

## When Your Child Has Trouble Sight-Reading Music

On occasion, a teacher will have a student who naturally possesses the skill of perfect pitch or relative pitch. While this is a wonderful gift, the downfall is that the student will often learn music solely by ear, instead of learning note-reading. An inexperienced teacher may inadvertently allow a student to progress beyond his/her skill level without realizing that the child has not been reading the notes at all, but has been playing back what the teacher has demonstrated. It is important to identify these students as soon as possible, because problems can arise if this is not dealt with early on.

Even an experienced teacher can be “tricked” by a student (though the student may not even realize what he or she is doing). In this scenario, the teacher gives a new piece of music to a student to play. When the student starts to stumble, the teacher demonstrates a passage. Instantly, the student “remembers” all the notes, and plays the song perfectly – because the student is repeating what the just teacher has played, and is not actually reading the notes.

One of the signs that a student may have “golden ears” is when his/her sight-reading skills are poor. When a teacher becomes frustrated with a student who cannot seem to sight-read, it becomes necessary to conduct some basic ear training tests (have the student playback a simple melody, for example). If the student indeed has highly-developed ears, it’s important that the parents (and the student) are informed, because this new development will explain why there had been some frustrating times in the lessons or during practice. Parents can take comfort in a (loose) comparison to Mozart, whose ears were so highly developed that he could return home after an evening of chamber music and write down the entire performance from memory – though he was only a child at the time.

A slightly different curriculum must then be developed for kids with good ears. The answer is for the teacher to provide NEW pieces of music for every single lesson. Because this is for sight-reading purposes, the music will usually be at a lower skill level than that at which the student currently plays. When the new piece of music has been played once, it is no longer new, and should be cast aside. Keep in mind that this exercise

is to be combined along side the regular repertoire of songs that are being perfected throughout the lessons.

Simply put, the teacher has to be careful when demonstrating a passage of music. A teacher who always demonstrates a song before allowing the student to try it will hinder the student’s ability to develop note-reading. This goes for all students, not just those with good pitch.

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