

RHYTHM STICK ACTIVITIES

by

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with special material by Jack Capon

INTRODUCTION

Rhythm sticks are available in most schools and are also easily made. They are interesting to children and have many values.

As a perceptual-motor activity, rhythm sticks and stick games are receiving attention nationally. Used creatively, they can contribute to many perceptual-motor and learning objectives, such as:

- Gross and fine movements
- Eye-hand coordination and control
- Aural-motor coordination
- Laterality
- Directionality
- Body image
- Crossing the midline of the body
- Movement exploration
- Creative work
- Position and design in space
- Following directions
- Movement sequencing

In essence, the sticks are extensions of the body, serving varied purposes. They can be utilized in many ways, for example:

1. Artistically - children can create their own movements, shapes, and forms in space using them.

2. Rhythmically - children can create rhythm patterns and be exposed to patterns in double and triple meter.
3. In listening sequences - children can listen to given patterns and echo them.
4. In developmental training - children can use them in perceptual-motor experiences and training in agility, balance, and body image.

The actual sticks used may vary among the following:

1. Commercial rhythm sticks found in most schools.
2. **Adult-made** sticks from dowels, broom handles, plastic tubing, plastic pipes, etc. Be sure to take necessary **SAFETY** precautions against sharp edges, splinters, etc.
3. Student-made **NEWSPAPER STICKS**. These are especially good since they are free; quickly made; produce a soft sound; are not hard, sharp, or otherwise likely to be injurious; and involve students in their making as well as in their use. To make them, take a complete section of the newspaper (as, the sports section), leaving the paper folded. Roll the paper tightly and fasten it with masking tape.

Add your own creativity and ingenuity to the ideas in RHYTHM STICK ACTIVITIES. You're sure to come up with real winners that are educationally valid and enjoyable, too!

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Track # 1 - COME PLAY THE STICK GAME - voice cues

In this stick game, students play back or echo rhythm patterns that they hear (as in Orff music training). Preliminary practice in echoing rhythm patterns (by clapping or playing sticks) should be given.

On the *chorus*, students sit, chant the words, and play their sticks as desired (Ex: hit sticks on floor, hit them together).

Words: Come play the stick game - use your ear,
 Then repeat just what you hear,
 Listen, listen, all of you,
 Listen first, then do it too.

In the *interludes* between choruses, listen to the sound pattern and then play it with the sticks.

Variations:

1. Do the game without the record, with students chanting and a student leader playing the sound patterns, making them as simple or as complex as desired.
2. If student interest warrants, develop this into a class project, making percussive instruments, practicing "call and response" rhythm patterns with the instruments, planning an accompaniment to the record, and recording it.

Teaching suggestion:

Give the class training in echo clapping exercises *before* using the recording.

TRACK # 2 - BASKETBALL - music only

This stick pattern includes basketball-type movements and will appeal equally to boys and girls.

Students stand spaced informally, feet astride, holding one stick horizontally in both hands with palms down over stick.

Part 1: Chest Pass and Pivot

cts. 1-4 Thrust stick fwd, extending arms; then bring stick back to chest, bending arms. Repeat. (This has the "feel" of a basketball chest pass.)

- 5-8 With weight on LF, pivot slightly and step fwd on RF. Return RF to place. Reverse all - with weight on RF, pivot slightly and step fwd on LF. Return LF to place.

Do entire sequence 4 times in all.

Part 2: Pass the Ball

- cts. 1-6 Hold stick vertically in RH. Toss stick alternately between hands 6 times - L R L R L R. Body sways L and R with a rocking motion, with the movement of the stick.
- 7-8 Pass stick to LH. LH brings it behind back and places it in RH.

Do entire sequence 4 times.

Part 3: Bounce the Ball and Under-the-Leg Pass

- cts. 1-4 Bend fwd from the waist holding the stick horizontally in RH pointing fwd. As if dribbling a basketball, bounce the stick in the air 4 times, bending the knees each time
- 5-8 Still bending fwd, pass stick in a figure 8 pattern around L leg (cts. 5-6) and R leg (cts. 7-8).

Do entire sequence 4 times.

Repeat steps 1-3.

Variations:

1. Add any body styling desired.
2. Make up your own stick pattern to fit the music.

Teaching suggestion:

This music, with its excellent quality, and strong rhythmic feeling, is useful for a host of other rhythmic activities. For example: dancing, exercise, movement exploration and creative activities.

Track # 3 SHOEMAKER DANCE - music only
(Special material created by Jack Capon)

Children stand in informal, scattered formation and use hands and arms in simple, rhythmic movements-

Rolling (to symbolize winding thread on the bobbin)
Wing-stretching (pulling the thread tight)
Tapping sticks together (snapping the thread off)
Hammering (hammering the heels on the shoes)

Measures 1-8: Holding sticks, roll hands and arms forward 4 times (over and over each other), then backward 4 times.
Thrust elbows back ("wing-stretching") 2 times
Tap sticks together 3 times.

Repeat whole sequence.

Measures 9-16: Hit L stick on top of R stick 7 times (hammering), then hit R stick on top of L stick 8 times.

Repeat this sequence.

Repeat entire pattern.

Variation:

Choose a leader and let him or her change the movements, e.g., hit sticks under one knee 3 times and under other knee 3 times, etc. Children mirror the actions and must be alert to follow.

Track # 4 - DO YOUR OWN THING - voice cues

The actions alternate between a *chorus*, which is the same each time - giving control, and a *verse*, which is different each time and being open-ended, allows the students opportunity for MOVEMENT EXPLORATION and CREATIVITY.

Chorus: 7 Tosses

Stand, holding 1 stick in RH. Toss stick 7 times to other hand L R L R L R L,
Then hold 1 count. Toss stick R L R L R L R, hold 1 count.

Repeat all.

Verses: Follow Voice Cues

On each verse, follow the verbal directions given on the recording, but "do your own thing" with it, i.e., do it in as simple or complicated a manner as desired-

1. Do something high and low
2. Go around your waist and knees
- 3-4. "Free"-do your own actions, such as up-and-down movements with alternate hands, push-and-pull motions, figure 8 around the legs, or a pattern (e.g., tap head and shoulder, head and shoulder, tap palm of hand 4 times).

Variations:

1. While tossing the stick in the chorus, also do body motions, for example:

Move feet from side to side
Kick feet in front (or back)
Twist body side to side

2. Instead of standing in place, do the dance sitting down.
3. Do the dance moving around available space.

TRACK # 5 - AFRICAN STYLE - music only (one stick)

Students sit in circle, with one person ("It") standing in the center. Students tap stick on the floor, using a basic beat or any rhythm pattern they want while keeping time with the music (or, rhythm pattern may be structured by the teacher, if desired).

"It" improvises a dance, using her or his stick, in the center for approximately 8 measures (32 counts) of the music. When finished, she/he taps the stick on the floor 6 times and then hands it (or passes it lightly) to someone in the circle (all must be alert!). That person catches the stick, tosses her or his stick to "It," and trades places. Continue with the new "It."

Note that the dance can be entirely *free*, as described above. It can also be more structured, by following the 6-count "cues" given in the recording at the end of each 8-measure phrase, signaling the end of each improvisation.

Variations:

1. Divide the class into smaller circles, each with an "It" in the center, to allow more children the opportunity for turns.
2. Have 2 "Its" in each circle. "Its" should observe each other so that their movements are complementary and not conflicting.
3. Let students sitting in the circle add small movements (like leaning forward, to the side, etc.) while tapping out a basic beat or their own pattern keeping time to the music. The movements can help create nuances of sound.
4. If desired, the teacher can expand this activity into a project involving African art and music. Students can use shakers, boxes, rubber bands, etc. as sound sources and decorate them appropriately. Then each instrument can play a simple sound pattern, with the "overlay" of the patterns making a complicated rhythmic sound.

TRACK # 6 - STICK JIVE #1 - voice cues

This is an easy but very effective routine in soul-music style. It can be done simply as per the given directions, or creatively, with the addition of *individual body styling* (see suggestions in parentheses in Stick Jive #2).

Part 1: Shoe-hand, apart-together

Stand with feet slightly apart, stick in each hand.

- ct. 1 Hop on RF, raise LF and hit it with R stick
- 2 Jump on both feet and hit sticks together
- 3-4 Repeat cts. 1-2
- 5 Jump with feet apart, extend sticks to each side
- 6 Jump with feet together, hit sticks together
- 7-8 Repeat cts. 5-6
- 9-16 Repeat entire sequence

Part 2: Slide-hit, and pound

- 1-4 Slide to L 2 times, then hit sticks together twice
- 5-8 Slide to R 2 times, hit sticks together twice
- 9-12 Pound R stick on top of L twice, L on top of R twice
- 13-16 Repeat cts. 9-12
- 17-32 Repeat entire sequence

Part 3: High-Low and Left-Right

- 1-4 Hit sticks high above head twice and low (about waist level) twice
- 5-8 Repeat cts. 1-4
- 9-12 Hit stick to L side twice, to R side twice
- 13-16 Repeat cts. 9-12

Part 4:

- 1-32 Repeat Part 2

TRACK # 7 - STICK JIVE # 2 - music only

More mature version:

Part 1: Hit LF, then RF

Part 2: When sliding, move sticks in the air, out and in on each slide. When hitting sticks twice, do 2 foot-stamps on the free foot at the

same time. On the pounding, add fwd-and-back body rocking. Pounding can also be done out (away from body) twice, in (close to body) twice, etc., or up-and-down, or around in a circle.

Part 3: Swivel body to L and R when hitting sticks L and R.

Students should be free to add any other styling they wish.

Variations:

1. For a real challenge, mature students may want to adapt this into a partner dance.
2. Form parallel lines facing each other and do the dance as a line dance. Concentration is needed, since the lines will be moving in opposite directions.
3. Take advantage of the excellent quality of the music by using it for other activities.

TRACK # 8 - PUPPET DANCE - voice cues

Make a puppet head or body (person, animal, TV or storybook character, etc.) out of paper or cardboard and tape it to one end of the stick.

Hold the stick upright and make the puppet dance, following the voice cue directions on the recording. The choruses are structured, and the verses are "open-ended," allowing the child full rein of CREATIVITY and MOVEMENT EXPLORATION.

- Chorus 1: Tap the floor 7 times in *front* of body, 7 times in *back*. Repeat.
Verse 1: Make the puppet dance *overhead* in the air.
Chorus 2: Tap the floor 7 times to *L side* of body, 7 times to *R side*. Repeat.
Verse 2: Make the puppet dance *on the floor*.
Chorus 3: Hold puppet up overhead and move it 7 times, bring it down and tap on floor 7 times. Repeat.
Verse 3: Make puppet dance *all the way* around your body.
Chorus 4: Tap *L knee* 7 times, *R knee* 7 times. Repeat.
Verse 4: Make puppet dance up-and-down and all around, *wherever you want* it to go.

Variation:

Choose 4 leaders, one for each verse. Children mirror what the leader has his or her puppet do.

TRACK # 9 - CIRCLE FOLLOW THE LEADER - music only

Children sit in a circle, holding 1 stick in RH. On the *chorus* hit stick on floor 4 times with RH, 4 times with LH; repeat. Less mature class may hit 3 times and then change hands. On the *verse* one student is the leader, creating movement for the others to follow. On succeeding verses, the leadership passes around the circle clockwise.

Variations:

1. Do the game kneeling or standing.
2. Use other choruses suitable to the maturity of the class, e.g., hit stick on floor with 1 hand only, throw stick alternately from hand to hand, drop and catch stick with RH only/LH only/alternating L and R.
3. Use 2 sticks instead of 1.
4. The music is excellent to use for other activities, for example, the folk dance "Cotton-Eyed Joe," the mixer "Cotton-Eyed Joe," square dances, or clog dances.

Teaching suggestions:

First, show children a number of things they can do on the verse (i.e., provide some structure and foundation beforehand rather than expecting children to create own ideas). Later, ask them for ideas, e.g.:

Wigwag stick - Tilt stick L and R, holding with 2 hands

Paddle L and R - Hit each shoulder/knee alternately

Move stick up and down - Hit palm/back of hand alternately

Wag like pendulum - Hit foot twice, knee twice

Chop - Use stick as flute, saw, telescope, hammer, bat, etc.

Hit as if with ping pong paddle - Flip it over in air and catch it

Move stick away from body, close to body - Do figure 8 in front of body
Circle overhead like lasso - Pass around waist/neck

Track #10 - PASS-THE-STICK GAME - music only

This game starts slowly and gradually speeds up, contributing to the enjoyment and challenge.

Part 1: L knee, R knee, hit LH

All sit cross-legged in circle, holding one stick in RH. Hit L knee (or thigh) twice. LH 4 times. Do this sequence 4 times.

Part 2: Hit floor and pass stick

Hit floor directly in front of self twice (counts 1-2), pass stick to hand of neighbor on R (ct.3), and change stick received in-LH to the RH (ct.4). Do this sequence 8 times.

This entire movement pattern starts slowly, then gradually speeds up. It would be helpful to practice the whole sequence slowly, without the recording, at first.

Variations:

1. Do as a small group game, with smaller circles.
2. Do as a partner game, with partners facing each other.
3. Change Part 1 or 2 to fit the maturity of the class or provide challenges (Ex: Part 2: Hit floor 4 times, flip stick over in air and catch it, pass it on).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR RHYTHM STICK ACTIVITIES

Courtesy of Jack Capon, Alameda Unified School District

Objectives of Rhythm Stick Activities:

1. To promote efficient hand-eye coordination and rhythm.
2. To promote perceptual-motor abilities of laterality, directionality, body image, and balance.
3. To enhance sensory functioning - particularly vision, hearing, touch and kinesthesia.
4. To foster improved listening skills and concentration.
5. To provide a fun and challenging physical experience.

General Organization:

1. May use a circle formation or scatter formation.
2. Students may be seated, kneeling, or standing depending on the types of activities planned.
3. Start by having each student work with only one stick and then progress to two sticks per student.
4. Students should work individually at first, but gradually introduce partner activities, and then small group experiences.
5. Movement exploration approach (verbal challenges....
"Who can?," "Show me how," etc.) can be highly successful with sticks.
6. Involvement of all students in the lesson is the key to success! Enough sticks should be available for each student to have one or two depending on the tasks presented.

Activities Using One Stick Only

A. Fine-Motor Finger Dexterity Tasks

1. Move stick around in circular motion using fingers. Now move stick in opposite direction. Exchange hands and perform the same tasks. (Try it holding stick vertically and then horizontally.)
2. Finger crawling up and down the tree. Hold stick vertically and move finger up and down the stick. (Exchange hands and perform same task.)

3. Twirl like a baton - in front of body, to side, and above. Exchange hands and perform same tasks.
4. Spin stick on floor. Try both directions. (Perform task using other hand.)

B. Hand-Eye Reaction Tasks

1. Toss from hand to hand. (Try to track stick with eyes without moving head.)
2. Lift stick up, release above head, and catch above head using same hand. (Perform same task using other hand.)
3. Flip stick in air turning it over one time only, and catch using the same hand. Use an easy toss. (Perform same task using other hand.)
4. Flip stick in air turning it over two times and catch using same hand. (Try using other hand.)
5. Hold stick in front of body at eye level (horizontally) with one hand at each end. Release and catch with one hand before it hits the floor. (Alternate hands when attempting to catch stick.)
6. Hold stick in front of body at eye level (horizontally) using just one hand. Release and catch with the same hand before stick hits the floor. To make it more challenging, student should attempt to catch it below waist level. (Try using other hand.)
7. Hold stick vertically in one hand with arm held straight above head. Release stick and reach across body with opposite hand and attempt to catch before it hits the floor. (Reverse hands and try the same task.)
8. From sitting position, hold stick vertically, bounce on floor and catch. (Perform task using other hand.)

C. Agility Tasks

1. Pass stick around body exchanging hands. Quickly change directions on given signal.
2. Pass stick around the knees exchanging hands. Quickly change direction on given signal.
3. Pass stick in and out legs in a figure eight pattern. Quickly change direction on given signal.
4. Hold stick horizontally in front of body with one hand at each end. Quickly step over stick with each foot without releasing ends, and then reverse procedure by stepping back again to starting position.

D. Balance Tasks

1. Balance stick (horizontally) on four fingers, then three fingers, two fingers, and one finger. (Try opposite hand.)
2. Balance stick on other body parts. Start at top of head, then go to forehead, nose, chin, shoulder, knee, foot.
3. Balance stick (vertically) on palm, then on fingers. (Try other hand.)
4. Balance stick on various body parts and walk forward, backward, sideward, etc.

E. Stick Tapping Tasks

1. Leader taps out a sound pattern, and students attempt to repeat same pattern (good auditory training).
2. Student holds stick, taps end on floor, and flips in air one turn and catches stick using same hand. (Try using other hand.) Progress to two taps and a flip, etc.
3. Student holds stick, taps end on floor, flips stick in air, catches it, and taps bottom end of stick on floor. (Try other hand.) Progress to two taps, etc.
4. Alternate hands performing item #2 and #3 using an easy toss when exchanging hands. Try to keep up a definite rhythmic beat.

F. Stick and Ball Task (using old tennis balls)

Pair off students and have them seated facing each other with legs extended and apart. Each set of partners should have one ball to use.

1. Students attempt to hit ball back and forth along the floor. (They start fairly close to each other.)
2. Students move further away from each other as skill is obtained.
3. Give each student a paper cup which becomes a target. Each partner attempts to hit ball with stick and knock over partner's cup.
4. In standing position, each student attempts to hit ball with stick and keep it bouncing. (This is a more advanced skill task.)

Activities Using Two Sticks

A. Fine-Motor Finger Dexterity Tasks

Perform same tasks as listed for activities using only one stick, but have one

rhythm stick in each hand. Both hands are now active at the same time which promotes bilaterality.

B. Hand-Eye Reaction Tasks

Perform same tasks as listed for activities using only one stick (except for Item #5) but have one rhythm stick in each hand. Both hands are now active at the same time (bilateral movements). In addition to these tasks, the following challenges are fun to try:

1. Hammer and Nail Task - Hold one stick, which is the hammer and the other stick, which represents the nail. Use the hammer to hit the nail down through the hole formed by cupping the hand. (Try hammering with opposite hand.)
2. Perform the hammer and nail task with the eyes closed. (Tactile and kinesthetic senses now play primary role.)
3. Hold both sticks in front of body horizontally and hit ends together. (palms down, palms up, etc.)
4. Perform task #3 with the eyes closed.

C. Agility Tasks

Set both sticks on floor in front of body and take a kneeling position.

1. Pick one stick up and begin passing it around your body. Set it down in front of body and do same movement with other stick. See how fast you can perform task. Quickly change direction on a given signal.
2. Perform task #1 with eyes closed.

D. Balance Tasks

1. Balance one stick on each shoulder, and walk in various patterns. Try other body parts such as back of hands, wrists, ears, etc.
2. Balance both sticks on floor at same time. Walk figure eight pattern around and between sticks without knocking them over.
3. Make a "T" by balancing one stick on floor, and placing other stick in balance position on top of it. Now remove top stick of "T" without knocking down bottom stick.

4. Hold one stick vertically in hand and attempt to balance other stick on top of it. (Sticks are placed end to end.)

E. Stick Tapping Tasks

1. Leader taps out a sound pattern using both sticks at same time or alternating sticks. Students attempt to repeat same pattern.
2. Students tap sticks on floor (front), then click together. Pattern repeats continually with regular rhythmic beat.
3. Students tap sticks on floor (front), then click together, then flip over and catch sticks. Repetition of pattern continues in rhythmic beat.
4. Students tap sticks on floor (front), click together, flip over and catch, followed by tapping ends of sticks down on floor. Cues are front, together, flip, down. Repetition of pattern continues in rhythmic beat.
5. Add side tap to pattern in #4. This is the same as a front tap except that arms go out to sides. Cues are front, together, flip, down, side.
6. Add cross tap to pattern in #5. Forearms cross in front of body, tap sticks to floor.
7. For older students you can provide an additional challenge to pattern in #6 by adding a flip and catch with arms still in crossed position.

Concluding Statement:

This paper is not intended as an exhaustive listing of stick activities. Obviously as you work and experiment with the rhythm sticks, new ideas will present themselves. The children themselves, when allowed to explore, will quickly discover and create other movement tasks.



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