

How Firm a Foundation, ideas by Sharla Dance, January 2009

This hymn has many abstract concepts that are not understood well by a concrete thinking child. Yet, the wonderful message can teach the child once the song is deep into the child's soul. The hymn also has lots of words, especially for the younger child. Because of its strong underlying beat and a child's need to move to learn, this song is best learned with many varied kinesthetic activities (movement) and much repetition.

I would teach this song over 8 weeks, spending only 3 to 4 minutes (perhaps a bit longer with older children), with a different activity each week. Here are some ideas:

1. Paper plate rhythm: Long, short, short, Long, short, short. Hold the paper plate in one hand. Hit the paper plate on your leg for the long, and tap it twice with your other palm for the shorts. Tap as you sing.  
Junior: As you sing, direct the children to change the way they are facing at each phrase.  
Senior: After tapping the rhythm as you sing for a phrase or two, pair up into partners and tap the two shorts with your partner, perhaps tapping the two plates together.
2. Carpet Square Jumps: Lay out 4 carpet squares (secured so they will not slip) or mark 4 areas in some other way. Choose 5 children. Demonstrate jumping on the strong beat (as indicated below) from square to square as you sing. Have one child jump at a time, one per phrase.  
First phrase: "firm," "-da-," "Saints," "Lord," Second phrase: "laid," "faith," "ex-," "word" etc.
3. Maori Sticks: Sing as you tap. Younger children tap the beat on the floor in front for 8 beats, on the floor to one side for 8 beats, on their lap for 8 beats, etc. Older children do a pattern as follows for 4 beats as they sit on the floor in a circle: tap on the floor, click twice quickly (eighth notes), pass both sticks to the left, pick up both sticks from their neighbor on the right.
4. Wind wands or ribbons: Sing as you move the ribbons in a pattern. Younger children circle 8 times on one side, then the other side. Circle 8 times overhead, then on the floor. Circle 8 times in front, and then flick the ribbons over their shoulders for 8 beats, etc. Older children repeat a pattern such as circle twice on one side, switch to the other side. Flick over each shoulder.
5. Action Words: Make up an action that represents concrete words such as "foundation," "Saints," "faith," "say," etc. Perform those actions as you sing.
6. Rhythm instruments: As you sing the song, play the rhythm instruments to the beat. Younger children divide into two groups and one group of instruments play on the first two beats, the second group on the last two beats of the measure. Older children divide into four groups and each play on one beat of the measure, group one on beat one, group two on beat two, etc.
7. Eraser Pass Game: Older children only. Put the major words of the song up on the board along with two synonyms for each word. Tap a child on the shoulder as you sing and ask him or her to erase one of the words that is not in the song, then hand the eraser to a child who has not yet had a turn. Do this until all the words NOT in the song are erased.
8. Crack the Code: Older children only. Put the first letter of each word, grouped by phrases on the board. Mix up the phrases. Ask the children to "crack the code" as you sing. They must recognize that the first letter of each word code, then figure out the order of the phrases.

Note: Younger children do well when you repeat some of these activities a few times, thus these activities will last for at least 8 weeks or more.