Music listening games for kids: eight free games for young ears

Peabody blog · Music · updated 2026-10-31

Eight free listening games for kids, from high or low for preschoolers to guessing the decade. What each one teaches, three boxes a question, no sign-up.

Listening is the first music skill, and it comes before reading notes or playing an instrument. A child who can tell whether a note went up or down, whether the music is speeding up, or whether two tunes are the same is already doing what musicians do. It is also a skill that grows with practice, which makes it a good fit for short games. Peabody has eight of them, free, with no sign-up, and every question is read aloud so a child who can't read yet plays too.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is a free learning site for children, free through the end of 2026, with stories in the library and a Music section. The games are at /music/listen.

How every game works

Each game follows the same pattern, so a child learns it once:

1. Tap Start. Peabody reads the question, then the band plays a short sound.
2. Tap one of three big boxes.
3. If it isn't right, that box fades, the sound plays again, and the child tries another. Hear it again replays the sound as often as they like.

A round is ten questions. Each game starts easy, and eight right the first time climbs a rung, where the sounds get closer together and the listening gets harder. The rung a child reached is kept on the device, and nothing is typed or sent. Every sound is made by Peabody's band in the browser, so nothing is downloaded.

The eight games

- Game: High or Low · Good for: Pre-K to 2nd grade · What it teaches: Pitch: was the second note higher, the same, or lower?
- Game: Fast or Slow · Good for: Pre-K to 1st grade · What it teaches: Tempo: slow like a tortoise, walking, or fast like a hare
- Game: Loud or Soft · Good for: Pre-K to 1st grade · What it teaches: Dynamics: getting louder, staying the same, or getting softer
- Game: How Does It Feel? · Good for: Pre-K to 3rd grade · What it teaches: Happy, sad or spooky, by the chords
- Game: Same or Different · Good for: K to 3rd grade · What it teaches: Three little tunes; which one is different?

- Game: Name That Instrument · Good for: K to 5th grade · What it teaches: Timbre: which instrument is playing the tune?
- Game: Instrument Families · Good for: 1st to 5th grade · What it teaches: Strings, keyboards, percussion or electronic
- Game: Guess the Year · Good for: 3rd to 8th grade · What it teaches: When was music like this new?

What each one is really practising

High or Low is pitch, the most basic idea in music and one young children often mix up with loud and soft. The first rung plays notes far apart; the last plays notes only one or two steps apart. A child who can hear that small a step is listening closely.

Fast or Slow and Loud or Soft are tempo and dynamics, the two changes children notice first in any piece. Loud or Soft asks about a change over time, music getting louder or softer, which is the idea musicians call a crescendo and a diminuendo.

How Does It Feel? starts with clues that are easy, such as happy music being fast and bright. By the last rung the speed and the instrument are the same every time and only the chords change, so a child is hearing the difference between major and minor without needing the words.

Same or Different plays three short tunes, two the same. On the first rung, one tune goes a whole new way. On the last, a single note moves by one step. Noticing when a tune repeats and when it changes is the start of musical form, how pieces are built.

Name That Instrument and Instrument Families are about timbre, the reason the same tune sounds different on a guitar, a piano or a drum. The families game sorts the band into four: strings you pluck or bow, keyboards you press, percussion you hit, and electronic sounds made by electricity. Beep boop chip music counts as a real family here.

Guess the Year is for older children. The band plays a short tune in the style of a time, and the child picks, from three boxes, when that kind of music was new: about 1900, 1930, 1960, 1985 or 2010. After a right answer Peabody says why, for example that swing, a kind of jazz, was the dance music of the 1930s, and that beep boop music came from game consoles in the 1980s.

A grown-up should know one limit: the instruments are Peabody's own synthesizer voices standing in for the real ones, so a piano here is close to a piano but not a recording of one, and woodwinds and brass are not in the games yet.

Games without a screen

The same skills work with nothing but voices and a table, and a few minutes of these makes the online games easier:

- Up and down. Sing a note, then another. Children point up or down. Then swap.
- The tortoise and the hare. Clap a beat; the child walks to it. Speed up and slow down without warning.
- Copy me. Clap a short rhythm and the child claps it back. Change one clap and see if they notice.
- Sound hunt. Find three things in the kitchen that make a high sound and three that make a low one.
- Freeze. Play any music and stop it at a surprise moment. Peabody's Freeze Dance does this with a shape to freeze in, and nobody is ever out.

Where the games lead

Listening games practise one idea at a time. A listening map puts the ideas together in a famous piece: the Mountain King gets faster, the Stars and Stripes goes soft and comes back loud, Für Elise's tune keeps returning. And a child who wants to make the changes rather than hear them can build a quiet bar and a loud bar in the Beep Boop Studio. For reading music, Note names puts a note on the staff with three letters to choose from.

Music games for kids gathers every music game on Peabody on one page.

Questions parents ask

What age are the listening games for?

High or Low, Fast or Slow and Loud or Soft suit preschoolers. Guess the Year is for third grade and up. Every question is read aloud, so reading is never needed.

Does my child need an account?

No. Every game works with no sign-up. The rung a child reached is kept on the device only.

What happens with a wrong answer?

The box fades, the sound plays again, and the child tries another box. Peabody says "Try again. Listen once more." Nobody loses a life, and once the right box is found the round goes on to the next question.

Are these real instrument recordings?

No. Every sound is made by Peabody's band in the browser, using synthesizer voices that stand in for the real instruments.

Is it free?

Yes. Peabody is free for everyone through 31 December 2026, with no ads and no card.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/music-listening-games-for-kids