

Sponge Ball Count Opener

To start my Maths Magic Show for Key Stage 2 (ages 8 – 11) I wanted something impressive and relating to numbers so decided to do the Vernon Ten Count with sponge balls that I have been doing in close up for years. The fact that you're counting from one to ten in a steady rhythm and that a sponge ball magically jumps from one hand to the other literally gets gasps from the children AND teachers! You can see how effective this is on the video. You may find it easier to learn from my explanation there but, for the sake of completeness, I'm detailing it all here for you.

I start by saying ““Some people ask me what has magic got to do with maths or what has maths got to do with magic? Well, I use the rhythm of counting and the numbers to practice magic. Like this.”

Standing behind a table you hold a sponge ball up in front of you pinched between the index finger and thumb of each hand. You place the left hand one down on the table in front of you and count One. Then bring the right hand one down beside it and count Two. The sponge balls should be shoulder width apart. Turn the left hand palm up and place it on top of the left hand ball squashing it flat and count Three. The hand is positioned so that it's the back of the fingers that cover the ball rather than the back of the hand. Turn the right hand palm up and place it on top of the right hand ball squashing it flat and count Four. Again, it's the back of the fingers covering the sponge ball. Count Five and pick up the right hand ball between index finger and thumb. As you count Six three things happen at the same time. Firstly, you place the ball you are holding onto the palm of your left hand. Secondly you close the fingers of the left hand and lastly you pull back the right hand index finger and thumb into the right hand which brings the sponge ball into a loose palm position. This very bold move is covered with the appearance of the sponge ball as the left hand closes and the ball underneath the fingers appears. This is VERY strong visual misdirection. Just do the 'pullback' into the right hand smoothly and at the same slow speed you do the whole of the count. As you count Seven move the right hand forward to the sponge ball that has just appeared and pick it up between the index finger and thumb – keeping the rest of the fingers curled in and hiding the ball in the hand. Pull the ball you have just picked up into your right hand, so it joins the one hidden there as you count Eight. Both hands are now closed in fists fingers up. The audience think there's one in each hand but in reality the left hand one is empty and the right hand one has two balls in. I pause here and slightly twitch both hands as if the magic happens at that point. I then count Nine as I open the left hand and Ten as I open the right.