

On Children

On Children is a poem written by Lebanese-American poet Kahlil Gibran. It is taken from *The Prophet*, published a century ago in 1923, but it seems ever more relevant today.



On Children was set to music by Ysaye M. Barnwell of Sweet Honey in the Rock, an all-female, African-American a cappella ensemble.

As with much of her music, “On Children” is scored for SSAA, with A2 written the bass clef. We have assigned male voices to this part also.



- This is a great opening piece especially at the start of the year. Not too difficult, but not too easy. Energetic, but not necessarily fast. An arrangement that can build a community of singers and useful for practicing close harmony.
- The challenge for the Alto 2 line may come in the range, it is rather low, hence the split part in bars 7/8 and bars 11/12 etc.
- Aim to learn each part separately and then maybe split your choir into SSAA(T/B) quartets to work on the rhythm and harmony independently. All parts sing rhythmically together for most of the song .
- Take care of the syncopation, and especially the different rhythmically settings of ‘children’. Compare the first 2 bars for instance. Your singers will learn this most readily with lots of call and response repetition.
- Note the dynamics on the repeat; the aim is a vibrant and exciting *pp* in the upbeat to bar 8 and a crescendo that grows steadily through bars 12-13, leading up to the word “souls” in bar 14.
- A nice thing to do in school if your group size allows is to sing the song in a circle, with no conducting and lots of eye contact. Let Sop 2s feel the beginning together, or choose a soloist to start the song off. The final rit. can also be “felt” as a group.

This poem, and Barnwell’s setting, provide a wonderful opportunity to contemplate the future and how we can help shape it.

Notes for changing voices: in this, as in all the songs, there is a part designed for boys with changing voices, doubled in other parts to provide support on the day.

Here, Alto 2/Tenor/Bass all sing the same part, with a narrow range of D by middle C down to F# below, with alternative low Ds for basses.