

Community Dance Leader Seminar

Presented by CALLERLAB Committee for Community & Traditional Dance

Square Dancing in Schools

Betsy Gotta

April 22-23rd 2023, Sparks/Reno, NV

How to get contacted – be on the internet. The schools I work for have all contacted me. You can also contact your local school board or Superintendent.

I have not done a teaching series, but one day/one period introductions to square dancing. This means I have a short time to change attitudes and show the children that square dancing is fun.

Make the kids as comfortable as possible

1. If possible, have the teacher help them choose partners and make up squares prior to your arrival. That eliminates confusion and saves precious time.
 2. Eliminate barriers to learning by not embarrassing kids. Understand that different age groups will learn in different ways.
 - A. The big bugaboo – Right and Left - Change how you teach calls to limit the use of left and right.
 - a. Even many adults (20%) cannot easily tell left from right.
 - b. Children may or may not have learned left and right.
 - c. Get on floor if possible and lead the first “Circle Left”. Wireless microphone helps.
 - d. Eliminate the decision – have people shake hands. In this culture, most people, even children, will automatically use the right hand, then you can also easily identify the left hand – the one not used. *For younger children – have them wear a band/bracelet on the right hand. Then you have to remember to call “Bare hand -Allemande; Band hand turn once around with partner.”*
 - e. For Promenade – reach across the body and shake hands, then join the left hands under the right ones. *Note: Younger children may shake hands until you tell them to stop! Be prepared.*
 - f. Teaching Do Sa Do – Pick a teacher and demonstrate before you try to describe the action. Face partner, boys take one step towards the center of the set while girls take one step toward the outside. Walk forward past each other, move sideways, boys to outside, girls to center back to back. Back past each other and end facing again. If they do it backwards, do not fuss!
 - B. Blend “Circle Right” into “Promenade Single File” by saying, “Let go of hands and continue to walk in the same direction one behind the other.” Then tell the dancers the move they are now doing is called, “Promenade Single File”. *Note: this technique does not work with younger children, they need to be shown how to stand for a Promenade with partner and I do not use Single File Promenade with them*
 - C. Repeat above, then have the trailing partner move into the center of the set to stand next to their partner and walk side by side. Teach Promenade handhold. See 5 above.
 - D. The Bigger Bugaboo, the opposite sex
 - a. For 4th, 5th. and 6th grades, I would use genderless dancing. If the children are forced to dance with the opposite sex, this torture will be all that they can focus on. Square dancing will be associated with torture. Terms used are partner, corner, opposite and Heads and Sides. **Beware! If there are all boys dancing in a square together, they may get rough! Strength tests have been seen during Circle Left/Right and Arm Turns.**
 - b. For 7th and 8th grades, I have used the “line” that I would expect younger children to have trouble accepting that they had to hold hands with the opposite gender, but I thought 7th and 8th graders were more grown up than that. If there are extra boys, I would return to genderless dancing in case some boys would later be teased about dancing the “girls part”.
3. Use a limited number of calls so the dancers are not too confused. Repeat, repeat, repeat!! I usually use DoSaDo, Right Hand and Left Hand Stars, Promenade, Swing (elbow or two hand swing). For older children, I add Grand Right and Left, Pass Thru, Left Allemande. Explore what you can do with each call. For example: Promenade. The Heads or Sides can Promenade outside the square, all the way

around, halfway around, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way around. Other choreography would be needed to get them home, such as Heads/Sides Circle Left $\frac{1}{2}$. Combinations using other calls will be needed to get everyone back home. For younger children, Couple 1,2,3,4 promenade inside the square – say “Hi” to each couple works well to add another combination.

4. Pick music that is not “hokey”. For younger children, Disney tunes, for older ones, Classic rock or pop. Since I am from the suburban Northeast, I generally avoid using lots of country music because it meets the stereotype that I think non-square dancers have. Pick music that suits your area. Here are some suggestions, research Music for Callers website or DoSaDoMusic.

A. Patter music includes:

Walk of Life – Riverboat 777
Get Back – TNT 302
Day Tripper – TNT 302
Thriller – Shindig Productions 1082
Billy Jean (dance remix) – Square Rhythmics 911
Butter – CHIC 4075
Electric Parade TNT 319
Superstar – Gramophone GP206
CeCe – ESP445
All About That Bass – SharpShooter 1027
Macho Man – Rawhide 1163
Kokomo/ Levantando Las Manos - TNT296

B. Singing calls would be used less since I only have a short time. Usually 1 each period. Some titles would include:

Let It Go - Riverboat 520
Frosty the Snowman – Blue Star 2497 (winter of course)
Hakkuna Matata - Rawhide 1005
Here Comes Peter Cottontail – Coyote 803 (substitute Springtime for Easter)
The Colors of the Wind – Rawhide 1130
It’s A Small World – Rhythm 362 / Rawhide 1233
Yellow Submarine – Down Under Records 112

Hit Me with Your Best Shot - Crown 183
Old Time Rock and Roll – ESP1073/Rhythm 173/Royal 277
Proud Mary – Rhythm 197/Hi Hat 5267/Riverboat 759/Square Rhythmics 103
Put a Little Love in Your Heart – ESP1170
Rock and Roll Music – Fine Tunes 148
Summertime Blues – Riverboat 1092/Silver Sounds 107
Joy to the World (Jeremiah was a Bullfrog) – Rhythm 247/Coyote 858
Glory Days – Royal 610

There are other titles that would work. Each caller needs to explore the music available for what they want to use. Listen for reactions to guide you in selections for the future.

I have had lots of help from the teachers, but there are still children who do not want to participate. (They will take a zero for the class.) I simply try to focus on the ones who are trying and help them to succeed. There are children who do not want to dance but will try so they do not get a zero, they will show their disapproval by body language. Once again, focus on the ones that want to succeed. The others are uncomfortable enough without being singled out. Be positive! It helps in the older groups if the teachers have a small reward for “the best groups”.

Betsy Gotta 4/23