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Multiple Means of Representing Symbolic Systems

Notation

One of the biggest challenges for students participating in music is the emphasis placed on the importance of musical literacy. In many great musical cultures and genres, music is never notated. Many of the greatest jazz musicians, including much of the early Count Basie band, did not read music fluently, yet they continued to be the standard for a swinging band.

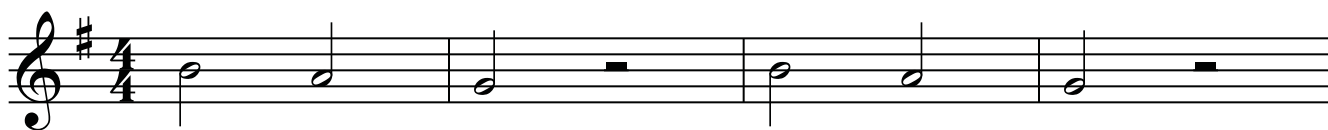
When teachers insist on students reading music, they essentially eliminate all of the talented musicians who might be wonderful improvisers, creative interpreters, and playful collaborators. Many students with disabilities will struggle with reading music, some will not be able to read at all, and others will never be fluent readers. These students will learn best by ear. Supplying recordings ahead of time so parts can be learned aurally can be effective. If possible, the part should be isolated on a recording with a like instrument or voice in the same octave.

Reading music involves very sophisticated processing. Children who are just starting to learn band instruments have to remember how to hold them, how to form an embouchure, how to tongue properly, the key signature and meter—and on top of that they are expected to be able to read music that relies on processing pitch, rhythm, articulations, and dynamics all at the same time! That is an awful lot to process at once. This book presents some examples of ways to adapt notation for students that may help struggling readers keep up.

Jesse Rathgeber has developed several ways to adapt notation to help students with music reading challenges. Some examples are inspired by adapted notation ideas from Chris Lapka. “Hot Cross Buns” seems to be one piece that everyone encounters sooner or later. What follows is a series of different ways to represent notation for recorder. Additional examples are provided at the end of the book in Appendix A for “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” “Hey, Ho, Nobody Home,” “Yankee Doodle,” and “Amazing Grace.”

First, here is “Hot Cross Buns” in traditional notation:

Hot Cross Buns



Now here it is with added numbers to help students remember how many fingers cover the top three holes of the recorder:

Hot Cross Buns

Musical notation for "Hot Cross Buns" in G major, 4/4 time. The first staff shows the melody with finger numbers above the notes: 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3. The second staff, marked with a box containing the number 5, shows the accompaniment with finger numbers above the notes: 3, 3, 3, 3, 2, 2, 2, 2, 1, 2, 3.

"Hot Cross Buns" with the names of the notes displayed in different colors. This helps some students to see the names better.

Hot Cross Buns

Musical notation for "Hot Cross Buns" in G major, 4/4 time. The first staff shows the melody with note names (B, A, G, B, A, G) written below the notes in different colors. The second staff, marked with a box containing the number 5, shows the accompaniment with note names (G, A, B, A, G, A, B, A, G) written below the notes in different colors.

Allowing students to label their notes is not "cheating" and is not a "crutch," but a way they can adapt the notation to be functional for themselves.

Hot Cross Buns

Musical notation for "Hot Cross Buns" in G major, 4/4 time. The first staff shows the melody with note names (B, A, G, B, A, G) written below the notes. The second staff, marked with a box containing the number 5, shows the accompaniment with note names (G, A, B, A, G, A, B, A, G) written below the notes. This version combines the note names and finger numbers from the previous examples.

8 ACCESSING MUSIC

Recorder fingerings have been placed above each note:

Hot Cross Buns

Two staves of musical notation for the song 'Hot Cross Buns' in G major and 4/4 time. The first staff contains the first three measures, and the second staff contains the next three measures. Fingerings are indicated by 'T' and 'O' symbols above the notes. A box with the number '5' is placed at the beginning of the second staff.

Iconic notation displays the duration and pitch of notation:

Hot Cross Buns

Iconic notation for 'Hot Cross Buns' in 4/4 time. The notation uses boxes to represent notes and rests. The first staff shows the first three measures: B (half), A (quarter), G (quarter), Rest, Rest, B (quarter), A (quarter), G (quarter), Rest, Rest. The second staff shows the next three measures: G (quarter), G (quarter), G (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), A (quarter), A (quarter), A (quarter), B (quarter), A (quarter), G (quarter), Rest, Rest.

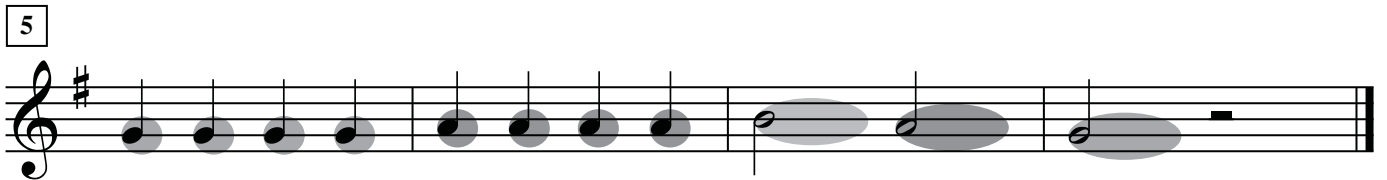
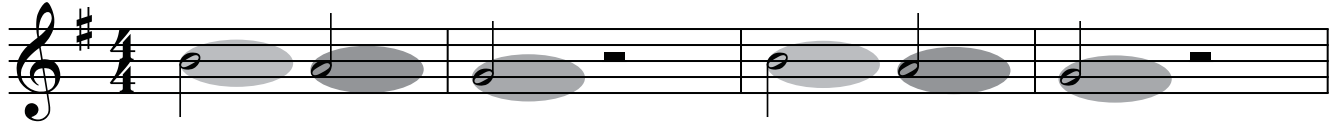
Glovert-style notation is similar, only duration is represented by size of the letters.

Hot Cross Buns

Glovert-style notation for 'Hot Cross Buns' in 4/4 time. The notation uses letters of varying sizes to represent notes and rests. The first staff shows the first three measures: B (large), A (medium), G (medium), Rest, Rest, B (large), A (medium), G (medium), Rest, Rest. The second staff shows the next three measures: G (small), G (small), G (small), G (small), A (small), A (small), A (small), A (small), B (large), A (medium), G (medium), Rest, Rest.

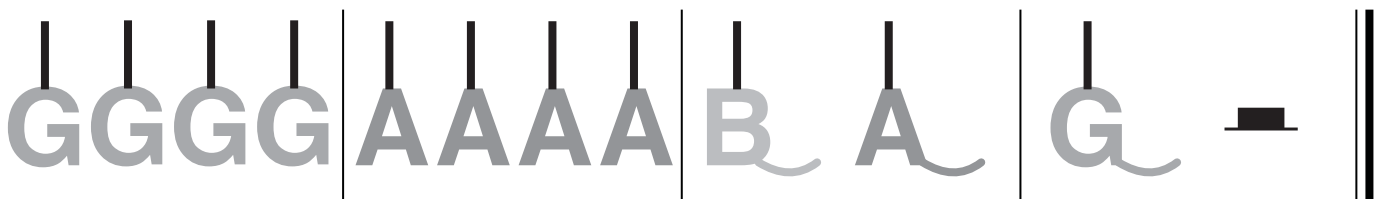
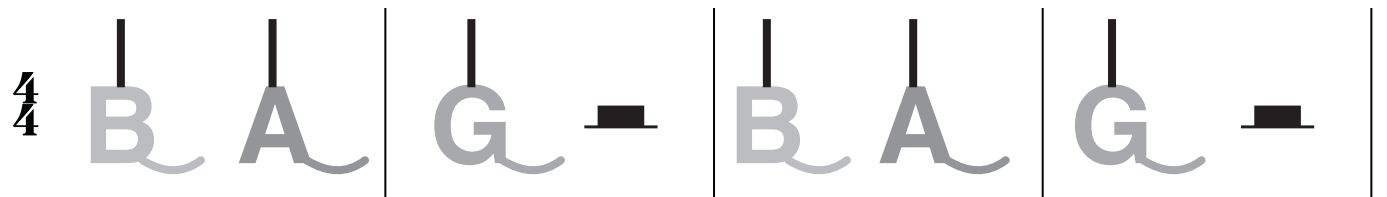
Color-dot notation shows traditional notation with highlighted dots in color that represent duration.

Hot Cross Buns



Stem names use ties to show duration.

Hot Cross Buns



Caution About Using Color

Before using colors with classes, the teacher should determine if there are students with color blindness in the class. If so, the student should be provided with a black-and-white page. Generally, black background with white printing is the easiest to see.