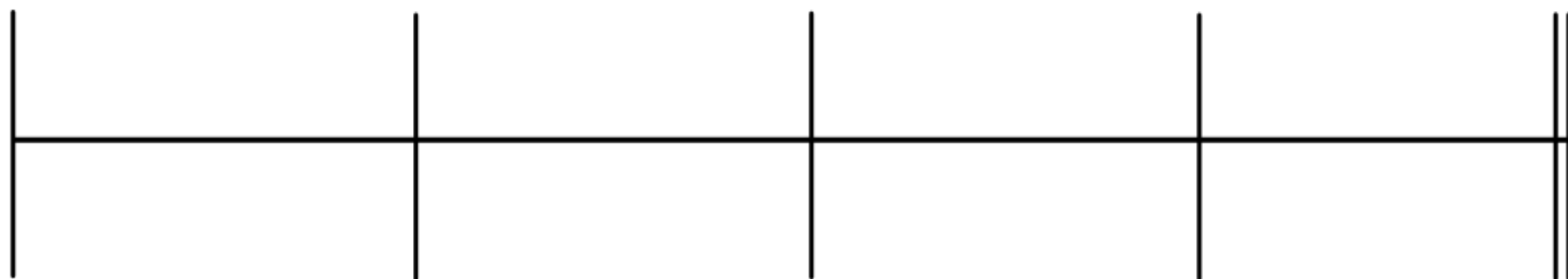
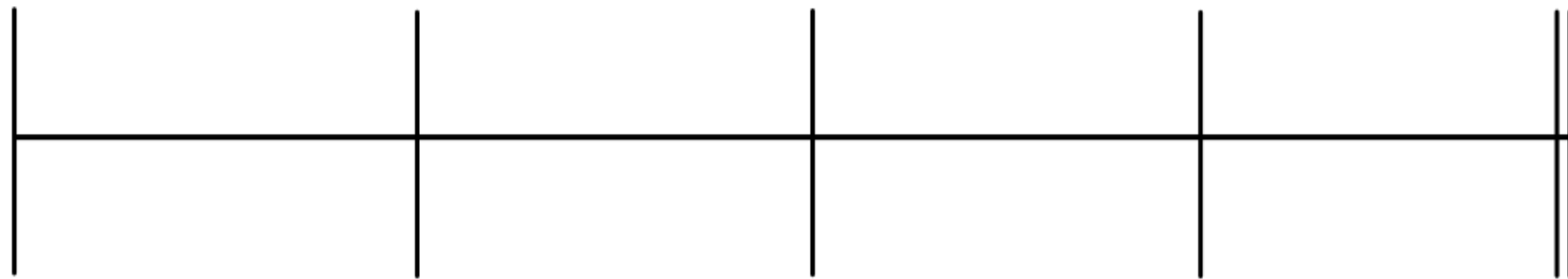
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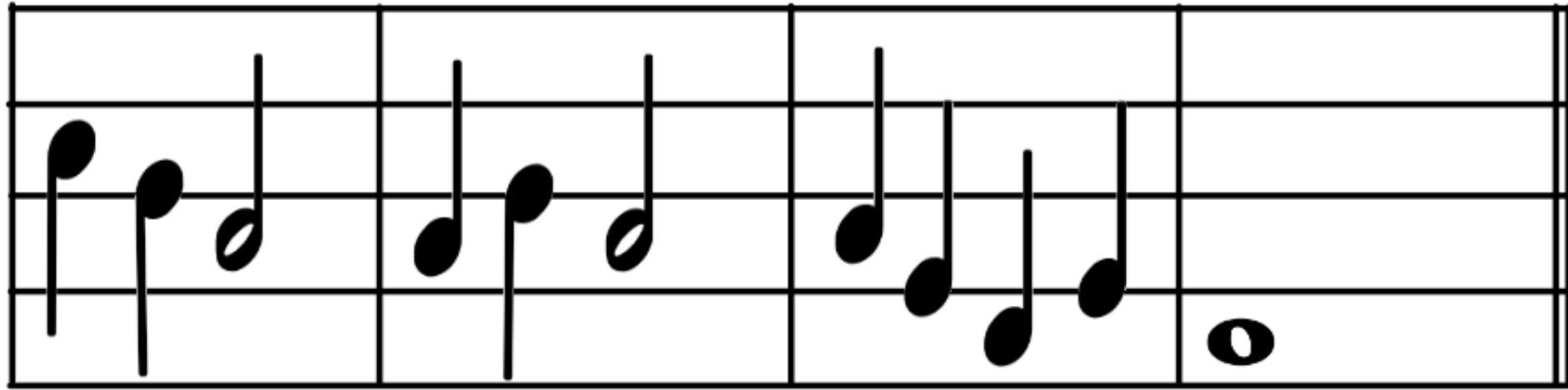
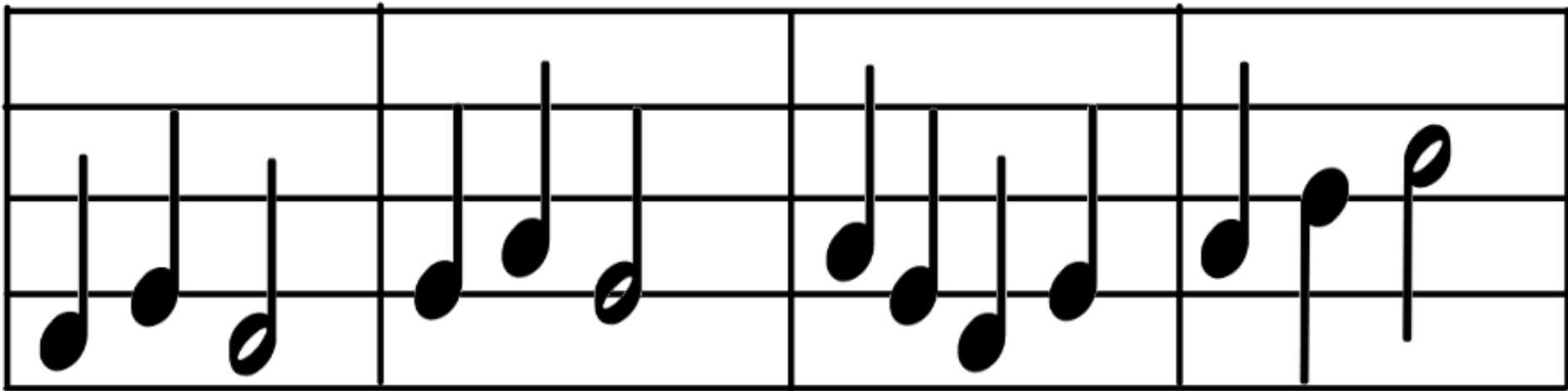
Days until THE LION KING

- Warm-Ups
- Rhythmic Reading
- Melodic Reading
- Breathe Soft Ye Winds
  - pg. 6 2nd verse
  - vowels on word "love"
- Announcements
- Gaudeamus
  - Slow tempo on clapping
  - B section on p 4

# THE WARM-UP AND REHEARSAL

- Attention Grabber
- Stretches
- Breathing Exercises
- Sirens
- Vocal Warm-Ups
- Rhythmic Reading
- Melodic Reading
- To The Music





# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT....

- Students come to you having often set in a desk all day with teachers who are teaching to and for the test. This anxiety is passed through the instruction to the students.
- As choral directors we are tested but in a different medium. Our classes matter just as much but there are higher stakes for the core teachers.
- When my students arrive I give them a few minutes “Just to be.” They know that as long as they are seated and talking quietly life is good!
  - FYI THEY DON'T KNOW HOW TO TALK TO EACH OTHER!

# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT....

- Some students carry a lot of baggage with them:
  - Desire to belong and fit in
  - No food
  - Lack of support at home
  - Need for attention (Some don't know the difference between positive and negative)
  - Don't have the resources to keep up
  - Received an end of the world message on Instagram
  - Friends today and enemies tomorrow
  - Do I smell?
- Some carry no baggage at all
- Middle schoolers fit together in an oddly shaped jigsaw puzzle.



# REACHING AND TEACHING WHERE THEY ARE

- **Patience is a virtue and a way of life. If you don't have patience with them then you will not get very far.**
  - A rehearsal can be derailed by the smallest thing. Plan for them be able to re-route and move on.
  - Practice being able to play piano and give "the look"
- **Talk about "Time and Place"**
- **Be firm but fair.**
- **Let them know you are there for them and want them to succeed. They want to know you trust them and care for them**
- **You are the most constant factor in their middle school career.**

## WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY

- “The time of day (besides P.E.) when I really get to have fun.” ~ Male, Grade 8.
- “A place where nobody judges anybody and you can just let it out.” ~ Female, Grade 7
- “Life!” ~ Female, Grade 7

## WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY

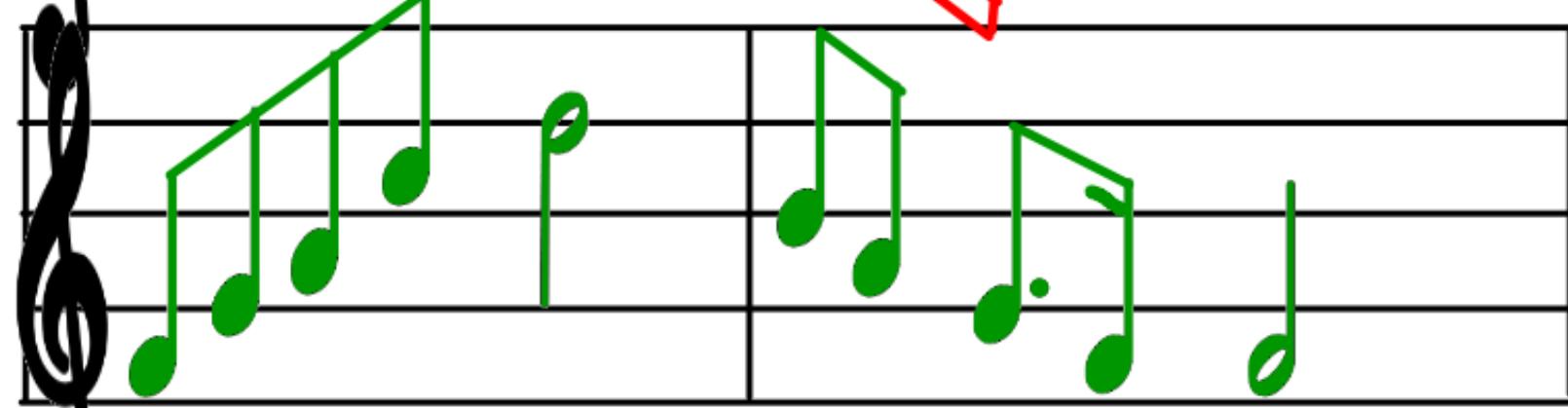
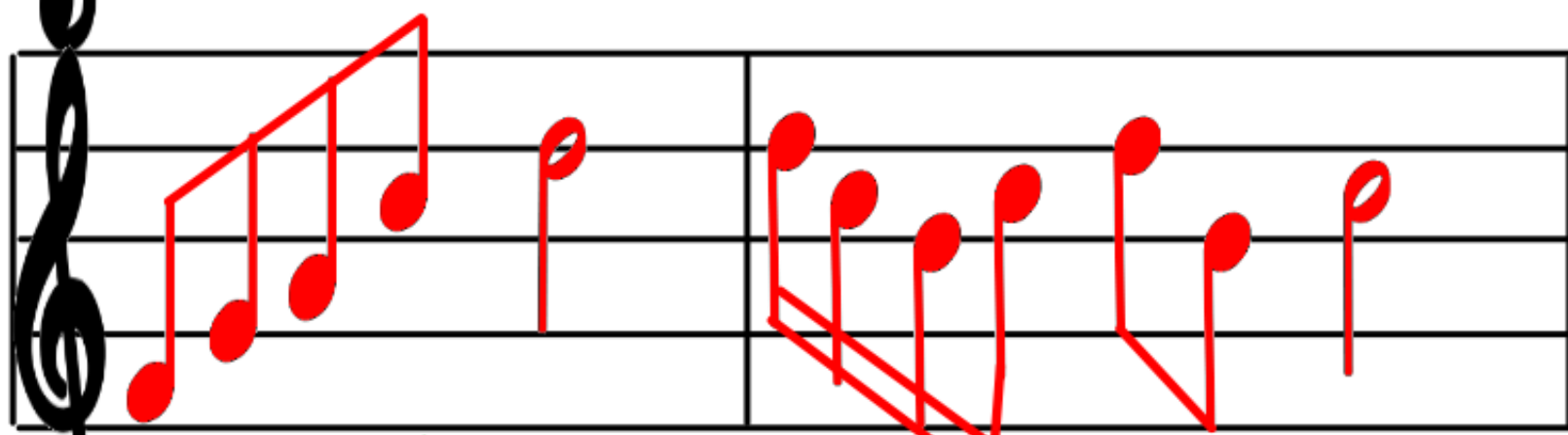
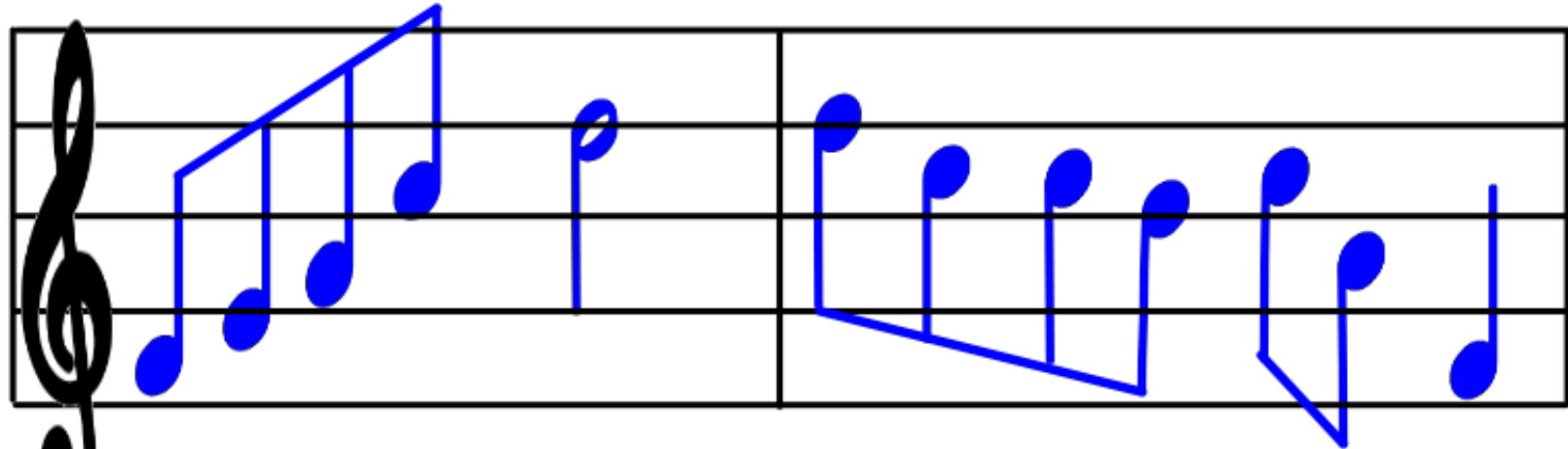
- “To me chorus means I can be who I want to be when I sing and I feel like I can be free.” ~ Female, Grade 7
- “Chorus is my safe place.” ~ Female, Grade 8
- “It means so much that I am accepted in a group of singers and they don't care what I look like or anything, they just care about my ability to sing and I am so glad I'm in chorus, It means so much to me because it's what I want to do for the rest of my life!” ~ Female, Grade 8

# WHAT MAKES A GREAT CHORUS TEACHER?

- “I think an excellent chorus teacher is a teacher that will not get very upset with you if you make a mistake.” ~ Male, Grade 8.
- “Doesn’t give us impossible assignments and songs.” ~ Male, Grade 8.
- “He/She has to be funny but yet serious and have lots of fun with his/her kids and take trips so kids will still be interested so the kids won't lose interest. Plus make jokes with your kids and protect them make them feel welcome and let them know that they can always come to you.” ~ Female, Grade 7

# TWO SONGS, SIMILAR PROCESSES

- Funwa Alafla
  - Day One, Sixth Grade
  
- Pie Jesu by Tom Shelton
  - Week Two, Sixth Grade



# I WISH I HAD KNOWN/I LEARNED THE HARD WAY.....

- Sing Day One, Save the rules for Day Three.
- Don't talk over them. Say "I'm going to wait" or just sit silently.
- Number your chairs with a label and show the chairs numbered on your seating chart. This way when a chair is empty when you are supposed to start class then you can look at the number then refer to your seating chart so you don't have to spend time thinking who sits there.
- Make everything visual. All terms rules and guidelines are very visual in my class. The students are able to understand them better and it makes them stick out.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

**“We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses.”**

**~ Abraham Lincoln**

**“We get mad! We get glad! I live/love the bipolarity of middle school!!!”**

**~Gretchen Harrison**



**THAT'S ALL FOLKS!**

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