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RESOURCES FOR MUSIC MINISTRY

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Celebrate the Colors in Our World

BY DARLA MEEK

Two years ago, I presented a workshop on children's literature and music to a convention for daycare workers. Before my session, I laid out my books attractively, displayed my PowerPoint, cued my music, and left the room in search of a bottle of water. When I returned, the room was filling up with attendees. I stopped in my tracks when I realized that every single person in the audience was a person of color. I looked at my books, then back at my audience. Out of the twenty books on the table, exactly ONE featured a person of color.

That is the moment I realized I had some significant work to do. I was determined that that would be the *last* time my audience was not going to see themselves represented at one of my sessions. After spending significant time poring through my entire library of over 700 books and an equal number of octavos — and removing any that hinted at any racist messages — I am now well on my way to bolstering the percentage of non-Eurocentric pieces in my repertoire.

The materials we use, the books on our shelves, and even the decorations on the walls send messages to our children about what we value. This is known as our *hidden curriculum*. We must ask ourselves, *Whose experiences are we highlighting? And whose are we ignoring?*

One book that I have selected for inclusion in my classroom library is *My Colors, My World: Mis Colores, Mi Mundo*. Maya Christina Gonzales is an author, artist, and activist who won the 2008 Pura Belpré Honor Award for this book. The award is presented each year to a Latinx author or illustrator "whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth."

The book is set in the Mojave Desert area of southern California, the driest area of the United States. There, windstorms that cover everything with a layer of sand are not uncommon. In the book, a little girl (the author herself as a child) finds joy when she strives to look beyond these circumstances. She says, "I open my eyes extra-wide to find colors in my world."

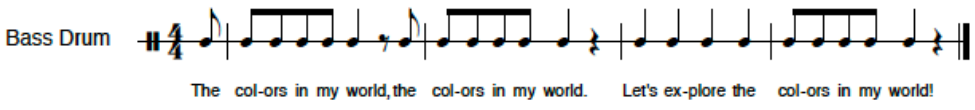
Here, I offer suggestions for ways you can use this book in your classroom.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

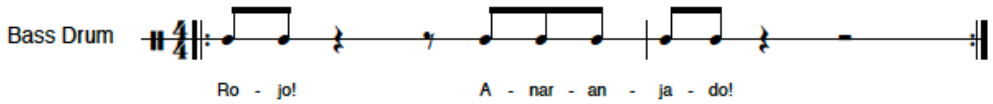
- children's book: *My Colors, My World: Mis Colores, Mi Mundo*
- drum
- triangle
- mallet
- various unpitched percussion instruments
- scarf or streamer for each child, several colors
- movement cards (described below) Make multiples of each card.
- recordings of "De Colores"
- OPTIONAL: *Teacher's Guide for My Colors, My World:* https://www.leeandlow.com/uploads/loaded_document/298/TG_Template_My_Colors_My_World_2016_pDF_copy.pdf

CREATE OSTINATI WITH COLOR NAMES TO ACCOMPANY A RHYME

- Teach the following rhyme to the children:



- Accompany with a pat-clap ostinato on the steady beat.
- Say, "I'll bet we can create a pattern that is more interesting and challenging by using color words!"
- Display the words below and practice each.
- Say each Spanish color name in rhythm. (Each color should have roughly four beats.)
- String two colors together to make a word chain. For example,



- Clap the rhythm of this word chain as an accompaniment for the rhyme above.
- Continue with several other combinations and guide the children to choose one they prefer above the others.
- Transfer this rhythm to unpitched percussion instruments.
- Perform this rhyme at the beginning and ending of the book.

English color	Spanish color	Pronunciation
pink	rosa	[RROH-sah]
red	rojo	[RROH-hoh]
orange	anaranjado	[ah-nah-rrahn-HAH-doh]
yellow	amarillo	[ah-mah-RREE-yoh]
green	verde	[BEHRR-deh]
blue	azul	[ah-SOOL]
purple	violeta	[bee-oh-LEH-tuh]
brown	marrón	[mah-RRAWN]
black	negro	[NEH-grroh]

PAIR THE BOOK WITH THE SPANISH FAVORITE, "DE COLORES"

"De Colores" is a beloved folk song which is sung throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Though no one is certain of the song's origins, it is generally thought to have come from Spain during the colonialization of the Americas. Verses were added by the Cursillos Movement and other Christian denominations as the song meandered its way from country to country.

PHONETIC TRANSCRIPTION:
(Note: "rr" indicates a flipped r.)

De colores se visten los campos en la primavera
[deh koh-LOH-rehz seh VEE-stehn lohs KAHM-pohs ehn lah pree-mah-VEH-rrah]

De colores son los pajaritos que vienen deh afuera
[deh koh-LOH-rehz sohn lohs pah-hah-RREE-tohs keh BYEH-nehn dyah FOOEH-rra]

De colores es el arco iris que vemos lucir
[deh koh-LOH-rehz ehs ehl AHRR-koh EE-rees keh BEH-mohs loo-SEER]

Y por eso los grandes amores de muchos colores me gustan a mi
[ee pohr EH-soh lohs GRRAHN-dehs ah-MOH-rres de MOO-chohs koh-LOH-rrehs meh GOO-stahn ah mee]

Play several versions of the song for the children, such as the one by Mexican musician and music educator José-Luis Orozco. He is the author of several terrific collections of Spanish songs, including *De Colores and Other Latin-American Folk Songs for Children*. You can hear him performing each song, usually with a team of children, by subscribing to his YouTube channel, José-Luis Orozco – Topic. He also maintains a website full of helpful materials for teaching English Language Learners: https://www.colorincolorado.org/. Other sources for recordings are listed in RESOURCES below.

ADD MOVEMENT

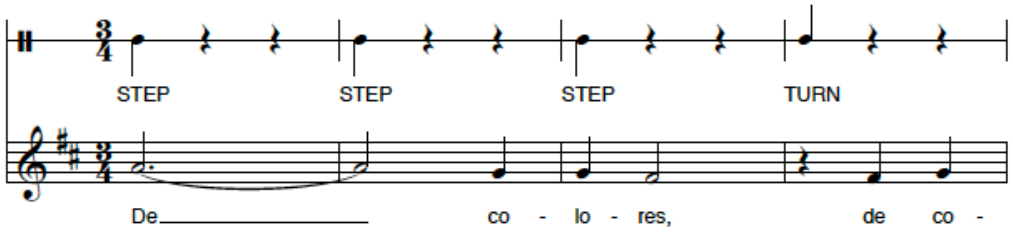
A beautiful way to visually represent the text is to add movement with colorful scarves or steamers! I suggest that rather than choreographing movements for the children to learn, leaders guide the children to *create their own* interpretive movements. Here's how:

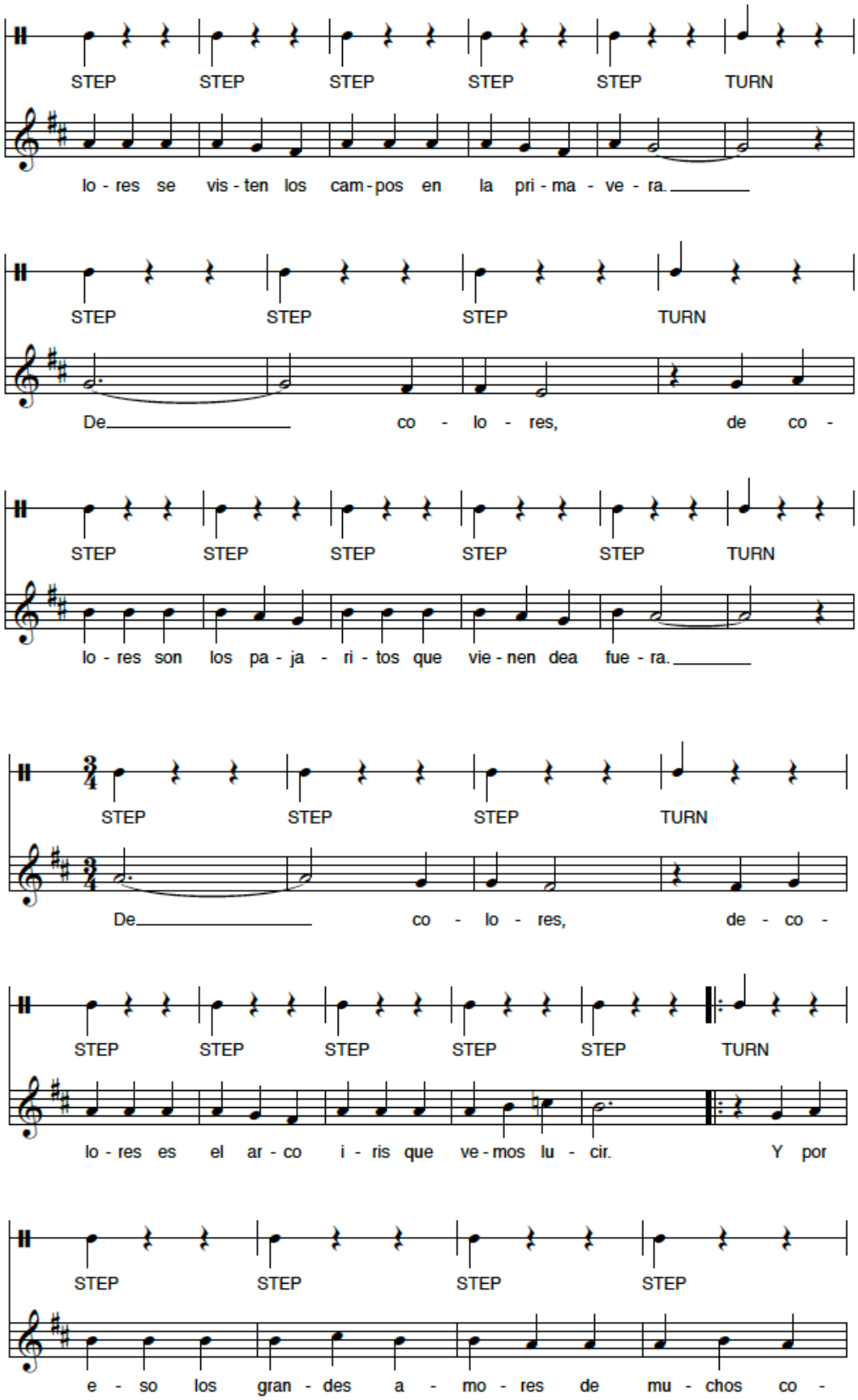
1. Develop a "repertoire of movements."

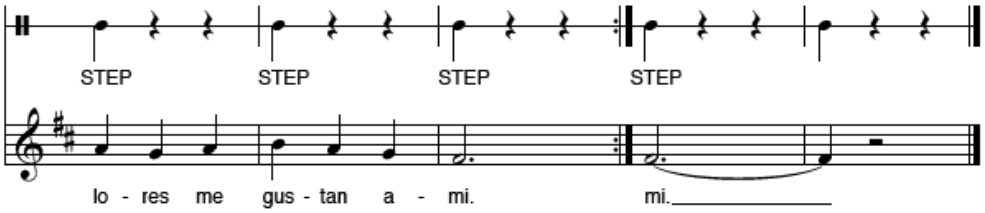
- Distribute props to the children: scarves, streamers, paper plates, etc. (Make a simple streamer by tying a hair elastic band halfway through a 5-6' length of ribbon.)
- Give the children 30 seconds to explore the different movements they can make with their props. As they explore, offer suggestions, such as, "Can you try a high movement? A low movement? A zig-zag pathway? A straight pathway? A curvy pathway? What happens if you include your other arm? What happens if you include your legs?" You may choose to show clips of Latino dancers to provide stylistic ideas.
- Ask the children to each settle on ONE simple movement that they can share with the group. (This can be accomplished in partner sets, as well.) Provide an example. I like to demonstrate a curved arch over my head and name it "El Arco Iris," which is the Spanish term for "rainbow."
- Invite individual volunteers, one-at-a-time, to demonstrate the movements they created. After each volunteer, have all the children practice the movement and NAME IT. Write the names of each movement on the board.
- Continue until you have 6-8 different movements. As each one is listed, have the children review all the previous movements to ensure they are memorized.
- Ask the children to combine two movements to create one longer movement. Lead the whole group to try different combinations.

2. Introduce the music.

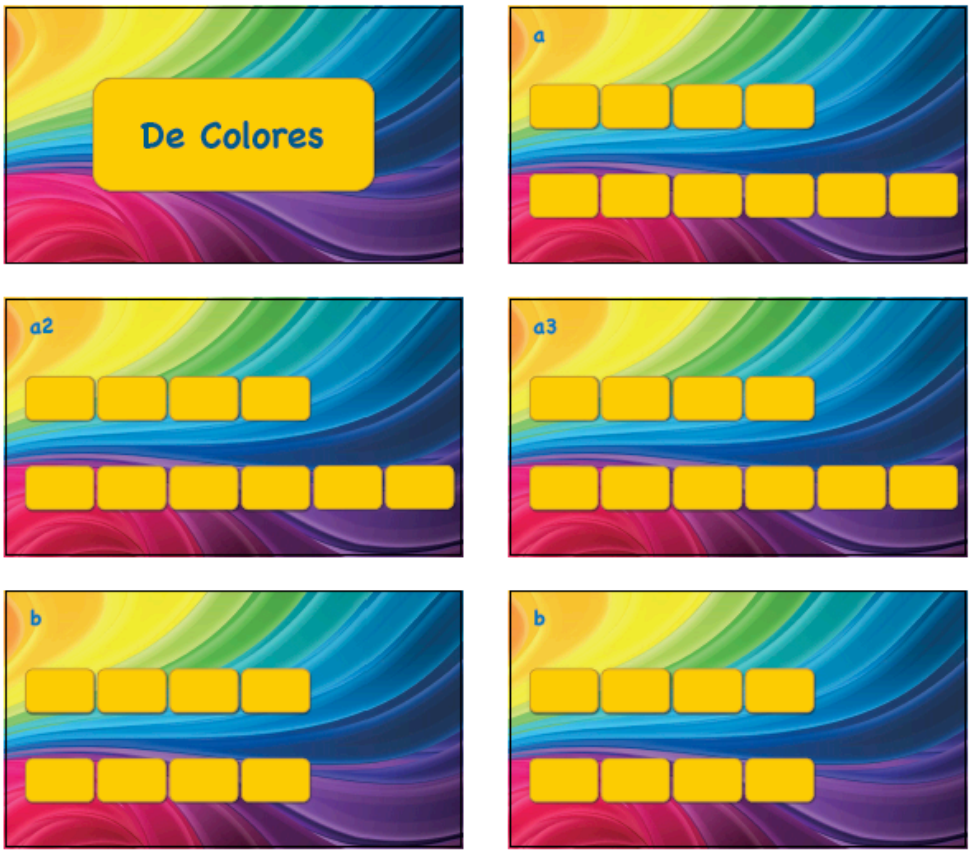
- Since the phrase lengths are odd, consider starting with locomotor movement so that the children can internalize the structure before choreographing it. To do this, gather a drum, a triangle, and a mallet. Instruct the children to take a step every time they hear you play the drum. When you play the triangle, they should turn around to face another direction (the back or either side). Play the entire pattern below once through with no singing. Then, play it again while singing the melody, either on a neutral syllable, in English (multiple singable translations can be found with a simple Google search), or in Spanish (text provided).




STEP STEP STEP STEP STEP TURN
lo - res se vis - ten los cam - pos en la pri - ma - ve - ra.
STEP STEP STEP TURN
De co - lo - res, de co -
STEP STEP STEP STEP STEP TURN
lo - res son los pa - ja - ri - tos que vie - nen dea fue - ra.
STEP STEP STEP TURN
De co - lo - res, de - co -
STEP STEP STEP STEP STEP TURN
lo - res es el ar - co i - ris que ve - mos lu - cir. Y por
STEP STEP STEP STEP
e - so los gran - des a - mo - res de mu - chos co -



- Now have the children sit down. Display the following form poster (enlarged and laminated) or slides.
- Play the recording again, having the children follow the form poster as you point to each section.



- Play the recording or sing the song, giving the having children time to practice some of the movements they created on their own, determining how the movement would nicely reflect the melody they hear.

3. Add choreography.

- Section by section, have the children offer ideas about which movement would work well with each section. (I write the names of the movements in water-soluble marker directly onto the laminated form poster.)
- Depending on the length and complexity of the song, consider choreographing only the A section on the first rehearsal. Choreograph the B section during the next rehearsal.
- Perform.

4. Use an alternate teaching process.

- If you are not comfortable giving the children this much freedom, here is one way to maintain more control.
- After analyzing the song, display the following pictures. Guide the children to practice each movement with their streamers.

ripple down

4 downward sways

run in a circle

rainbow

up 3, down 3

circle head

flutter

freestyle

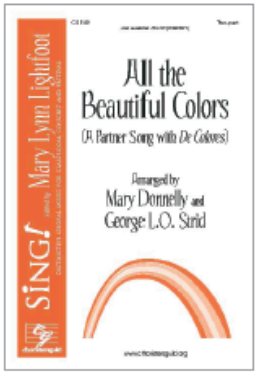
- Have the children listen to the song and decide on an appropriate order for the movements. You will need to ask leading questions, such as, "When do you hear a long high note?" "When do you hear a section of music that seems to move downward?" "On what words do you hear the music move upward, then downward?"
- Perform.

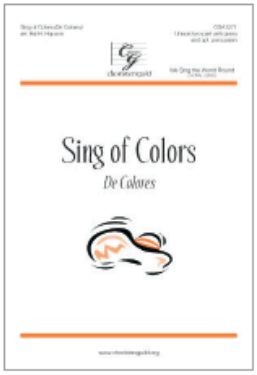
5. Segue to an octavo.

This lesson could serve as an introduction for your choir to one of the two following two-part octavos:

- **CGE49** | All the Beautiful Colors | by Mary Donnelly and George L.O. Strid
- **CGA1271** | Song of Colors | arranged by Hal Hopson

Both of these delightful pieces feature the traditional folk song paired with an original partner song. Accompaniment tracks are available for both pieces.





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