

Moving Your Vocal Centre

NOTE TO TEACHERS: I find that is best to keep the students moving about the room throughout this exercise, but it is not necessary if your space does not permit. Standing is best.

1. Ask the students to place their hands on the sides of their ribs. Now ask them to focus on taking a deep breath that will expand their lungs out to the sides, and slowly release the air. Repeat a couple of times, before having the students inhale and exhale to a designated count. Start with 5 and see if you can work your way up to 10. This is a technique used to increase breath support.
2. As we know words are made up of constantans and vowels. We are going to start with warming up our vowels. Choose a common song like *Rock-a-Bye Baby* or *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* for the students to sing as a group, but instead of having them sing the words they simply say “oo” as in “good” to create the melody of the song. Now repeat it with the soft “a” sound, followed by the “o” sound as in “Cheerios” and finally with the hard “e” as in “eat.” Students will notice the difference in the way that they hold their mouths, and we put the “h” in front of the vowel sounds to make it easier on their vocal chords (e.g. “oo” becomes “hoo”).
3. Sticking with the vowels for a moment longer, you are going to ask the students to inhale and on the exhale they are going to say the “oo” sound at the highest pitch that they can until they can no longer hold the sound. Repeat this but now ask students to say it in the lowest pitch that they can. Repeat with other pitch ranges, and vowels as time permits.
4. We are now going to move on to the constantans. With two fingers placed in their mouth between their top and bottom teeth (preventing them from fully closing their mouths) have them say some of the tongue twisters below. Repeat each tongue twister 2 to 3 times this way, before removing their fingers. Once their fingers are out, have them immediately repeat the tongue twister. They should notice much clearer annunciation.

If I bake this bitter butter, it will make my batter bitter.

How much wood would a woodchuck chuck, if a woodchuck could chuck wood?

Nine nice night nurses nursing nicely.

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

A tutor who tooted the flute tried to tutor two tooters to toot.

5. Now that the students’ vocal range is fully opened up, encourage them to say the tongue twisters in a voice that would be appropriate to their characters. Consider pitch, tempo, and where their character places sound in their bodies. Do they speak through their nose? Does the sound vibrate in the bottom of their ribs? Where they place the sound will be their character’s vocal centre.