

Musicianship Matters



Tools to Build Literacy With Joy

A white paper resource for choral educators and developing musicians

Rethinking “Theory” as Storytelling

Music literacy is often reduced to rules and drills—but in thriving choral spaces, literacy is more than skill. It’s how we **tell stories, shape emotion, and build confidence.**

This handout offers practical tools to **turn theory into joy**, and connect **musicianship skills** with identity, creativity, and community.

What Is Joyful Musicianship?

Instead of:

-  Endless worksheets
-  Fear of wrong notes
-  Rigid “right vs. wrong” language

Try:

-  Games that build internal rhythm
-  Movement and storytelling to shape phrasing
-  Apps and tech tools that meet students where they are
-  Social media to celebrate and explain concepts in fun, personal ways

Teaching Musicianship as Storytelling

Help students internalize concepts like:

- **Phrasing** → like reading a sentence aloud
- **Rhythm** → the heartbeat of the story
- **Harmony** → emotional subtext and collaboration

Pro tip: Ask students to “narrate” the phrase without lyrics, using body movement or gesture. “How would you move if this phrase were a question? A celebration?”

Games & Challenges for Skill-Building

Use these **interactive, low-prep ideas** to bring theory to life:

Quick Games

- **Rhythm Charades:** Clap or tap patterns, others guess the emotion or word.
- **Phrase Sculpting:** Create a group gesture map for a musical line.
- **Dynamic Dice:** Assign dynamics or articulations to numbers, roll and perform!

Group Literacy Challenges

- **“Sight-reading Showdown”** (teams take turns reading patterns)
- **“Silent Solfege”** (inner hearing + hand signs, no sound!)
- **“Compose a 4-bar hook”** challenge using a rhythm prompt



Tech Tools for Literacy Practice

These tools reinforce **aural skills**, **notation**, and **sight-reading**, while empowering students to **practice at home or on the go**:

Tool	Use	Platform
TonalEnergy	Tuning, drones, pitch accuracy	iOS, Android
Sight Reading Factory	Custom sight-reading drills	Web, mobile
Rhythm Cat	Fun rhythm practice (younger/novice)	iOS, Android
MusicTheory.net	Interactive lessons + exercises	Web
Soundtrap / BandLab	Composition + layering harmony	Web, mobile
SmartMusic	Digital practice + assessment	