

Shine Jr. Chorus Parent Handbook

Welcome to Shine Jr.! 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

Shine Jr. is a fun and upbeat introduction to choral singing, with an emphasis on teamwork, artistic expression, 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 performances, while developing self-confidence and poise that will serve them throughout their lives.

Rehearsal Structure

Shine Jr. rehearsal activities fall into two primary categories: musicianship training and performance preparation. At the beginning of each season, we spend more time on musicianship training (75-80%) and less on performance prep (20-25%). As we get closer to a performance, those percentages gradually shift to 50/50, and right before a performance, they might be around 20/80.

What Does Musicianship Training Look Like?

Since the primary instrument used in our program is the singing voice, our musicianship training starts there. We begin rehearsals with a series of vocal exercises designed to develop healthy vocal technique and listening skills. Singers experience unison, canon, and part-singing, with an emphasis on blending and creating "one big voice" together. We play singing games that draw out the unself-conscious singing voice by de-emphasizing performance in favor of pure in-the-moment delight. Many of our folk games also include brief solo opportunities, which even our shy singers embrace because they are experienced as simply taking one's turn in the game.

The second goal of musicianship training in Shine Jr. is that children will build a solid foundation for musical literacy (reading, notating, and composing music). Every new musical concept is first experienced by singing-- only once a song has been learned in a game or sing-along context do we break it down into its rhythmic and melodic elements, discover how to notate and read it, etc.

In the Fall/Winter season, we focus on rhythmic elements. For example, in the Fall of one year, our singers might begin 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. Once these rhythmic elements are internalized, we add "tika-tika" (four beamed sixteenth notes), "ta-a" (a half note), "ta-a-a" (a dotted half note), and "ta-a-a-a" (a whole note). Our singers learn to read, notate, and compose

using these elements, in a notation system known as “stick notation” first. (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 same year, we would continue to practice those rhythmic elements, while introducing melodic elements *do*, *re*, and *mi*. 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. Once *do*, *re*, and *mi* are internalized, we would bring in *so* and *la*, completing the pentatonic scale that so many folk and popular songs are based on.

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?

The first time I introduce a song for performance, I will usually perform or play a recording of it for the children once all the way through. This enables them to experience the song as it will be experienced by those who will sit in the audience when they perform it, which sharpens their attunement to the meaning of the song, as well as teaching audience etiquette. We then go over the lyrics line by line, to see if there are any new words that the children need defined. I want the children to thoroughly understand every single thing they are singing; not only do they connect more authentically with the song that way, but they also become empowered by new vocabulary words, new meanings for familiar words, and new concepts like metaphor and symbolism. (Even our youngest students excitedly point out the difference between a “real” motorcycle and a metaphorical one!)

We then teach the songs chunk by chunk, slowly at first, and increasing the tempo later in the season as the performance approaches. The songs are taught by ear, with sheet music incorporated for teaching purposes where appropriate.

During performance preparation, we also practice healthy singing posture and vocal technique, artistic expression, and group cohesiveness and focus-- all the things that a choir needs to know to perform well. We practice with our concert accompanist for the two rehearsals prior to each performance. Because Shine Jr. contains such a strong element of musicianship training, we usually only prepare 2-3 songs at a time for performances. (Our older ensembles prepare more songs and give more performances throughout each season.) This is part of our effort to provide the students in each age group with what they most need at their specific developmental stage.

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 calendar is shared by all of our ensembles; be sure to look for events specifically marked for Shine Jr.

Attendance

Shine Jr. 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. If a child must use the restroom during rehearsal, there are specific restrooms that we have been asked to use. These will be pointed out on the first day.

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; 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 Shine Jr. consists of a turquoise Shine Jr. t-shirt (available for purchase for \$15), dark blue jeans (no embellishments or rips), black socks (100% black) and black shoes (100% black). Some singers wear black boots with their jeans, which is fine, and in that case it does not matter what color socks they wear.

Solos

Occasionally our Shine Jr. singers may have the opportunity to sing solos. Since these times are few and far between, we do our best to de-emphasize solo singing in favor of the joy of creating music as a group. When solos do occur, soloists will be assigned by the director and are subject to change at her discretion.

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

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