

LET'S GET SINGING!

Alvin the Alligator

Adaptation of the original by Nick Thorkelson and Chris Thorkelson (used with permission)

Did you ever step in a water pipe and fall to the bottom of the water system?
There did you meet a little alligator who goes by the name of Alvin?
If you did, he's mine. I lost him.
I threw him down the water pipe and now I'm getting lonely 'cos he's gone. I miss him.

About the song

From Nick: I was a kid walking down a street in New York with my family, and my younger brother Chris said, "Did you ever step in a sewer-pipe pipe?" and I took it from there – I wrote this song. My older brother Peter, known professionally as Peter Dinklage [from pop group The Monkees], introduced it to the world as part of his cabaret repertoire, but he changed "sewer pipe" to "water pipe." Eventually, it became widely known, especially in summer camps, with some later singers changing Alvin to Alfred.

This version is an adaptation of Nick's original composition. You can find the original in the Rise Again fakebook, published by Hal Leonard:

<https://www.amazon.com/Rise-Again-Songbook-Stay-Open-Binding/dp/1495031241>

This song can be sung as a round with parts entering as indicated on the score. You can listen to how Roshan sings this to know where to bring in the second part as well.

About the composer

Nick Thorkelson is an American singer/songwriter, instrumentalist and visual artist, known for his work as a cartoonist, animator and graphic designer.

About the presenter



Roshan Tuivavalagi (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Maru) has worked as a music specialist for over 14 years and currently runs school and community music programmes in the Hauraki region. She has a background in jazz performance but her passion is providing quality, accessible music education for all.

Warm-ups

Warm-ups help to prepare us physically and vocally for singing. They help to relax our bodies and sharpen our minds.

Physical/Vocal

1 Walking walking. Objective: getting bodies moving; tempo and steady beat practice; expression and vocalisation. Students say the rhyme with Roshan and get their bodies moving. Notice the change in tempo when she slows down. It's important to explore the whole vocal range – up high and down low. Once your students know the rhyme and can do it without Roshan, vary the tempo or speed. You may find that your students keep in time better if the tempo is a little faster, especially younger students. This exercise also makes an important distinction

between singing and speaking voices. For more information, you will find a demonstration of the difference between speaking and singing resonances here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDCUSrcWms>

- 2 Breathing exercise. Objective: low breath, efficient exhalation; activation of abdominal muscles for supporting the voice. When we sing, we exhale over a much longer period so we need to manage our breath flow very efficiently. A combination of the muscles controlling our ribcage movement and breathing deeply to the very bottom of our lungs will help with this. Feel the rib cage expand and contract as you breathe. Use the consonant patterns to activate the abdominal muscles.

Vocal

- 3 Bumble bee. Objective: vocal agility; building vocal range. This exercise is excellent preparation for the song. The rhythm is quick so students will need to keep the notes light and tumbling to stay in time. Connect the notes together smoothly to make a long musical line.

Teaching Notes

- While this song is quite short, it has some technical challenges. It is a good opportunity to develop students' singing skills – breath management, clear diction and agile voices.
- This song has long phrases with lots of words to fit in. It's important to breathe well! Make sure that you don't all take breaths in the same place. One of the great things about singing as part of a group is that you can take sneaky breaths at different times from each other. The audience thinks that you have been able to sing the whole phrase without needing to take a breath! There are warm-up exercises that focus on good breathing techniques associated with other videos in the series. Have a listen and add these exercises to further develop students' skills.
- Clear diction is critical. The song is only amusing if people can hear the words. You will find some diction warm-ups and tongue twisters associated with other songs in this series. Check them out. Make sure that tongues aren't tight and lips and jaws are relaxed. Students will need to be able to use these to articulate.
- Take the song slowly at first until the students are confident with the words, rhythms and melodic characters of each line:
 - » Phrase 1 – a tumbling melody
 - » Phrase 2 – a stepwise, rising melody before another tumbling sequence
 - » Phrase 3 – a stepwise, rising melody that finishes with repeated notes and a skipping-down pattern

» Phrase 4 – a return to the tumbling opening melody that leads into a melody that jumps around the place! This is the trickiest line in the song to learn, so repeat this part of the video teaching sequence as often as you need to for the students to feel very secure. A skipping-down pattern completes the song.

- The accompanying tracks provide you with multiple options for performing this song – as a unison song with melodic accompaniment, as a 2-, 3- or 4-part round or using the harmony-only loop track. Choose whichever track supports your students the best. You also have the option of performing this a capella, or without any instrumental accompaniment.

What else could you do with this song?

Extension/Curricular links

- The theme of this song lends itself to imaginative oral and written language activities:
 - » Fantastical adventures using "Have you ever...?" as a prompt
 - » Stories about Alvin's adventures in the water system
 - » Ideas about how students might go about finding and retrieving Alvin. Extend this into a technology task to build a machine that could help to retrieve Alvin from the water pipe.
- In the original text, the lyrics detail that "I threw him down the water pipe...because he was getting too big for his britches." What does this mean? Why does the singer now regret this decision?
- Use the song as a template to create a new set of lyrics.

Important Messages

- Singing is fun!
- It is important for the health of children's voices that they are singing in a pitch range that is not too low.
- Never louder than beautiful. Let the natural beauty of children's voices shine. Understand that the volume they produce is directly proportional to their age, size and stage of development. Encourage healthy singing, not shouting.
- Singing voice, speaking voice, whispering voice – we can use our vocal mechanism in different ways. Ensure that children are using their voices in a 'singing' way. A light and ringing sound will help protect young voices from overuse and possible damage.
- Our body is our instrument. That means that no two voices will sound the same – we are each unique!
- We need our whole body to sing – energy, breath, posture, expression as well as a singing voice.
- Again – Singing is fun! And important! And good for us! Singing every day will energise you and your students.

Glossary of musical terms

A capella	Singing without instrumental accompaniment.
Beat	The steady heartbeat of the music that continues as long as the music does. It only gets faster or slower if the music requires it. Sometimes the beat is audible and sometimes it is implied. An ensemble stays together by sharing a sense of beat. Keeping the beat means keeping in time.
Melody	A series of notes/pitches that make up a tune.
Phrase	A musical sentence.

Rhythm	The pattern of long and short sounds that move the music forward through time. In a song, the rhythm is the pattern of the words.
Round	A song in which two or more voices, or groups of voices, sing the same melody but not at the same time. One group begins and the second and subsequent groups join in at pre-determined places in the melody. Rounds are a kind of canon.
Tempo	The speed of the beat.