



synthesizer

Skin and Bones (There was an old woman all...)

This story turned into song has been frightening children since the 1700s. Check out older gruesome versions included in this file for grown-ups only.

Skin and Bones

1700s
Ireland

Key Em, first note E(do)

a capella count-in: 1--2-There...



There was an old woman all skin and bones. Ooo
She lived down by the old graveyard Ooo
One night she thought she'd take a walk Ooo
She walked down by the old graveyard Ooo
She saw some bones a layin around Ooo
She went to the closet to get a broom Ooo
She opened the door and BOO!

There are many versions of this traditional rhyme/song. Until recently (last 30 years) the words have been much more graphic so as to emphasize the state of a corpse. Original words include the woman going to visit a church (over a wooden stile to stay a while) and finding a ghost laying on the floor with "grubs crawling" in and out. The woman asks if she shall be like the corpse when she is dead. The corpse shrieks "Yes!"

"Here the lady screams, notes the editor of **Gammer Gurton's Garland**, and ever since the story was first told, her experience has been bringing terror to the listeners in the nursery. [The poet] Southey, in tears, used to beg his family not to proceed. An essayist, in 1863, recalled his 'suppressed anticipation' as the story 'drew near its terribly personal ending'; a correspondent in 1946 said that these verses in Rimbault's book 'scared us so much as children, we fastened the leaves together'. The lady, the title says, was a 'gay' lady before the event, and therefore undoubtedly wanting in virtue. Perhaps the macabre moralist who wrote the tale had in mind the paintings of bodies corrupting in the grave at one time hung in churches.."

References:

Gammer Gurton's Garland or The Nursery Parnassus, R. Christopher, 1784: edition of 1810, enlarged by R. Triphook.

Nursery Rhymes with the tunes to which they are still sung, Edward F. Rimbault, 1846.

If you think this song is too scary for your class (Grade 3 classes vary widely in their maturity.) then skip over it. Try one of the seasonal songs or activities from Lesson 7B.

New Song: Skin and Bones

- 1 "Ooo -----oo." Sing the refrain in this song. Sing it again immediately using your hand to show the pitches changes. Ask students to be your echoes with their voices and hands. (If you are not comfortable singing the refrain, play it on the glockenspiel --take off unnecessary notes to avoid mistakes.)

Skin and Bones

Key Em, first note E(do)
a capella count-in: 1--2-There...

Ireland
1700s

There was an old wo-man all skin and bones, Ooo oo.

There was an old woman all skin and bones. Ooo
She lived down by the old graveyard Ooo
One night she thought she'd take a walk Ooo
She walked down by the old graveyard Ooo
She saw some bones a layin around Ooo
She went to the closet to get a broom Ooo
She opened the door and BOO!

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- 2 Play the sing-a-long version with students joining on the refrain using voices and hands. Enjoy the ending!

- 3 **"What in the music helps to make this a scary song?"**
Acknowledge student ideas and name them with the musical words.

instrument choice timbre
very slow NEW WORD largo
decreasing volume decrescendo

- 4 Post the words. Play the sing-a-long version again. Students join on the refrain and use their hands to show the melody for the words. Repeat with students singing the entire song.

5 The asterisks in the music above show where to play the bordun/drone in this song (first beat of each bar). Sing the song with students, practising the play by using both hands and knees. Keep an eye on the students as they are practising so that the one chosen to play the instrument has a high chance of success.

6 Try the song with a student playing the accompaniment.

7 Add an instrument on the moans (oooooo). If a pitched instrument isn't available, choose an unpitched percussion instrument to be played on the rhythm of the words.

Ooo
B oo
 A
 o **G** ooooo.
 E

Key of Em
 do = E
 so = B

A bordun or drone is the sound made when "do" and "so" are played together throughout a piece of music.

Keep track of who has had an opportunity to play the pitched instruments e.g. glockenspiels and xylophones. Showing students how you are keeping track helps to alleviate a little of the "I never get to play" anxiety.

Teacher or Student Choice For the rest of today's time, choose from the following or your own favourite seasonal songs/activities.

Rhythmic Story: Adding Sounds to Story

Choose sounds and/or instruments to accompany **In a Dark, Dark, Wood**. (See Lesson 7B)

Song: Dramatic Play

Enrich the experience of **Old Mrs. Witch** by singing it as a drama. (See this and other ideas for Old Mrs. Witch in Lesson 7B.)

Listening Activity: Identifying Ways Music is Used

Match music with characters by miming activities. (See Lesson 7B)

Song Revisions: Rhythm and Beat Counting

Sing **Purple Stew** and then fill up that **Purple Cauldron** again (See Lesson 7A)

Enjoy the Repertoire Student Choice of Song or Dance

New Repertoire

Early Versions of the Story/Poem/Song

The Oxford Book of Nursery Rhymes (Iona and Peter Opie, 1951) gives the earliest known set of words, from 1810:

There was a lady all skin and bone,
Sure such a lady was never known:
It happened upon a certain day,
This lady went to church to pray.

When she came to the church stile,
There she did rest a little while;
When she came to the church yard,
There the bells so loud she heard.

When she came to the church door,
She stopped to rest a little more;
When she came to the church within,
The parson prayed 'gainst pride and sin.

On looking up, on looking down,
She saw a dead man on the ground;
And from his nose unto his chin,
The worms crawled out, the worms crawled in.

Then she unto the parson said,
Shall I be so when I am dead?
O yes! O yes! the parson said,
You will be so when you are dead.

There was a woman all skin and bone
Oo-oo-oo!
Who lived in a cottage all on her own,
Oo-oo-oo!

She thought she'd go to church one day
Oo-oo-oo!
To hear the parson preach and pray,
Oo-oo-oo!

When she got to the wooden stile
Oo-oo-oo!
She thought she'd stay and rest a while
Oo-oo-oo!

When she reached the old church door
Oo-oo-oo!
A ghastly ghost lay on the floor,
Oo-oo-oo!

The grubs crawled in, the grubs crawled out,
Oo-oo-oo!
Of its ears, eyes, nose, and mouth.
Oo-oo-oo!

Oh you ghastly ghost, she said,
Oo-oo-oo!
Shall I be like you when I am dead ?
YES!

A woman in a churchyard sat,
Oo-oo-ah-ah!
Very short and very fat,
Oo-oo-ah-ah !
She saw three corpses carried in,
Oo-oo-ah-ah!
Very tall and very thin,
Oo-oo-ah-ah !

A variation on the
form of storytelling/singing.

Woman to the corpses said,
Oo-oo-ah-ah!
Shall I be like you when I am dead ?
Oo-oo-ah-ah! Corpses to the woman said,
Oo-oo-ah-ah !
Yes, you'll be like us when you are dead,
Oo-oo-ah-ah!
Woman to the corpses said
[piercing deathlike scream!]

Version from girl, 10, London.

**For notes on exploring this dramatic story,
see [CanDo Music 3](#) [October Lessons](#) ...**

In a Dark, Dark ...

In a dark, dark wood there was a dark, dark house
And in that dark, dark house there was a dark, dark room.
And in that dark, dark room there was a dark, dark closet
and in that dark, dark closet there wa a dark, dark shelf.
And on that dark dark shelf there was a dark dark box
And in that dark dark box there was a
GHOST

--cupcake
spider
mouse, etc.