

# How to Prepare an Effective

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## END-OF-YEAR CLASS PERFORMANCE

*singing?*

*movement?*

*poetry?*

*video?*



## HOW TO PREPARE AN EFFECTIVE END-OF-YEAR CLASS PERFORMANCE

Anyone who has worked with me will tell you that I believe strongly in the benefits of performance for young children. When done effectively it motivates, engages and excites children over many weeks and increases the energy in the classroom.

It teaches them the value of perseverance and practice. It develops their ability to work with a team and to be flexible when there are inevitable changes. It fills them with a sense of accomplishment and pride because their performance didn't come quickly or easily, it was the result of consistent effort. It can also help them achieve their learning goals if the performance content is related to topics, themes or strands that they are engaged in. And this is what I recommend... a class performance that is a celebration of their learning.

Start planning early and work through it over the term so it's not too stressful, but is enjoyable instead (for the teachers AND the kids). If you're not sure the creative arts are worth the time taken out of your teaching day, read or listen to [this interview](#) about the benefits of music for young children.

### What Performance Elements Should We Use?

It really depends on the skills and comfort levels of the teachers involved and the level of expectation of the parents. Fortunately, in early childhood, we don't have to be experts to do a creditable job! These are some elements that I suggest can be used to great effect, depending on how much time you and your kids have available, and taking into account their ages and interests. Of course, if it's considered a major performance on a stage in front of many it will need more effort. But if we're talking about a small performance in the classroom just for parents and grandparents it doesn't need to be, and shouldn't be, too elaborate.

**Class poem:** Group poems are highly effective. They can be spoken all together, or if they're longer, divide up the lines so individuals or smaller groups of children can narrate certain parts. This way, even younger children can attempt a poem that is longer than they'd usually try.

**Individual/small group poem:** Have children been writing/speaking poetry? It can be as simple as filling in the blanks. For eg,

I see a bear.  
I see a blue bear.  
I see a silly blue bear.  
And he/she sees me.

Having the confidence and focus to stand up and recite a poem like this is fantastic. They have created something, and the audience enjoys it. What can be better? And for sure, their mum has taken a video of it to share with relatives!

**Class song:** Most kids really love to sing so it's just a matter of choosing the right song or songs. You can use a class favourite that they've been singing through the year, find a song that relates to the content they're learning or choose something new so it's a special surprise. Avoid songs that are too difficult or have too many words. If kids feel stressed about it they won't enjoy the process and that's to be avoided. Make sure you add some hand and body movements to it, they help the kids remember the words and help them stay engaged throughout.

**Writing a song:** This is a terrific literacy activity. Choose anything your kids are learning about and ask them for input to write a song together. Choose a melody you're all familiar with, such as a nursery rhyme or children's song and brainstorm the concepts that are important.

Then weave the information into a song. It's best to do this a little every day over perhaps a week or more as songs don't usually pop out of thin air, they need a bit of mulling over. It's nice if they rhyme, of course, but it's not essential.

**Dance/Movement:** You can add dance to your song(s), and movement to your poetry, but you can also do it separately, particularly if you find a song the kids love that is relevant, but too difficult to sing. Often, each teaching team will have one member who's stronger at movement and can take on the choreography, but again, this isn't necessary. Kids know how to move. If you ask each of them for a suggestion you'll end up with plenty of ideas. Also, if you play through the song a couple of times and ask the children to dance you can pick a few dance moves that you like and encourage the others to follow. How awesome when a child's choreography is chosen for a performance... it's another aspect to make them proud and successful.

**Acting out a story:** Choose a story your kids love, or have them work with you to adapt it. Or write your own story. Kids are good at that, too! Write out a script and test it with your kids to make sure it's not too difficult or too long. If some children need help learning their lines send their scripts home with their phrase(s) highlighted. This can be super helpful for children who a) have a lot to learn, or b) struggle with English or pronunciation. You may have a child that is too shy to speak, don't force it, but try and give them something to do in the story that is theirs alone such as looking after a particular prop. Small group chants are great for including children like this. For eg, if a bunch of kids shout, "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down," even the shy ones, or any who are self-conscious about their language skills can join in without fear of exposure.

**Instruments:** If you have percussion instruments incorporate them into your program if possible, being aware than it can get noisy! And if you don't have them, your kids can easily make shakers or drums, just google it and you'll find plenty of suggestions. They can be played **over a recorded song**, starting and stopping at appropriate places, playing softer and louder, faster and slower throughout. Play them at the beginning of a song they'll be singing, or **add an extra verse** in the middle where they can stop singing and just play for a bit. **Add music to a skit.** This is very effective and is a great responsibility for the children playing, particularly since they must never drown out dialogue. If we take The Three Little Pigs as an example:

Wolf stalks towards a house/pig (tapping sticks play slowly)

'Little pig, little pig...' (shakers play softly)

'Not by the hair on my...' (one triangle ding)

'Then I'll huff and I'll puff...' (shakers a little louder)

Shakers and drums play while wolf blows and blows

As the little pig runs away a triangle can be played quickly like running steps



**Turn the story into a class book:** Divide up the story amongst your class so that each child, or pair of children, can draw a picture for each part of the story. You can type out the text for each page, glue it to the bottom and bind the pages into a book. Don't forget to include a title page! It can be read by the teacher at the side while the children act out the story, or placed near the classroom entrance so parents can look at it on their way in or out.

**Turn the story into a digital book:** This is one of my favourite keepsakes to make. Have children create pictures as above, but scan each picture so you have a digital copy then use a program you like to put the pages together into a story. Even better, record your kids' voices narrating the story so it's all them. I have used this method with children who are **just learning English** and it's brilliant because they just have to get the short phrase right once while you're recording and they're done. So they can listen to you speak the phrase and immediately repeat it. Then they don't have to worry about trying to remember it during a performance when everyone is looking at them.

You can play this story during performance time, or save it as a keepsake to give to families.

If you're not sure how to do this I recommend looking at some easy-to-use software. [This post](#) has a list you might like to check out. You can record your kids' voices using Garageband or Audacity, then add the pictures and audio files to iMovie or Movie Maker or Photostory3. I've also used VoiceThread successfully in the past.

**Our year in pictures:** Gather pictures and/or video clips from throughout the year and put them together into a slideshow with quiet background music. They can just be random or grouped into learning areas, friendships, field trips etc. You may have a parent or two who will offer to take this project on for you, or a teaching assistant that can help you out. The trick is to give yourself time to collect them, or to start taking some specifically for this project. Again, using programs like iMovie or Movie Maker will make this fairly simple, although editing can be time consuming so give yourself plenty of time – definitely don't leave it till the last minute. Just as with a digital book, kids absolutely LOVE watching themselves and their friends in photos and if you show it during their performance make sure the kids can watch, too. Their reactions to the slideshow will be priceless for parents watching!

**Our year in words:** Have each child create a short sentence that tells the audience something about that year, then they can each present that sentence to the audience. For eg, things that they learned, field trips they enjoyed, friends they made, funny things that happened, special event days etc. This gives parents a lovely little peek into their child's year. And if one of your children would be uncomfortable sharing, let them stand with their friend while their friend says the sentence for them.

**Joke Telling:** Do you have a class clown? Have a couple of your more confident children stand up and deliver a couple of jokes, such as 'knock, knock,' jokes.

**Subject Areas:** Think of ways to present what you've been learning in science and social studies. Of course, most early childhood centres have their learning fully integrated but it's nice to create a presentation that is not all singing and dancing! For eg, take photos of an experiment the children did, project them on the wall and have children explain the experiment. Or have the children create a big poster and they hold it up while the teacher briefly describes what happened.

**Costumes:** If you have parents or colleagues who are keen to get elaborate that's great, but mostly I encourage you to keep it simple. Of course, your kids can wear their regular clothes, or uniforms if they have them, but it's nice to have some kind of special outfit. Do most of them own jeans and bright T-shirts? Often, if you survey parents you'll find one child will have extra that they can lend to another child. **Or** you can **make small signs or pictures** that represent their character and pin it to their shirts. **Or** make **paper hats** for your kids that show their character or something about the story. Those can take away the need for costumes at all!

**Props:** Keep it as simple as possible! Audience imagination is accepted so don't think you need every single thing that might be in your story. But a few little props can add visual interest and kids love being made responsible for looking after them, or for grabbing them at the right time in a performance. Just be sure they don't actually slow down the action, or become problematic because they get in the way... or if kids can't stop playing with them!

**Backdrop:** Class-type performances don't generally require any backdrop, but if you're keen try and do it as simply as possible. For eg, use a big piece of cloth or butcher paper and then attach pictures the kids have created onto it. If you want a sky and grass you can use blue butcher paper (or cloth) and the kids can walk over the bottom of the paper with green paint on their feet... how cute would that be! Just make sure you do it outside with a handy water source nearby.

**Advertising:** Children should absolutely be part of the advertising process! Depending on their ages ask them to **create an invitation** by writing and/or drawing. You can make your own invitation but ask the kids to write, 'mum and dad,' or 'grandpa' on it to personalize it. They could also type a **short email** or text, or just push the 'send' button. They can **make posters** well in advance to put up where parents will see them.

**Program:** Making a simple program becomes a sweet keepsake. Choose one child's artwork, take a photo of it and use it as the cover. Inside you can list the performances and the names of all the children involved. You can also add a little blurb on all the skills your kids were using while preparing for the concert, particularly if there were aspects that they found particularly difficult but persevered through.

**Performance video:** find someone who can video the whole performance and give it to parents as an end-of-year gift. You can add any other slideshows you've made to this so they're all together. Also, if you take candid photos of the kids preparing for their show, plus photos of them getting ready before the performance and add them to the performance video, they always look terrific. You'll probably find some parents who'd be happy to do this for you.

## AN 8-WEEK TIMETABLE

**8 weeks:** brainstorm what elements you want to include, make sure they're feasible, approach other staff for support and help, and gain permission, if needed, from leadership. Think about your tech needs, do you have everything available or will you need to borrow equipment? Choose a date and time. I prefer the end of the week so the kids can practice in the days leading up to it, and pretty much first thing in the morning. If your kids start at 9.00, make the performance 9.20am so they've got time to get ready but working parents aren't waiting around too long.

**7 weeks:** inform parents of the date and time of the concert so they have plenty of advanced warning. Ask for volunteers if you want help with costumes/props/makeup and hair/slideshows. Make a detailed plan for when and how the kids are going to learn the show.

**6 weeks:** start teaching the different elements, particularly if they're new. Give your kids plenty of time to learn and only do a small amount at a time. Remember to be taking photos as you go and start collecting photos from throughout the year if you're doing a slideshow.

**5 weeks:** be clear on your costuming/props and start checking with parents to make sure the kids have what they'll need... try and avoid parents having to buy anything. Do your kids need to make instruments? Plan to do it over the next week or two.

**4 weeks:** create posters and invitations. If your kids are learning a new song or play, make sure they've started learning them by now... remember, slow and steady is the key. Do you need to find or buy makeup, hair gel or props? Make sure you're working on any slideshow... they're better done early. Don't forget background music!

**3 weeks:** if you're making a backdrop now would be a good time, especially if the kids are contributing to it... slowly! Create the programs, too, it's good to get them done and tucked away. Make sure you have all your tech needs covered. Line up parents to help the kids get ready before hand... do you want sparkly gel in their hair? Or makeup?

**2 weeks:** start practicing the transitions between performance elements, make sure they're as easy as possible. If you have emcees, make sure they're learning their lines and are able to project their voices or use the microphones properly. Run through from beginning to end, preferably a couple of times so the kids (and you) feel confident. Make sure all costumes are in your classroom, or that all parents know how to dress their child on the day. Make sure all parents are clear on the date and time.

**1 week:** Woo hoo... it should be an energy filled week, but not stressful if the preparation has been consistent over the term. Try and practice it all the way through over consecutive days if possible to iron out any kinks and help the kids feel confident about their role and the sequence of the program.

Remember, it doesn't have to be perfect. For me, the most important thing on performance day is that the children have a great time and feel proud of their achievement. And I believe this is what most parents are looking for too!

**0 week:** Put **videos and slideshows together** for parents and run off copies. I always used iDVD for this but (very big boo hoo) Apple no longer supports iDVD so you might need to actually add any slideshows to the end of the performance video if you want to hand them a DVD with multiple videos.

**OR:**

- \* ask parents to send in a **thumb drive** and download any files to them that way
- \* put all the files in **dropbox** and send parents the link to upload for themselves
- \* make a private **YouTube** channel and upload the footage there for parents to watch

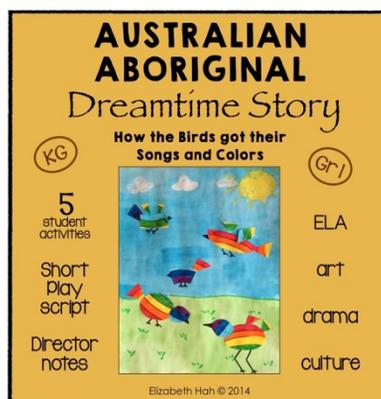
**Sites I recommend**

If you are looking for ideas I recommend the following two publishers. They can help with plays, dance and songs for little ones, I've used TONS of their materials. They also create fantastic backing tracks for kids to sing to so you don't have to worry about the music. And if you order downloadable materials you can get started right away!

Australian Publisher: [Bushfire Press](#)

US Publisher: [Music K-8](#)

If you're interested in creating a simple **Dreamtime Story** you can find **How The Birds Got Their Songs and Colours** here!



**Other points to keep in mind:** Most kids love to be singled out for special roles – even if it's just to hold a sign.

Encourage kids to bow, practice it so it looks confident. It's a great way to end and the audience loves it.

Teach them about performance etiquette: being quiet while others are performing, putting on big smiles for the audience, trying hard to remember what comes next, not using 'shhhh' to quiet others ('shhh' is a really loud noise and carries much further than just saying 'please be quiet').

If you have microphones, make sure the kids practice using them. Some mics pick up sound from quite a distance, but most need the children to be speaking directly into them. It's important that they practice this as it's so disappointing for children to have done a lot of work to learn their line(s) but they're not actually heard on the day. If children are sharing a mic, make sure they practice allowing each other to get closer to it when they're speaking so everyone can be heard equally.

I hope this information has been helpful to you, I didn't realise I'd end up writing such a huge post... but there you have it. When I start talking about performance I can go on forever!

I hope this post helps you create a wonderful show  
and wish you happy teaching and learning!

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