

Yes, We Test Too: Assessment in the Middle School Choral Classroom

ERIC G. JOHNSON

How did we get here?

- Somehow over the last few years the word ASSESSMENT has become a word that has crept into our classrooms and strikes fear not only in the hearts of students, but also that of Teachers.
- As assessment practices change within the school how do we find a way to be relevant and not become “The Choral Classroom Left Behind”?
- Assessments help students to know that they will be held accountable for the knowledge they gain in our classes.
- Assessments can be quick, easy, and pain free if you plan ahead and think about it.

Five Principles for Effective Classroom Assessment

1. Ensure that assessment serves learning
2. Use multiple measures
3. Align assessments to goals
4. Measure what matters
5. Ensure that assessments are fair and equitable

from *Core Learning: Assessing what Matters Most* by Jay McTighe

Dry Erase Boards

- Dry Erase boards have become far more of an economical purchase over the last few years. There are companies that even make dry erase boards with the staff already on them. However in our large classes they can take up a tremendous amount of space.
- To solve the space issue, and to save money, I purchased heavy weight sheet protectors and inserted white cardstock. This creates an instant dry erase board.
- I also purchased dry erase markers in bulk (get the good kind), and simple white “boys” socks. The marker lives inside the sock and the sock becomes the eraser.
- The sheet protectors also allow for additional forms of assessment because you can insert rhythm, and melodic templates into the sheet protectors. You can’t do that on a dry erase board.

Dry Erase Board Activities

- **White Cardstock**: Functions as a traditional dry erase board where they can easily answer multiple choice or short answer questions while you quickly scan the room.
- **Single Line Staff**: Use a page with a single staff line on it for students to compose one or two measure rhythm patterns. Have students work to pair their rhythm with complimentary rhythms to create a composition for the whole class to perform. This can also be used for rhythmic dictation.
- **Five Line Staff**: Similar in concept to the single line, I have students compose one measure melodic patterns and then they pair up to create compositions for class performance.
- Place each template on different colored cardstock to help students quickly locate them.

Dry Erase Activities

Ear Training

- Sing a pattern on neutral syllables.
- Have the students color in the corresponding squares that match the solfege syllables they heard.
- Have younger students cross out the rows that you will not be using to help them get used to the concept.
- For advanced students include a five line staff for them to then write it out as a melodic dictation exercise.

S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T

Assessment Games

- **Kahoot!**: This is a digital device based multiple choice game. Students earn points for being able to answer in a timely manner. I normally use Kahoot to review terms or song lyrics. You can also upload images to test note names. Take time to explore the public Kahoot's that other teachers have made.
- **Password**: Stand at the door with a stack of Rhythm or Melodic cards. Each student gets a different card to function as their password. If they got the password correct they take the card to their seat, if they didn't get it right I have them stand beside me and study the card until they are ready to try the password again.



Assessment Games

Jenga

- Students love to play Jenga because it is fun and loud.
- Number each jenga block. Have each number correspond to an assessment item that can be displayed on the board. They answer the question to get a point for their team.
- I have used jenga to review rhythm and melodic patterns as well as note names.
- It works a little easier when you make the large jenga blocks instead of the small traditional jenga sets bought in stores.



Assessment Games

Race To The Double Bar

- Place song titles on small cards and place at 0% when the piece is started.
- When you make great strides in a song, move the card towards the finish line. Let it be a conversation of the class as to where it belongs.
- This game helps the singers know where they are, and how far they still have to go.
- This also works to motivate other classes when they have the same songs, and other grades because no one wants to have the lowest song.

HMS CHORUS PROGRESS CHART

	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
Six - One					
Six - Two					
Seven - One					
Seven - Two					
Eight - One					
Eight - Two					

Teacher Checklist Rubrics

- Rubrics help to take the guess work out of assessment.
- This checklist provides a simple yes/no option for evaluation to give students feedback before a larger summative assessment. It also gives you the ability to track student growth in quick documented glances.
- Pre-print the rubrics and have names of students on the rubric before the assessment begins. This can be done by writing in advance, or using mailing labels affixed to the checklists.
- Do a few students at a time, and be sure to make it random. They should not serve as a “gotcha” form of assessment. (ex. Tommy is out of his chair so I will do his today)
- Be sure the students are allowed to see the rubric and their assessment grade. The rubrics will only be effective if students receive feedback and have the opportunity to self-correct before the next assessment.
- The goal is mastery, so feel free to re-assess and replace grades as needed.

Teacher Checklist Rubrics

<p style="text-align: right;">Classroom Procedure Rubric</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Class: _____</p> <p>1. In seat when the tardy bell rings _____</p> <p>2. No personal items at seat _____</p> <p>3. Has assigned music and folder _____</p> <p>4. Has pencil _____</p> <p>TOTAL GRADE: _____</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Classroom Procedure Rubric</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Class: _____</p> <p>1. In seat when the tardy bell rings _____</p> <p>2. No personal items at seat _____</p> <p>3. Has assigned music and folder _____</p> <p>4. Has pencil _____</p> <p>TOTAL GRADE: _____</p>
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<p style="text-align: right;">Singing Posture Checklist</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Class: _____</p> <p>1. When seated feet are flat on the floor & back is away from chair, when standing feet are shoulder width apart with weight evenly distributed _____</p> <p>2. If using music it is held at an appropriate level, if singing memorized arms are relaxed at sides _____</p> <p>3. Torso is erect and and ribcage is expanded _____</p> <p>4. Head is upright and neck is aligned _____</p> <p>TOTAL GRADE: _____</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Singing Posture Checklist</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Class: _____</p> <p>1. When seated feet are flat on the floor & back is away from chair, when standing feet are shoulder width apart with weight evenly distributed _____</p> <p>2. If using music it is held at an appropriate level, if singing memorized arms are relaxed at sides _____</p> <p>3. Torso is erect and and ribcage is expanded _____</p> <p>4. Head is upright and neck is aligned _____</p> <p>TOTAL GRADE: _____</p>
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Teacher Checklist Rubrics

<p style="text-align: center;">Diaphragmatic Breathing Checklist</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Class: _____</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Rib cage high and expanded _____2. No clavicular (shoulder) movement on inhalation _____3. Abdominal expansion on inhalation _____4. Sustained breath flow without collapse of ribcage on exhalation _____	<p style="text-align: center;">Diaphragmatic Breathing Checklist</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Class: _____</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Rib cage high and expanded _____2. No clavicular (shoulder) movement on inhalation _____3. Abdominal expansion on inhalation _____4. Sustained breath flow without collapse of ribcage on exhalation _____
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<p style="text-align: center;">Classroom Performance Checklist</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Student is attempting to sing _____2. Student is standing or sitting with correct posture _____3. Student is visually forming proper vowel shapes for singing _____4. Student is focused on the directors instructions _____	<p style="text-align: center;">Classroom Performance Checklist</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Student is attempting to sing _____2. Student is standing or sitting with correct posture _____3. Student is visually forming proper vowel shapes for singing _____4. Student is focused on the directors instructions _____
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Teacher Checklist Rubrics

<p style="text-align: right; margin: 0;">Rhythm Reading Rubric</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Class: _____</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rhythm is accurate _____ 2. Visually Keeps Steady Beat _____ 3. Uses projected tone _____ 4. Uses correct counting syllables _____ <p>TOTAL GRADE: _____</p>	<p style="text-align: right; margin: 0;">Rhythm Reading Rubric</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Class: _____</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rhythm is accurate _____ 2. Visually Keeps Steady Beat _____ 3. Uses projected tone _____ 4. Uses correct counting syllables _____ <p>TOTAL GRADE: _____</p>
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Teacher Checklist Rubrics

Melodic Reading Assessment

Name: _____

Date: _____

	Pitch	Rhythm	Solfege	Handsigns
25	All pitches are accurate	All rhythms are accurate	All solfege is accurate	All handsigns are accurate
20	Most pitches are accurate	Most rhythms are accurate	Most solfege is accurate	Most handsigns are accurate
15	Some pitches are accurate	Some rhythms are accurate	Some solfege is accurate	Some handsigns are accurate
10	Few or no accurate pitches	Few rhythms are accurate	Little or no solfege is accurate	Few handsigns are accurate

Total Score: _____

Melodic Reading Assessment

Name: _____

Date: _____

	Pitch	Rhythm	Solfege	Handsigns
25	All pitches are accurate	All rhythms are accurate	All solfege is accurate	All handsigns are accurate
20	Most pitches are accurate	Most rhythms are accurate	Most solfege is accurate	Most handsigns are accurate
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Total Score: _____

Melodic Reading Assessment

Name: _____

Date: _____

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20	Most pitches are accurate	Most rhythms are accurate	Most solfege is accurate	Most handsigns are accurate
15	Some pitches are accurate	Some rhythms are accurate	Some solfege is accurate	Some handsigns are accurate
10	Few or no accurate pitches	Few rhythms are accurate	Little or no solfege is accurate	Few handsigns are accurate

Total Score: _____

Melodic Reading Assessment

Name: _____

Date: _____

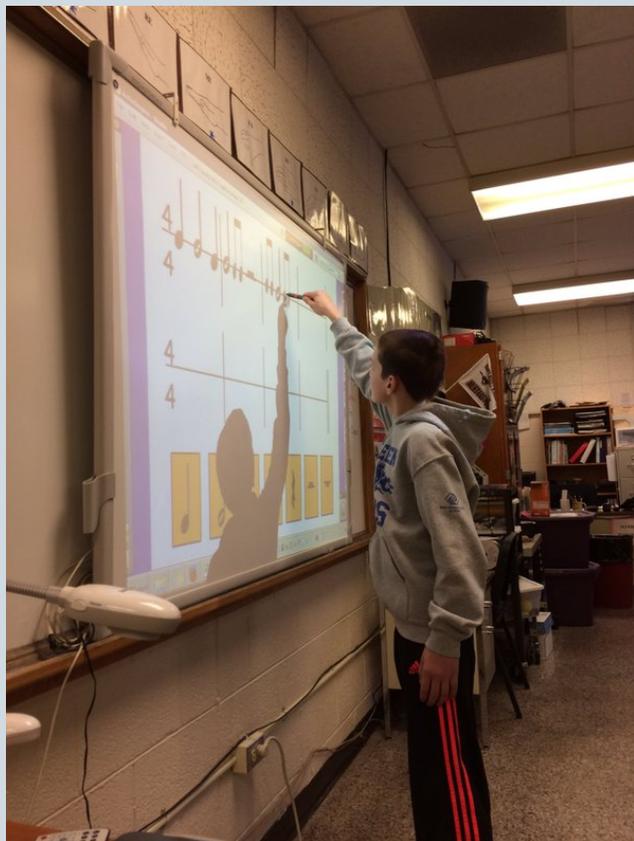
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10	Few or no accurate pitches	Few rhythms are accurate	Little or no solfege is accurate	Few handsigns are accurate

Total Score: _____

Students Assessing Other Students

- Our singers need to be able to assess each other. I work to find ways to allow my students to learn from each other in a positive light.
- Each day a student composes our rhythmic sight-reading. They do this while I am taking role and working through warm-ups so it is ready by the time we are ready for the literacy portion of rehearsal.
 - As a group we talk through any errors there might be and how we could improve them. IF a student has multiple errors, I usually tell the class that I had that student give them a “fake” exercise so we could work on finding errors. I never want a student to feel scared to compose.
- Once we are well into our music I will have my students assess a performance of the song performed by another choir. I often turn to YouTube as there are a plethora of good, and not-so-good performances on YouTube (my own choirs included).

Students Assessing Other Students



4				
4				
4				
4				

Choir Performance Assessment

Name: _____ Class: _____

Choir Assessed: _____

Directions:

As you are listening to a performance of the choir, circle the number that best represents the standard of achievement of each performance objective. At the end of your assessment, list 2 strengths of the choir and 1 area of needed improvement.

<p>Tone Quality:</p> <p>3 Tone quality is pleasing to the ear, supported, and vibrant.</p> <p>2 Tone quality is inconsistent more work is needed with support and opening the sound for greater freedom.</p> <p>1 Poor tone quality, thin and airy in sound, and not supported.</p>	<p>Intonation:</p> <p>3 Sings consistently in tune.</p> <p>2 Sings in tune at times but has problems with specific sections of the music, singing sharp or flat in pitch.</p> <p>1 Generally does not sing in tune; many problems with pitch.</p>
<p>Diction:</p> <p>3 Words are clearly understood; vowels are beautifully open and pure; consonants are easily heard.</p> <p>2 Some words can be understood but more work needed on open vowels and/or crisp consonants.</p> <p>1 Words are difficult to understand; much work needed on vowels and/or consonants.</p>	<p>Musical Effect:</p> <p>3 Beautiful phrasing and dynamics; makes you want to listen to more music from this choir.</p> <p>2 On the right track, but more work is needed; more attention to phrasing and dynamics needed to make this truly musical.</p> <p>1 Very little phrasing or dynamics are used; choir basically sings the notes in a vertical rather than horizontal motion.</p>

List two areas of strength of this performance:

1. _____

2. _____

List one area of improvement needed:

1. _____

Designed by Sherri Porterfield from the book Teaching Music through Performance in Middle School Choir

Singing Tests

- Singing tests are the original form of assessment for the choral classroom and nothing struck fear in a young, and present day, Eric Johnson than the word singing test. Especially singing Quartet tests!
- This fear carries on in some singers for a lifetime, and could potentially be what keeps them from singing beyond school choirs.
- Singing tests can also be time consuming if you have larger choral programs. Even when they are done in small groups some students are still able to slip through the cracks and not really be heard.
- Digital devices have changed how teachers conduct singing tests. It is now easier and faster to assess student vocal growth and help them maintain a digital library of their own recordings.
- Creating a digital archive also allows you to have documentation to fully support any grades that are given.

My Singing Tests

- Students use a Google Chromebook that they are issued by the school system.
- www.online-voice-recorder.com
- The entire section sings but with each student getting an individual recording onto the Chromebook. [Forty singing tests completed in the time of one.](#)
- The file is automatically saved into their personal Google Drive and then the students share the file with me for grading.
- Many teachers are now utilizing Google Classroom and cell phone videos for this very thing.

Name: _____ Class: _____

Singing Assessment

Song: _____ Date: _____

Rubric

<p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All rhythms and pitches are sung correctly. • Sings with an open, free, and full sound with knowledge of good support. • Sings consistently in tune. • Uses dynamics as written in the music. • Demonstrates correct phrasing throughout the passage assessed. 	<p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely sings correct rhythms or pitches. • Demonstrates a very limited knowledge of breath support; sound is airy in quality. • Exhibits much difficulty singing in tune. • Demonstrates limited knowledge of dynamics to be used. • Demonstrates limited knowledge of correct phrasing.
<p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sings 75% of the rhythms and pitches correctly. • Sound is somewhat airy in quality; needs to continue working on breath support. • Some pitch problems; has trouble singing without the piano. • Is developing a sense of dynamics and uses them at times. • Is developing a sense of correct phrasing. 	<p>0</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sings no rhythm or pitches correctly. • Demonstrates no knowledge of breath support; exhibits difficulty on being heard by others. • Cannot demonstrate singing in tune. • Demonstrates no knowledge of dynamics to be used. • Demonstrates no knowledge of correct phrasing.

Self-Assessment

Correct Rhythms	3	2	1	0
Correct Pitches	3	2	1	0
Breath Support	3	2	1	0
Intonation	3	2	1	0
Use of Dynamics	3	2	1	0
Use of Correct Phrasing	3	2	1	0

Total Score: _____

Teacher Assessment

Correct Rhythms	3	2	1	0
Correct Pitches	3	2	1	0
Breath Support	3	2	1	0
Intonation	3	2	1	0
Use of Dynamics	3	2	1	0
Use of Correct Phrasing	3	2	1	0

Total Score: _____

Designed by Sherri Porterfield from the book Teaching Music through Performance in Middle School Choir
Adapted by Eric Johnson

Getting Started

- Choose only one or two types of assessments to slowly implement so as not to get overwhelmed.
- Be consistent in your usage.
- Avoid negative uses of assessments (i.e. punishment)
- Music reading assessments do NOT have to be a full “all-state” style sight reading exam. Start simple and grow in length as time progresses.
- A little bit of fun goes a long way.

Where Does This Lead?

- Improved curriculum implementation
- Pathways of understanding for non-musicians, administrators, and parents about what your contributions to the overall development of each student in your class
- Increased student ownership of their education
- Better singers
- Lifelong music appreciators

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