

# CHORAL READING

by  
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Choral reading is the art of multiple voices speaking poetry or other lyrical writings in unison. It can be performed for parents as part of a school presentation, or it can be explored within the classroom for the sheer beauty and delight of it. Choral reading is quite rewarding and relatively easy to organize. Children seem to love the challenge of speaking aloud together, and it piques the interest of many students to read additional poetry or to write poetry of their own. It also teaches spoken language skills, such as diction, pronunciation, volume, rate, and pitch.

To add variety or meaning to any given choral reading, you might assign lines to a single individual or any combination of groups of students as well as using the whole group in unison. Read the following Mother Goose rhyme. How would you interpret it as a choral piece?

## Hot-cross Buns

Hot-cross buns! Hot-cross buns!  
One a penny, two a penny, hot-cross buns.  
If you have no daughters, give them to your sons.  
One a penny, two a penny, hot-cross buns!

There is no right or wrong way to assign the lines. Just be sure your choices are supported by the material. One delineation which has worked well is as follows:

## Hot-cross Buns

<i>1st half of class:</i>	Hot-cross buns!
<i>2nd half of class:</i>	Hot-cross buns!
<i>Single voice:</i>	One a penny,
<i>Two voices:</i>	Two a penny,
<i>All:</i>	Hot-cross buns.
<i>Girls (using slightly higher pitch):</i>	If you have no daughters,
<i>Boys (using slightly lower pitch):</i>	Give them to your sons.
<i>1st half of class:</i>	One a penny,
<i>2nd half of class:</i>	Two a penny,
<i>All:</i>	Hot-cross buns!

Once you have assigned the lines, you can direct the students with role assumptions in mind. Perhaps the first and second halves of the class are street

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vendors from two competing bakeries. The single and duo voices could be the head bakers from each bakery, calling out their prices in a price war. Then, switching to another role, the students could quickly play the parts of girls and boys on the street responding to the hubbub. The poem finishes with lines from the bakers and their vendors again.

What other interpretations could you give to this poem? Perhaps it could be played as though excited, hungry children race to the vendors after school, calling for their favorite treat: hot-cross buns. Or maybe each child represents a different baker from Olde England who has taken to the streets early in the morning to sell his wares.

All choral reading need not be poetry. Older grades also enjoy non-rhythmic writings such as Lincoln's Gettysburg Address or the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States. The rhythm of a non-poetic piece is not as obvious. It is more complex to perform, but that's part of the fun of it. Let's take a look at the Preamble to the Constitution. It reads as follows:

### **The Preamble**

We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

One group of college students thought that the lines suggested specific roles such as judge, mother, soldier and minister. This became a basis for a way to assign solo lines to certain parts of the text. Then, since we wanted to preserve the sense of large groups of Americans speaking their minds, we divided the rest of the class into three groups and had the groups alternate with the single voices. For special emphasis, we had everyone speak in unison, in a declamatory, noble sort of way which nicely illustrated the patriotism of the piece.

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### The Preamble

*Group 1:* We  
*All:* The People  
*Group 2:* Of the United States  
*Judge:* In order to form  
*Group 3:* A more perfect union  
*Judge:* Establish justice  
*Mother:* Insure domestic tranquility  
*Soldier:* Provide for the common defense  
*Group 1:* Promote the general welfare  
*Minister:* And secure the blessings  
*Soldier:* Of Liberty  
*Group 2:* To ourselves  
*Mother:* And our posterity  
*Minister:* Do ordain  
*Judge:* And establish  
*Group 3:* This Constitution for  
*All:* The United States of America.

Sometimes, rather than trying to interpret lines according to character, lines can be assigned according to pitch. The class can be divided into three different pitch groups: high, light voices; medium voices; and low, dark voices. A poem by Laura E. Richards entitled *The Train* demonstrates the effectiveness of using varied pitches. While performing *The Train*, make sure students listen carefully to each other and maintain the train-like rhythm inherent in the poem.

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### The Train by Laura E. Richards

*Medium:* What does the train say?  
*Low:* Jiggle joggle, jiggle joggle!  
*Medium:* What does the train say?  
*Low:* Jiggle joggle jee!  
*High:* Will the little baby go  
Riding with the loco?  
*All:* Loky moky poky stoky  
Smoky choky chee!

*High:* Ting! ting! the bells ring.  
*Low:* Jiggle joggle, jiggle joggle!  
*High:* Ting! ting! the bells ring.  
*Low:* Jiggle joggle jee!  
*Medium:* Ring for joy because we go  
Riding with the loco,  
*All:* Loky moky poky stoky  
Smoky choky chee!

*Medium:* Look! how the trees run,  
*Low:* Jiggle joggle, jiggle joggle!  
*Medium:* Each chasing t' other one,  
*Low:* Jiggle joggle jee!  
*High:* Are they running for to go  
Riding with the loco?  
*All:* Loky moky poky stoky  
Smoky choky chee!

*Medium:* Over the hills now,  
*Low:* Jiggle joggle, jiggle joggle!  
*High:* Down through the vale below,  
*Low:* Jiggle joggle jee!  
*Medium:* All the cows and horses run,  
*High:* Crying, "Won't you take us on,  
*All:* Loky moky poky stoky  
Smoky choky chee!

*Medium:* So, so, the miles go,  
*Low:* Jiggle joggle, jiggle joggle!  
*Medium:* Now it's fast and now it's slow,  
*Low:* Jiggle joggle jee!  
*High:* When we're at our journey's end,  
Say goodbye to snorting friend.  
*All:* Loky moky poky stoky  
Smoky choky chee!

*Draw the "sloooow" out as well as the "jiggle joggle jee!" Speak these last four lines as though the train is grinding to a huffy, puffy, jerky, braking, winding down stop.*