

Little Lights Chorus Parent Handbook

Welcome to Little Lights! Whether your family is new to the Shine organization or you've been with us for a long time, it is important to review this document to be well-prepared for the season ahead. Some of our policies change over time as we incorporate feedback and new information, so please be sure that you are up-to-date on everything here. Thanks so much! -Lauren

Curriculum and Methodology

Little Lights is a fun and upbeat introduction to choral singing, with an emphasis on teamwork, musicianship, and healthy vocal technique. Our Kodály-inspired curriculum equips children with the foundations of musical literacy, training them to hear, read, notate, and create, using the voice as their primary instrument. Children experience the satisfaction of working toward a goal as we prepare for our seasonal showcases, while developing self-confidence and poise that will serve them throughout their lives.

The Kodály Approach

I highly recommend that all Shine parents read about the Kodály approach to music education. There is a wonderfully concise guide here: http://www.allianceamm.org/resources_elem_Kodaly.html

Rehearsal Structure

When children enter the Little Lights rehearsal room, the first thing they do is locate their name card, which will either be somewhere around a large circle on the floor, or on a chair. They place their name card into an envelope at the front of the room, and then return to the spot where their card was. While we wait for everyone to arrive, I encourage students to talk to one another, giving them questions to ask each other if needed.

The beginning of the rehearsal is marked by the repeat-after-me recitation of this poem:

*This is my speaking voice, I use it every day.
This is my whisper voice, it's quieter this way.
This is my shouting voice. It sounds like a fight.
This is my singing voice. It sounds just right.*

This is the first goal of musicianship training in Little Lights: that all children will be able to identify and produce a healthy and pleasant singing tone.

This poem is usually followed by a few rounds of a call-and-response greeting that necessitates that children stay in their singing voice. During this exercise, they experience singing in a large group AND in smaller groups, as I greet different groups of singers (everyone wearing red, seven year-olds, etc.). As the

season progresses and children become more comfortable, I begin to greet individual singers in this way, and they experience solo singing in front of the group, a great confidence builder.

Importantly, the pitches used for this greeting are *so* and *mi*, which are purposely used because they are the first two pitches that the children learn on the solfège scale. These pitches also appear in the poem above, and in many of the songs and games that we play in class.

We then sing a song together, one that is either known or that is easy for singers to immediately jump in on, to get everyone singing and warmed up. This opening song is typically followed by a singing game, one that includes gross motor activity. Usually one or both of the opening songs will be specifically chosen to lead into a musicianship training activity, where we work as a group and in small groups on a task, such as illustrating a song's rhythm using manipulatives. After this period of fine motor activity and focus, we change it up with a singing game or dance activity that gets everyone up and moving.

At this point in the rehearsal, we get into our choral singing formation and practice correct posture as we do our breathing and vocal exercises. We practice important skills like listening to one another as we sing, watching the conductor, responding to and using Kodály/Curwen hand signs, dynamics, breath support, and more. We then sing through any songs we are learning (perhaps for an upcoming Showcase), working on making them the best they can be.

Our rehearsals typically end with an energetic dancing/singing game, and a closing circle that brings everyone in for a cheer.

What Does Musicianship Training Look Like in Little Lights?

It looks like kids singing songs, playing singing games while sitting, standing, or dancing, clapping and using body percussion to keep the beat or tap out the rhythm, taking turns conducting others to sing loudly/softly or high/low, using manipulatives like cloth and felt shapes, popsicle sticks, and glass gems to represent musical notation, writing on the board to contribute to a group composition or notation project, and much more. Little Lights rehearsals are very active start-to-finish, with seamless transitions between activities to create a very engaging experience for singers.

In addition to teaching healthy singing technique, our aim is to help children build a solid foundation for musical literacy (reading, notating, and composing music).

In the Fall/Winter season, we focus on rhythmic elements. For example, in the Fall of one year, our singers may work with “ta”, “titi”, and “rest”. These are the syllables used in the Kodály approach to represent the quarter note, a pair of eighth notes, and a quarter note rest, respectively. Our singers learn to read, notate, and compose using these elements, in a notation system known as “stick notation”. (We begin with stick notation because it is easier to isolate rhythm from melody in this system; staff notation is introduced once students are skilled at working with both rhythmic and melodic elements.)

In Winter/Spring of that year, we would continue to practice “ta”, “titi”, and “rest”, while introducing melodic elements *so*, *mi*, and *la*. These are solfege syllables, and I teach them within a system of “moveable *do*”. That is, the scale is a set of intervals that can be overlaid on any musical key. Students who internalize the solfege scale are in great shape to become excellent sight-readers and sight-singers.

When we play a singing game, the children have lots of fun, but we are never playing just for the sake of the game itself. Each game’s song contains rhythmic and melodic elements that will come up again later as material for musical literacy work. Many of these singing games also teach other great musical principles, build social skills, and boost group unity. I also love that these songs come from rich folk traditions, and possess a timeless quality; they give children access to a musical heritage that connects them to previous generations.

What Does Performance Preparation Look Like?

Performance preparation in Little Lights is about sharing what students have learned over the course of the season. At a Showcase performance, students might sing a favorite song from the season while standing in a traditional choral formation, or they might demonstrate their ability to carry out a singing game independently as a class, without the teacher’s direction. Little Lights rehearsals and performances are done a cappella or with very light accompaniment, to give young singers the chance to develop good pitch using just ear and voice. Our preparation work is always done in a positive, supportive atmosphere, where it is okay to make mistakes. Rather than striving for perfection, we are striving for connection-- to each other, and to our audience-- through emotionally expressive singing that is true to its original intent (beautifully delicate if that is the nature of the song, or boisterous and fun, or strong and powerful, etc.).

Calendar

All rehearsals and events are posted on our [Google Calendar](#). As a general rule, we rehearse every Sunday throughout the school year, except when the following Monday is a PPS holiday, but there are occasional exceptions. Our Google Calendar is shared by all of our ensembles, so be sure to look for events specifically noted as being for Little Lights.

Attendance

Little Lights is a wonderful place for children to practice commitment, where they learn that the group depends on every member being there. We expect families to honor this commitment by ensuring that their children are at rehearsal and on time each week. If your child will not be at rehearsal, please let me know via e-mail at least 24 hours in advance or via text the day-of. I prepare the room for each rehearsal by setting out each child’s name card in a certain spot; when a child is not there, it is helpful to know in advance so that we can avoid empty spaces.

Observing Rehearsals

The presence of observers in the rehearsal room can be distracting and inhibiting for our singers. For this reason, our regular rehearsals are closed to prospective members as well as parents of current singers. On select occasions, we will hold open rehearsals, which are chances for parents and prospective members, including friends of our singers, to observe. Outside of those dates, if you have a specific concern and would like to observe a rehearsal, please contact me and we can find the least disruptive way for you to do so. Thank you for your understanding!

Water and Restroom Use

To minimize interruptions, we ask that each child come to rehearsal with a personal water bottle, and that he/she use the restroom directly before rehearsal. Unfortunately, our rehearsal rooms are not conveniently located to restrooms, and I would not send Little Lights students to the restroom unaccompanied. If you anticipate your child needing to use the restroom during the 45-minute class, please plan to be close outside the door of the rehearsal room so that your child may peek out and see you and you can take him/her to the restroom. Otherwise, I must take the whole group to the restroom, using valuable class time.

Full Participation

All singers are expected to participate fully in each rehearsal, unless alternative arrangements are made beforehand. Singing is a physical activity, requiring upright posture (standing and sitting), deep breathing, and a great deal of energy. Rehearsal activities also typically include walking, marching, dancing, clapping, stomping, etc. as well as writing, passing objects, joining hands with others, and more. **In the event that a child is unable to participate fully in rehearsal due to injury, fatigue, or other issue, a written note from a parent is required.** This will help us uphold the standards of good singing technique and active participation in rehearsals, while also honoring and making exceptions for the special circumstances that individual singers may face.

Communication

We rely on e-mail to communicate with families about all aspects of the program. You can expect to receive an e-mail at least once a week, updating you about the progress we have made in rehearsal and any upcoming events. Occasionally we will need a response from you about availability on certain dates; in these cases, we hope to receive all responses within 48 hours. If you do not check your e-mail often enough to make this a possibility, please let us know at the beginning of the season so that other arrangements can be made for your family.

Performance Attire

Performance attire for Little Lights consists of a navy blue Shine t-shirt (available for purchase for \$15), and choice of bottoms and shoes.

Thanks, everybody! We are looking forward to a fantastic year!!

Sincerely,
Lauren Fitzgerald
Founder + Director/ Shine Children's Chorus