CREATIVE MUSIC-MAKING

Lesson plans for all ages focused on creativity in music learning

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Introduction

Why do we teach creative music-making?

The teaching artists who have put together this collection believe that it is not only possible, but crucial, that students be empowered to compose and improvise from the very beginning of their musical studies. This is how students develop ownership over the sounds they produce and start to make the connection between those sounds and their own unique sense of self.

If your students have not had the opportunity to do so early on, we believe, with equal intensity, that it is possible to begin this work at any level of technique. The exercises and projects outlined throughout this document offer a variety of entry points to composition and improvisation from the youngest musicians to those in high school (both beginners and advanced players).

This group of teaching artists came together out of a shared interest in becoming better teachers of creative music-making. Many of us do not identify as composers or improvisers. We know that that is the case for many teachers who want to offer these opportunities to students. We are here to say, there is no need to be afraid! You can craft a safe and supportive environment for students to take musical risks. With the help of the structures and entry points these activities provide, our hope is to enable a feeling of limitless creation in your teaching setting

In addition, each of these activities meet one or more of the National Core Arts Anchor Standards listed below (for more information see: https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/). We have suggested age ranges for each lesson; however, all of the activities can be adapted for use with any age or level of skill. We encourage you to be creative with the material and to make it your own.

It is no mistake that we all use the language of "playing" an instrument. It is *playfulness* that keeps us exploring, challenging ourselves, and fortifies us to spend the time needed to get better by practicing something that we feel we want to accomplish.

Creating:
   #1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas
   #2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
   #3. Refine and complete artistic work.
Performing:
   #4. Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.
   #6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
Responding:
   #7. Perceive and analyze artistic work
   #8. Interpret intent and meaning in work
Connecting:
   #10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experience to make art

Musical Literacy (General Music) Lesson Plans

Rainstorm Exploration

Alexandria Ramos
(This is actually the brainchild of my colleague Josh, but here it goes!)

Overview*:*
Rainstorm Composition (Body percussion). This lesson helps students explore different mediums of sound other than voice/instruments. Note that this type of activity can be used to make various soundscapes using body percussion.

Age Range: Pre-K and up

Setting: General Music

Scope of Activity: 1-2 weeks depending on your learners. The activity itself can probably be learned in one class, but it should be practiced for a while. The composition also can and will be different every time.

Materials: Visuals / Pictures of hands clapping, hands patting legs, hands rubbing together, fingers snapping, and a foot stomping. Media device that can stream a YouTube video with decent sound quality.

      YouTube Video: "A Choir Making the Sounds of a Rainstorm"
                            Link: https://youtu.be/29qaN0M0o0s

Preparation resource:
      YouTube Video: "Visual Signal Example"
                            Link: https://youtu.be/r2eEvzqWCkA

Steps:

1. Start off showing the YouTube video to my kindergarten class.

2. Ask "What did you hear? What did you see?" and allow for a conversation to start among the students. Call on students to share their answers with the class. They will notice that the people in the choir will have been clapping, rubbing hands together, patting on their laps, stomping, and snapping. They may also notice that the choir is making sounds that sound like a rainstorm.

3. Talk about how you can make music with your body, and not just with your voice and instruments. Practice the musical actions noticed in the video (clapping, stomping, etc).

4. Bring out the visual. Show the visuals to your students. If you have much younger students, you may need to tell them what each picture is. Tell students that when you show them a visual that they are to perform the musical action that the visual shows.

5. After showing the class the visuals, create some kind of signal for starting the action presented (*like how a conductor gives a prep beat - See "Video Signal Example")*. After said signal is established, start showing the students the visual. Have the students perform the musical action

for a few seconds, and then change to the next visual. Do this in whatever order you wish, and even mix them up if you'd like. You decide when the piece is over, but make sure you've shown all the visuals (or leave some out and see what happens?!).

Visual Rhythmic Composition

Alexandria Ramos

Overview:
Composition and music literacy. This activity will teach students to connect visuals with musical actions, give students a safe space to be creative and explore their musical ideas, practice beat vs rhythm concepts, practice collaboration, use critical and higher-order thinking, and refine memory and physio-motor skills.

Age Range: Pre-K and up.

Setting: General Music

Scope of Activity: Anywhere between 2-4 weeks, depending on how often you see your kids and for how long, and the types of learners you may have.

Materials: Your voice and body, a beat keeping instrument, a dry-erase board, dry-erase markers, poster paper, washable markers.

Steps: (*These steps are stretched over two weeks in 45-minute classes***)**

1. Start by doing some match me rhythm activities. I start with a "my turn, your turn" rhythm game. I sit on my cajon and play simple 4 beat patterns that students must clap back. After a while, we switch from the teacher leading to taking turns leading. This whole activity only lasts about 4 minutes.

2. I then take a dry-erase marker, walk to the board and ask for someone to raise their hand and clap me a rhythm. I'll take two 4 beat patterns and put them together (I write them out for myself). I will do this until I have about four different two bar patterns.

3. I number the two bar phrases, clap each of them a few times, and have the class vote on their favorite two bar pattern. When the class has selected their favorite, we start to come up with symbols for each musical action. For example, one class I had come up with three small lollipops to symbolize a group of triplets, a large chocolate bar for a half note, and a pizza slice for a quarter note in one bar.

4. Next, we practice the two bars we have come up with. After we've got it down, I will put all the compositions together and we will practice. I teach three kindergarten classes, so putting the three two bar phrases together is low-lift and perfect length for my kids. If you teach more than 3-4 kindergarten classes, I suggest that you compose a 6-bar piece instead of two, and I also wouldn't combine them with other classes' compositions.

5. This is how I have students perform their pieces: I have everyone start out by keeping a steady beat on their lap. After 4 beats of this, the first class will clap their rhythm, then go back to patting the beat. After another 4 beats, the second class will clap their rhythm, then go back to patting the beat on their lap. The last class will do this also. After the final 4 beats are performed, the piece is over. Here is what a visual of a classroom composition may look like.

This was what my kindergarteners came up with last year:

KZB miller-Berke

K2 c Redmond

<u>**Musical Math: Composition with Patterning**</u>

Elissa Johnson-Green

Overview:
In this lesson, students will be introduced to three foundational concepts of composition: Phrase structure, form, and patterning. They will be working with AB and ABA from micro- to macro-levels. While I have designed these activities to be immersive and student-centered, they are also highly structured and scaffolded. Students will use multiple skills to complete each level and each level can be differentiated to grade, learning style, and developmentally appropriate practice. You will notice that I drew on 5th and 6th grade standards for these lessons: According to the National Core Arts Standards, these were the closest I could find to what the children actually do and learn. I have effectively replicated these activities over years with children in grades K-4 and now do them with my college-age students in their methods classes.

I prefer not to use traditional, Western notation because my young students' ideas are always more complex than their ability to notate them. The idea here is to allow children to express their musical ideas through a compositional process without a barrier to entry. I highly recommend audio or video recording your students playing their compositions at each stage of the process. They can listen to their work and edit or add to it.

Age Range: Grades K-4

Setting: General Music

Scope of Activity: Beginning to intermediate instrumental composition skills: 5 sessions but can be stretched over more depending on the teacher's curriculum and the students' engagement level.

Materials:

1. White drawing paper.
2. Staff paper.
3. Colored pencils, markers, and crayons.
4. Instruments.
5. A recording device.

Steps:
Introduction:
1. Draw a shape on your white/chalk/smart board or on a piece of paper. Match the color of the shape to one of the Lego colors.

2. Tell the students that this shape "equals" a musical phrase. For example:

3. Ask the students to draw this shape on a piece of paper - for now, they will need to imitate your shapes and colors.

4. Ask the students to experiment on their instruments to find a short line of music that they like.

5. Tell them that once they have their idea, that they will need to write it down in any way that they can remember it. They will write the music next to the shape. For example (using alternative notation):


6. Each time they see this shape, they will play the music the same way.

7. Repeat this step twice more using two different shapes/colors. For example:
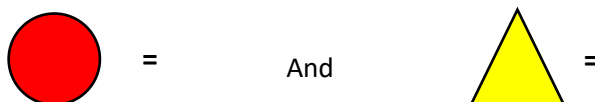
8. Once the students have written three lines of music for the three shapes, ask them to put the music together in the following ways:
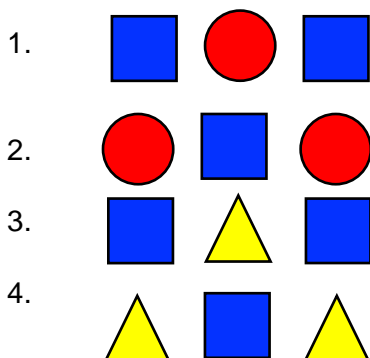
9. There are many permutations of these shapes/melodies that the children can work with. Continue to have them use three shapes and then progress to the following:
    1. Add double shapes/melodies
    2. Connect four or more shapes/melodies together
    3. Continue to create different patterns with the shapes and music

10. Once the students have worked with these shapes for one or two lessons, ask them to make up three of their own shapes with three new melodies. These shapes/melodies can be anything they imagine (as appropriate, of course!).

11. Lead the students in the same exercises as above using these new shapes/melodies.

12. Remind them that every time they add an idea, they need to write the shape and the music down on paper.

13. Move into complex patterns combining all six shapes and music. For example:
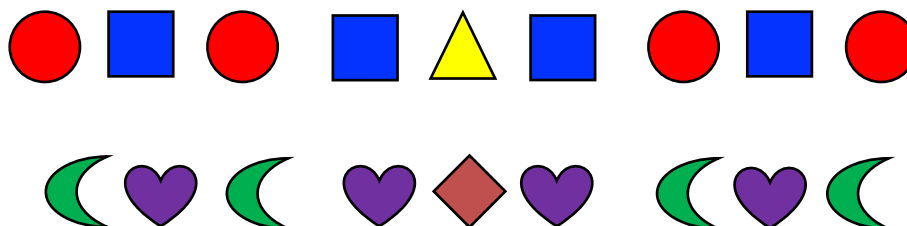
14. If you want to show another layer of form, the students might label the shapes this way:

This method becomes versatile as you can teach them any compositional form connecting their musical ideas to the shapes and letters.

15. Extensions for these lessons can get highly complex. For example:
    1. Take this pattern and label it "Phrase 1:"
    2. Take this pattern and label it "Phrase 2:"
    3. Those two patterns together will now be big letter A.
    4. Now write two more phrases using the same technique but this time, mix up the shapes to create new music.
    5. Move the phrases around to see how many AB and ABA patterns can be created using only six musical ideas. The possibilities are endless…

Musical Engineering: Composition with Legos

Elissa Johnson-Green

Overview:
These activities can stand alone or be used as a continuation of Musical Math found on pages 10-13. The principles underlying Musical Engineering are similar but take the activities further. Here, the students will be building three dimensional structures out of Lego bricks to represent their music. The structures and written music become two parts of a musical score that students read as they play.

Age Range: Grades K-4

Setting: General Music

Scope of Activity: Beginning to intermediate instrumental composition skills: Up to 10 sessions depending on student engagement and complexity of compositional skills.

Materials:

1. 600 Lego bricks in blue, red, and yellow of various shapes and sizes (you may need more depending on class size).
2. 200 black and white Lego bricks, also of different sizes and shapes.
3. Containers to sort and store the Legos by color.
4. Small, individual containers for each student to store their work.
5. White drawing paper.
6. Staff paper.
7. Colored pencils, markers, and crayons.
8. Instruments.
9. A recording device.

Steps:
1. Introduction to engineering discussion prompts: Ask the students the following questions:
   a. If we're going to build a bridge or a building, what kinds of materials do we need?
   b. How might we put these materials together so that the building will stand up?
      i. Talk about symmetry, scaffolding, form, balance, etc.
   c. If a composer wants to write a piece of music, what kinds of materials would they need?
   d. What might the composer need to do if they want the music to hang together?
      i. Talk about balance in music, for example, maybe they write an idea and then bring that idea back somewhere else in the piece.
      ii. Talk about beginning, middle, end.
   e. Today we're going to start building musical pieces as if we were going to build a structure.

2. Show the children one blue Lego brick. Draw the shape of it on a whiteboard/blackboard/smartboard/piece of paper. For example:

3. Tell the students that this brick will equal one musical idea (just like in the Musical Math lessons). Draw it out to demonstrate, for example:
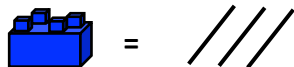
4. Every time the students use this brick, they will need to play their musical idea the same way. Tell the students that they will need to draw or write down their music any way that they can remember it.

5. Direct the students to improvise on their instruments until they find a musical idea that they like. They will then write down this idea like you did – this idea will be their blue Lego idea.

6. Repeat these steps for a red and a yellow Lego brick. For example:
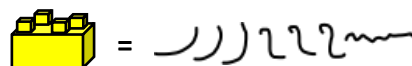
7. Once the students have all three ideas written down and associated with each color, ask them to experiment with moving the ideas around. When they have found a phrase that they like, hand them the next layer of Lego bricks. This time, they will need to start connecting the bricks together to reflect their music. For example, their music could look like this:
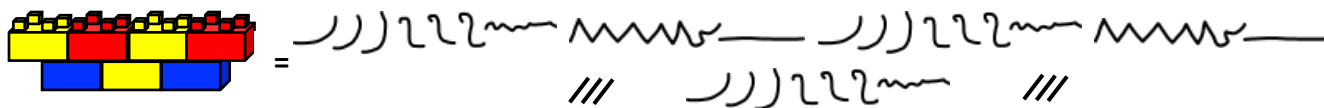
8. Keep in mind that the students will play this music in a way that makes sense to them. For example, they could either play both hands together or they could play the ideas linearly in any direction.

9. The purpose of this exercise is to get the students thinking like composers, where they work with the same material in various ways to come up with larger musical ideas. The Lego bricks are not tied to rhythm or beat, which is important because the focus here is on creating complex musical forms. (When I tried to impose micro-structure on the compositional process, it wasn't successful because the students quickly disengaged.)

10. This activity can become highly complex – my students began using white and black Lego bricks to represent rests and repeats.

11. As with the Musical Math lessons, there are unlimited possibilities to compose using this technique. For example:
    a. After students write their first composition, ask them to take apart their Lego structures and file their music away. Ask them to use the same Lego bricks but to write different musical ideas for each brick. Reiterate the process, but this time, give the students more compositional rules to follow like:

i. Put two of the three ideas together to create an antecedent and then create a consequent to go with it. Move the ideas around to create new phrases. Connect all of the phrases together to create a larger-scale piece.

ii. Using the new piece as an introduction, have the students write new material that is based on the introductory material.

iii. Repeat the introduction. Essentially, the students will start to work within larger formal structures.

<u>**Composition Take-Home Project**</u>

Rachel Panitch

Overview:
Students explore the idea of notation in a broad way: seeing typical Western notation as just one way to communicate a musical idea. They are encouraged to expand and develop their compositional ideas through a mostly self-guided process, with regular check-ins to hear and share progress.

Age Range: Grades 3-10

Setting: General Music **/** Individual instrumentalists (this template is created with string players in mind, but can be adapted)

Scope of Activity: Can be assigned in a lesson or group setting, progress reviewed with teacher through check-ins over a period of 4-5 meetings, over days or weeks.

Materials: Instruments/voices, pencils and take-home packet/worksheets (below).

Steps: See the Appendix for activity sheets.

Depending on the age group, you may want to talk through each week's assignment together to make sure it's understood before students attempt it. If students have not experienced much music notation before, you may want to also offer a "cheat sheet" of different types of musical notes for reference.

Students can also add a performance element, by polishing their own performance of the piece, or coaching one of their classmates or teachers on a performance of their piece at the 5th class meeting.

Musical Apples-to-Apples Game

Sean Elligers

Overview:
This activity can be interpreted as a musical take on the popular card game Apples-to-Apples. In Apples-to-Apples, players match people, events, and/or places with a descriptive word. Here, students will compose short melodies to mirror selected descriptive words or scenarios. An individual student chooses which melody best fits the descriptive word or scenario.

Students will gain familiarity with a notation software, develop skills in melodic construction, and develop listening and interpretive skills.

Age Range: Grade 8 and up (depending on comfort level with notation software)

Setting: Music Theory/Composition Class or Music Technology

Scope of Activity: One class (approximately 45-50 min long) but lots of room for repeats using different variations/parameters.

Materials: small slips of paper, pencils, something to hold the paper (large bowl or hat), computers with access to notation software (Noteflight, Finale, Sibelius)

Steps: This activity is great to play with students soon after they've developed an early familiarity with a notation software.

1. **Each student writes down a descriptive word or scenario ideas.** Collect the papers and put them in a bowl. *An easy way to get students to think of scenarios is to have them finish the sentence: "That feeling when you…." Results could be: "...have to wake up for school in the morning," "...eat your favorite kind of ice cream," "... get a paper cut." etc.*

2. **Select one student from the class to be the <u>Listener</u>.** All of the other students are the <u>Composers</u> for this round.

3. **The <u>Listener</u> randomly chooses one of the scenarios out of the bowl and reads it out loud.**

4. **The <u>Composers</u> each compose a very brief melody that reflects the overall mood or meaning of the randomly chosen scenario.**

5. **General rules (for starters...adjust them to your liking):**
   a. The melody must be no longer than 4 measures.
   b. The melody must be finished in 3-5 minutes.
   c. The melody can only include one instrument and no polyphony.

6. **At the end of the time limit, composers each place their laptops on a listening table.** If the computers are desktops and cannot be moved, find some other way to keep the composers anonymous.

7. **The <u>Listener</u> goes to each computer and listens to each melody. Through a process of elimination, they decide which melody best lines up with their own feelings associated with the chosen scenario or descriptive word. Whichever student composed the chosen melody gets a point.** *During this portion, encourage the Listener to talk their thoughts out loud. What do they like about this melody? How does it connect with their personal feelings of the scenario? Does the instrumental choice help or hurt?*

8. **Choose a new <u>Listener</u> and continue the game by returning to step 3.**

Vocal Music Lesson Plans

<u>**Using Funga Alafia to Teach Vocal Improvisation**</u>

Alexandria Ramos

Overview:
Intro to vocal improvisation using the song Funga alafia. This activity addresses listening skills, social skills, risk taking, pattern recognition, vocal skills, call and response skills, refining skills, solo performance skills, and improvisation skills. This activity is also a way to gradually build a child's confidence, explore their creativity, and provide children opportunities to see themselves as artists.

Age Range: Pre-K and up

Setting: General Music

Scope of Activity: Anywhere between 5-8 weeks, depending on how often you see your students and for how long, and the types of learners you may have. The activity itself should only last about 10 minutes.

Materials: Your voice, an accompanying instrument.
          YouTube Video: "Funga Alafia- LaRocque Bey"
                                   https://youtu.be/A9C_T8R8wtI

Steps:
First Step: Teach the song Funga alafia by LaRocque Bey (lyrics and video link included below.)
1. Instruct the students to only listen and not sing yet. Perform the verse using hand motions.

2. Ask students to join in matching the hand motions if they are ready. "Match my motions, but don't sing my song." Perform the verse again with students matching your motions this time.

3. Do this a few more times (usually do it about two more times).

4. Then, do MY TURN, YOUR TURN. Perform two bars while students watch, then have students match your motion and sing immediately after. Do this with the next two bars, then the next 2 bars, etc. until the whole verse had been done. Then, do this process again.

5. Next, you will do a 4 bar call and response section with a call and response on each bar.
   a. _Teacher:_ Ashay, asha-a-ay   _Student:_ Ashay, Asha-a-ay
      i. _Teacher:_ Ashay Ah-ah shay _Student:_ Ashay Ah-ah shay
      ii. _Teacher:_ Ashaaay Ah-shay _Student:_ Ashaaay Ah-shay
      iii. _Teacher:_ Ah-shay Ah-shay   _Student:_ Ah-shay Ah-shay
   b. Watch motions and melody video for more details.

6. Finally, you will repeat the process you used to learn the first verse with the second verse (English).

7. Learning the song could take up a full 10 minutes and may need to be repeated over the course of a few classes. Depending on the age group of your students, I wouldn't spend more than 10

minutes on this in any one class. Improvisation cannot happen until children are comfortable with the song.

Second Step: Incorporate Improvisation
1. After the song has been learned and practiced over a few class periods (again, the number of classes needed to learn the song will be determined by the skill level of your students) with the teacher leading the call and response section, start asking for volunteers to come up with one bar of the call and response section.

2. After a few class periods of "one solo per bar", you can start asking for volunteers to improvise the entire 4 bars.

3. It is important to note that not all students will "get this right", but should be celebrated for effort. This will create a safe space for risk-taking and encourage all students to try.

Lyrics: Funga alafia ashay ashay
Funga alafia ashay ashay
Funga alafia ashay ashay
Funga alafia ashay ashay

(improv section) Ashay ashay
Ashay ashay
Ashay ashay
Ashay ashay

Welcome my friends I greet you in peace
Welcome my friends I greet you in peace
Welcome my friends I greet you in peace
Welcome my friends I greet you in peace

(improv section) Greet you in peace
Greet you in peace
Greet you in peace
Greet you in peace

Funga alafia ashay ashay
Funga alafia ashay ashay
Funga alafia ashay ashay
Funga alafia ashay ashay

Graphic Notation Vocal Warm-up

Sean Elligers

Overview:
Students create simple graphic notation intended for a glissando vocal warm-up. The activity will help students understand and recognize whether a pitch is high or low and ascending or descending. It will also give the students a chance to direct their class in an original warmup that they composed.

Age Range: Grades 1-5

Setting: Elementary school Chorus or general music

Scope of Activity: 15 minutes

Materials: Individual white boards and dry erase marker for each student. Paper and pencil would work as well.

Steps:

-Note: Steps 1 - 5 should only take 2-3 minutes.

1. **Begin a simple call and response with the students through body percussion or any fun vocal sounds.**

2. **Continue call and response and introduce high and low vocal sounds**. Options are endless, but for the high sounds, you might squeak or talk like a mouse and for low sounds, you could talk like a bear or scary monster. Ask students which creature matched the high sound and which is low and ask them what other creatures could be high sounds and low sounds.

3. **Continue but add hand gestures**: hold your hand high for the high pitch and low for the low pitch.

4. **Continue and perform glissando from the low and high pitches. Use your hand to reflect the path of your vocal pattern. Point out to students that when your pitch ascends, your travels up and when your voice descends, your hand travels down.** You may need to define the words ascending and descending.

5. **Draw the shape (or path) of a vocal pattern on the board and ask the students to "perform" the line with you.**

Examples:
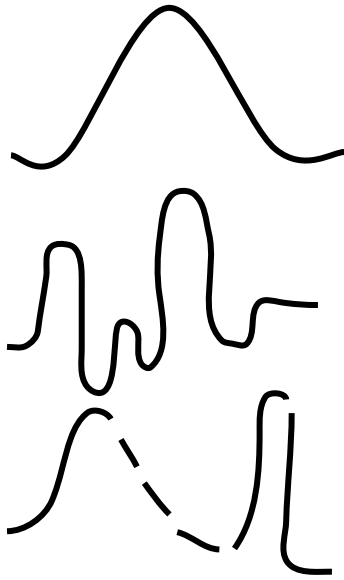
6. **Pass out white boards and dry erase markers.**

7. **Have the students compose their own shape on their white boards.** (Give them about 3-4 minutes)

8. **Go around the room and ask each student to reveal their graphic notation and guide the class through the shape they created.** You're likely to have students get pretty crazy and their shapes/lines might not be linear (left to right). You'll likely have some retrograde pathways. Whatever they throw at you, just go with it. Depending on your age group, you can open up a discussion on how the variety of paths/shapes inform the performance: "what do our voices sound like in "reverse?", "how do we perform all of these dots scattered all over the place?"

9. **Extensions:** Once you've done this activity a few times and there is familiarity, you could build on it and give students a chance to share something about themselves. Ask students to share what their day was like. Low points in the shape can show when they were tired or sad. High on the board could indicate when they were happy or excited. Ask them to trace the path of the day. Ask students to share their day and how their line/shape reflects what their day was like.

Instrumental Ensemble Lesson Plans

<u>**Open String Improvisation Over a Groove**</u>

Joshua Garver

Overview:
In this activity, beginning string players will use their knowledge of their open strings and foundational instrumental technique to perform simple improvisations in the form of call and response patterns. Teachers will use a drum track in common time as a rhythmic support for this work. This activity serves as a daily-warm up for students, who will build more confidence as improvisors and in turn, nurture a capacity for musical risk-taking.

Age Range: First-Second Year Players

Setting: Beginning Strings Ensemble

Scope of Activity: Daily Warm-Up or Weekly Activity

Materials: Instruments, Drum Track Application (i.e. Loopz).

Steps:

1. Establish a rhythmic groove using a reliable, drum loop app

2. Establish the parameters for the improvisation:
    a. Only using one open string (can use more as students gain more confidence)
3. Group Call and Response. Play what I play (4 beat pattern)

    a. Students perform open string rhythms either pizzicato or arco (Can be based on student comfort level, teacher preference, or student ability level)

4. Group Call and Response. Play something different from what I play.
    a. Students perform open string rhythms either pizzicato or arco (same as above). It must be different from what the teacher plays.

5. Solos: Students volunteer to play an improvised solo in call and response format with the teacher

6. Reflection:
    a. What did you think of your solo?
    b. What did you think of one of your peers solo?
    c. How can we apply every technique we learn to this creative process?

Teaching Rote Songs for Instrumental Ensembles

Stephen Curtis

Overview:
I am currently in my 42nd year as a public-school band director. To make a long story short, researchers tell us and from my own experience as a teacher I agree that elementary school bands sound a lot better when they learn a song by rote. Learning to play by rote also promotes creativity in the form of improvisation and composition that never happened when I was teaching kids to play while they were learning to read notation at the same time. I am not saying that reading notation is not important, it is in our school band culture in the United States, but you can try playing by rote also. At this point in time I always teach kids to play by rote first for as long as possible before teaching them to read.

Try it! You'll like it!

I am sharing with you three original compositions for Band

Age Range: First-Second Year Players and up

Setting: School Band

Scope of Activity: Teaching kids by rote. This will very soon lead to improvisation. The more songs kids learn by rote and by ear the better their improvisations will become.

Materials: Smart Phone, Bluetooth Speaker (or other speaker), access to YouTube recording, Music Score (PDF Score), Kids with instruments

<u>**Original compositions**</u> **(See Appendix for Scores):**
    1. Bouncy Billie Boogie
    Music Score
    Keyboard Accompaniment
    Accompaniment recording
        YouTube Video: Play Along - "Bouncy Billie Boogie"
                          Link: https://youtu.be/ZcbubJ77ot8
    2. The Second Line (Original arrangement of traditional piece)
    Music Score
    Keyboard Accompaniment
    Accompaniment recording
        YouTube Video: Play Along -"The Second Line"
                          Link: https://youtu.be/PsMevCvntko
    3. Harvard to Yale
    Music Score

Keyboard Accompaniment
Accompaniment recording
YouTube Video: Play Along - "Harvard to Yale"
Link: https://youtu.be/2OHBG_iImW8

Teaching by Rote in General

Steps:

1. Play the whole composition with accompaniment.

2. Play the passage you are teaching them at present.

3. Show them the notes they will need for the passage and make sure they can play them.

4. Teach them to play the song in phrases, parts of phrases, or one note at a time, whatever it takes!

5. Have them play with the accompaniment. It may be a Play along recording or if you can a keyboard accompaniment.

Comments:

The more you teach songs by rote the better you will get at it.

Practice playing by ear yourself if you do not already. You and your students will benefit musically from it. Start with very easy songs (Hot Cross Buns is always a good beginning). It really is fun playing by ear.

Teaching by Rote "Bouncy Billie Boogie"

The following is just a suggestion. Every teacher develops their own procedure. You will get better at teaching rote songs the more you do it.

Steps:

This is a pretty simple song. Try to memorize it yourself on the instrument you are teaching. If you need to look at the score yourself that is okay, but do not put the notation in front of your students (It really is better to memorize this yourself first).

You play the song on your instrument and sing (section C) where indicated along with the provided play along recording all the way through. At first play the lower part where there is a divisi. Section D is for improvising. We will talk about this later.

Play the lower melody by itself several times.

Teach the melody in section A by rote:

1. In this song I would teach 1/2 a measure at a time, adding them to the preceding ½ measure(s) until they can play the first two bar phrase. The next two bar phrase is the same as the first.

2. Teach the phrase in measures 9-10 (This phrase is quarter notes only).

3. Add the next two bar phrase which is the same as the first two bar phrase.

4. Finish teaching measures 13-15 in this manner.

5. Play through section A and section B several times then ask the kids to join you in this.

If your students can play this much, they really can play the whole arrangement. This may take several weeks to learn depending on your situation. Use plenty of repetition. Model for them, have individuals play, have students help each other, etcetera.

Have kids play along with the play along as a group first with then without you. When the singing part comes, you sing and if they are so inclined kids will eventually start to also sing it (you of course can teach this as a singing rote song). Most kids I have worked with think the singing part is funny and they sing. However, once in a while you get a group of kids that absolutely will not sing. In this case have a kid play the song as a solo or do whatever you think. Be creative.

If you have kids in the group that learn more quickly than the others teach them the higher melody also. This helps keep them interested. Have them play it where indicated in the score or any way you want.

Improvisation: When you get to section D, this is for soloing. Most kids that learn a song in this way are very willing to improvise. I tell them this is their solo. They can just play the song or change the song a little or completely change the song. They can play anything they want. **They cannot make a mistake**, anything goes!

If you are an improviser that is fine. This is concert Bb Blues, do your best solo to demonstrate. If you do not improvise first play the melody as written and then try changing it a little or a lot. As I said, anything goes! In the school system where I saw the kids several times a week kids would take a whole chorus (All of section D) to solo and then the next kid would start. In the school system where I would only see them once a week and had very large groups kids would play a few bars and stop and then the next kid would start. The main idea is to get them improvising. **Praise them! Praise them! Praise them!** Whenever they learn a new song have them solo in this way and many become very good improvisors even by the time they get to middle school (I have provided chord changes in the solo section but it is best that you and your students pay them no attention).

You can use the provided play along recording as accompaniment in a concert or use a live keyboard. I have done both and both work well.

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Sound/Thought Experiment

Karl Knapp

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Overview:
The goal of this project is to start students thinking about music and the creation of music in a different way; to connect the sounds they create to an animal, emotion, idea, or color. One skill being addressed is developing a direct line between thought and sound creation. The potential impact of this activity over a long period for students will be a larger vocabulary of sounds to draw upon when improvising or composing.

Age Range: Beginner-Intermediate Players

Setting: Musical Ensemble / Instrument Group Lesson

Scope of Activity: Daily Warm-up

Materials: Instruments

Steps:
1. **Pre-game**: educator draws on the experience of the class to show how music can be used to evoke emotions, animals, situations. Educator draws students' attention to examples in movies, concert music, popular music.

2. **The Game**: As part of the daily warm-up for the ensemble, the teacher will choose and display a written topic word (ex: squirrels, hippos, basketball, joy, red).
   a. Teacher discusses briefly with your students sounds that might be appropriate for the topic.
   b. Set as a game in the round, the teacher will demonstrate their interpretation of the topic for 10-15 seconds, then pass to the first student.
   c. Duration of the game is once (possibly twice) around the room.

3. **Post-game**: the educator can, depending on time available, lead students in a discussion of what each student felt while improvising, and what sounds they enjoyed that they heard during the game. Suggestion: the first couple of games, the educator presents their own feedback, before handing the responsibility over to the class.

Skips and Steps Musical Line

Pilar Zorro

Overview:

This activity/exercise allows the student to explore and understand the concept of "Skips and Steps" that creates a melodic line, while strengthening their motor agility and comfort on their instrument. The role of the teacher is to guide the student on any instrument technique difficulty that the student may need to successfully perform his/her/their "Skip and Step" musical idea (improvised or composed). The level of complexity of this activity/exercise is limitless and can be expanded as a way to develop ear training and/or music reading/writing.

Age Range: Beginner-Advanced Players

Setting: Musical Ensemble / Instrument Group Lesson or Private Lesson / Music Theory Class

Scope of Activity: This activity can be part of a 5 to 10-minute warm up routine or be extended as a full class lesson plan. For each lesson/class the parameters of the activity may change. The improvisation/composition result will be different every time.

Materials: Musical Instruments
Possible extension activities require: Personal white board and dry-erase markers or music staff paper and pencils for the students to use.

Steps:
1. Explain the difference between "Skips" and "Steps" on a musical line.
   a. "Steps:" A musical line that goes "step by step", up or down, the musical alphabet.
      i. e.g., A B C D E / E D C B A
   b. For beginner students, any 5-note scale, with or without sharps or flats, that is at an achievable technique level of the student, can be used without getting into details of sharps vs naturals.
      i. e.g., E F# G# A B for beginner violin students
   c. If the students know any major scale, it can be used as a reference.
      i. *Possible extra activity of the "steps" concept:* There are two types of steps on the "classical" tradition: whole-steps and half-steps.

2. If the students know a major scale, analyzing its structure can show them how a "step by step" melodic line can be a combination of whole-steps and half-steps.
   a. "Skips:" A musical line moving up or down that "skips" one or more notes of the musical alphabet.
   b. e.g., A - D / D – B
   c. Students may explore "skips" without any reference to intervals.
   d. *Possible extra activity of the "skips" concept*: Introduction to major and minor intervals.
   e. *Possible extra activity to reinforce a visual and auditory understanding of "Skips" and "Steps" components of a melodic line:* Using a melody that the students know and play, have them find by playing or looking at the music sheet, how many "skips" and "steps"

compose a section of the melody (e.g., Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, first 2 measures: 1 skip, 2 steps).

Note: After these concepts have been introduced to the class, the first step of the lesson plan can be omitted in future lessons.

3. Determine a set of 5 notes scale that the students will use to create their "Skip and Step" melodic line. This step can be determined by the teacher, with or without the students help, or by the students themselves.

   a. <u>Set by Teacher:</u> In this case the teacher may use this exercise to help the students practice a technical difficult aspect of the instrument on a more fun and creative way for them.
      i. e.g., D E F G A (5 notes) for a string ensemble, with the objective to create freedom in the use of the L2 fingering on Violin/Violas and 2nd finger on Cello/Bass.

   b. <u>Set with the help of students:</u> In this case the teacher may limit the aspects in which the students can help to choose the 5-note set, based on their performance level or the technical objective of the activity.
      i. e.g., Violin lesson setting: Student chose to start on C# on the A String. Teacher sets the 5-note scale as C# D E F# G with the intention to strengthening the movement of the H2 to L2 fingering across strings.

   c. <u>Set by students:</u> Working individually or in small groups, student may use any 5-note scale line they like. The trick is that at the moment of improvising or composing their "skips and steps" melodic line, they can only use the 5 notes scale they determined and announced.

Possible extension: Have the student write on a music staff the 5-note set the have chosen, specifying the sequence of Whole steps and Half steps it contains:
e.g., D E F G Ab - Whole/Half/Whole/Half Step

Note: I like the 5-note scale set as the starting point for this activity. Teachers may change this as they please.

4. Have the students practice the 5-note scale set as a group or individually

5. Students create their "Skip and Step" melodic line, having in mind a limit of notes length that the teacher may determine.

The following are some different ways to have this happen:
- <u>Improvisation on an ensemble setting</u>: The class takes turns between practicing the 5-note scale set and a "Skip and Step" solo.
  o All the students play together up and down the 5-note scale set.
  o One student improvises a Skip and Step melodic line.
  o All the students play together up and down the 5-note scale set.
  o Another student improvises a Skip and Step melodic line.

- o   And continues …

- Individual or group composition on ensemble setting: Individually or in small groups of 2 or 3 members, students will have a set amount of time to compose and practice a skip and step melodic line that they will perform to the rest of the class.
- *Possible extra activity:* Students write on a music staff their composition
- *Possible challenge activity:* How many "Skips" does your peer's "Skip and Step" line have?
- Students play the composition to each other and challenge their peers to discover how many "Skips" it has.

Note: I find that allowing time for the students to transmit their musical thoughts/ideas on to their instrument is a very important aspect of introducing and encouraging improvisation or composition. Because of this, I measure the length of the solo not by the length of time or amount of measures, but by the number of notes used. Although the focus of this activity is on pitch and intervals, there is no rhythmic limit on how students play these notes.

Improvisation Chaos!

Hannah O'Connor

Overview:

This is an introduction to the practice of improvisation. As part of a call and response warm up, beginning students practice improvising for 8 beats with a drum track.

Age Range: Beginning Players

Setting: Beginning Band Brass Sectional

Scope of Activity: 5 mins as part of the group warm up

Materials: Instruments, loop app, and speaker

Steps:

1. After a call and response warm-up where students are repeating what the teacher is playing, explain the following:
   a. The teacher will play for 8 beats,
   b. Then students will play for 8 beats,
   c. Then students can play whatever they want as long as it is within the 3 notes they know how to play (or some other limit on the notes; another option is to limit the rhythm but not the notes.)

2. Put on a drum loop track, and alternate 8 beats between the teacher and students. First the teacher plays 8 improvised beats, then the students play 8 improvised beats.

3. Do this a few times, and then have individual sections alternate with the teacher (e.g., the teacher plays 8 beats, then trumpets play 8 beats, teacher plays 8 beats, low brass plays 8 beats, etc.)

4. Once students get comfortable with the idea of improvising 8 beats at a time, have them play in smaller groups (e.g., teacher plays, a trio plays, teacher plays, everyone plays, teacher plays, a duet plays, etc.)

5. A brief discussion afterwards is optional. I like to at least say to students that we just practiced improvisation, to emphasize the vocabulary.

<u>**Expanding Pitch Set Improvisation**</u>

Rachel Panitch

Overview:
For students in these grades who are sometimes hesitant to start improvising, a narrowly bounded challenge can sometimes be just the thing to get things flowing. This is a straight-forward and safe way to start creating musical ideas -- both rhythmic and melodic.

Age Range: Grades 4-12

Setting: Small or large ensemble

Scope of Activity: 10-minute activity over 1-3 weeks

Materials: Instruments/voices

Steps: This progression can be introduced 2-3 steps per class meeting or can be followed in full once the students are more comfortable with the process, or with older students.

1. Choose a key that's comfortable for all students and begin with an exercise just holding out (taking breaths or bow changes if needed) the 1st scale degree/tonic/home note/do.

2. Ask students to add their choice of articulations and rests into the otherwise-held note. You might not have any regular sense of time or shared pulse as a group yet, and that's ok!

3. Have a volunteer create a regular repeating rhythmic motive on the same note in a different octave. If the sound is too dense, ask students to play quietly enough so that they can hear this rhythm.

4. Add a second, interlocking rhythm on the 5th scale degree. You can ask for many ideas first, and then pick one you think will fit well, or just choose a volunteer and see what happens! If they are comfortable, you can have the two interlocking people play together without the rest of the group.

5. Students can now choose any rhythmic combination of these 2 pitches or can stick with just 1 (any octave). Have the whole group play together at first. It will be messy. Then, try out a pattern where you add students either one at a time, or section by section. You can ask students/sections to drop out if the density starts to overshadow everything else.

6. Ask for a volunteer to choose the 3rd pitch. Have some people hold that pitch out during the above activity (step 5). Ask what students noticed about any change in feeling/mood/quality with the addition of this 3rd pitch.

7. Give students a minute to practice on their own -- again, this will sound messy -- and create a way to combine any 2 of the 3 (or maybe all 3!) pitches in any octave. If they are eager, you can ask some students to share their ideas. Or, jump right into playing them all at the same time. Try again with adding in the ideas around a circle, or section by section.

Reflection and Group Composition Bonus:

8. Ask students what they heard that they liked, and what they would like to change, if anything? If they want more clarity or to be able to hear certain things better, can they help to brainstorm an Arrangement or a Form in order to be able to hear what they are looking for?

Rhythmic challenge:

9. Choose a new rhythmic idea as a starting point, such as 6/8 or 3/4 feel.

Character Compositions

Rachel Panitch

Overview:
This project is an opportunity to connect real life (characters -- both real and invented, personality traits, and one's identity) to music-making. Students will use their listening skills and imagination to make connections between sounds they create and moods they are trying to conjure up. Students are also asked to invent a series of sounds and remember them -- a process which will take decision-making, editing, and practice of those sounds. Finally, students have a chance to see their composition's impact on others. They get to be successful, whether or not their piece made others think immediately of that same character trait (the piece has clarity), or if the character trait is difficult to discern (the piece has complexity).

Age Range: Grades 4-8

Setting: Small ensemble / group

Scope of Activity: 3-5 class meetings. Steps below are broken down by 3 longer class meetings but may be spread out over more classes so that students have more time to dive into these concepts and to polish their creations.

Materials: Instruments/voices, paper and pencils.

Steps:

1. Decide which aspect of "character" you would like to explore with your students.

    a. Option A, Identity: Have students pick from a long list of words they would use to describe themselves or someone they admire in their lives. Write up the list of character traits ahead of time or brainstorm them with students.

    b. Option B, History: If you are looking into a particular period of history or important figure(s), come up with a list of character traits that can be used to describe some of these figures or important people in history.

    c. Option C, Wild card: If you are either working with a group of students on the younger end, or are just into the idea of exploring a wider range of sounds and moods, have each student (or in pairs) invent a character out of thin air, with a name and 3 character traits, pulling these again from a pre-generated list, or a list brainstormed as a group.

2. Solo or in pairs, have students choose 1 of these character traits at a time and brainstorm some different sound options for it on their instruments (30 seconds or less of music). Encourage students to try out at least 3 different possibilities before settling on one that they like the best. After that, have students hone this snippet of music together so that it is consistent and can be shared either with the teacher or with the whole group.

3. Record these so that students can jump in where they left off, in case they forget their creations the next class.

   …next class…

4. Review first character trait musical snippet. Have students think about an event (in history, or in the life of this person or character) that challenged him/her. What additional character trait does this person need to use in order to meet this challenge? Can you create music for this and make it sound different than the first character trait?

5. Rotate around to the individuals or groups, encouraging them again to try out a few different ideas, and to test out ideas of volume, articulation, bowing, range, silences, and melodic lines, if they are getting stuck coming up with contrasting ideas.

6. Try out a "guessing game" system at sharing time, where students have 3 tries to guess the new character trait being shared. If they are correct, you can applaud, and if they don't guess it, you can also applaud the creator -- because it means s/he created something especially complex/different/interesting/surprising!

7. Again, record the shared music and/or encourage students to write down some notes/drawings/letter names/reminders that will help them recall how these musical snippets go when they come together next.

   …next class…

8. Allow students to listen to their two "character trait" creations, or look at their notes, and make sure they can still play them (or new versions).

9. Students decide an order to put the snippets in and create a transition from one trait to the next. This is a way to start to explore a "Beginning/Middle/End" format for composition.

10. Students end the session either by recording their piece for a teacher and/or sharing it with the group and/or preparing to share it at a wider community event where they are encouraged to introduce the piece by talking about the character traits and why they chose certain musical elements to represent these people/identities/traits.

Large Scale Collaborative Composition

Hannah O'Connor

Overview:
Students will make individual contributions and decisions about a collective composition that will be written on the board. The composition will be 8-beats long and will be composed by limiting parameters for rhythm and pitch options. This is to introduce students to the idea that they can compose music, and to start a discussion about musical decisions when composing.

Age Range: Beginning Players

Setting: Beginning Band Brass Sectional (26 students, meets one hour each day)

Scope of Activity: 15-20 minutes of class, can be repeated on subsequent days with different parameters

Materials: White board, dry erase markers, eraser, instruments

Steps:
1. For a group of mixed brass, have three blank staves drawn on the board- one for each instrument transposition/register group (in this case, trumpets, euphoniums/trombones, tubas).

2. Tell students we are going to write 8-beat motives as a class, in 4/4 time. The rhythms available are whole notes, half notes, quarter notes, whole rests, half rests, and quarter rests. The notes available are Concert A, Bb, C, D, Eb, F, G.

3. For the first motive, call on students to decide which note and rhythm should be placed where. Draw them on the board and play the entire draft composition each a note is added. Once all 8 beats are up, ask if anything should be changed. Revise accordingly, play revisions, and discuss whether to keep the revisions.

4. Next, have individual students come up to compose a new 8-beat composition. The teacher facilitates writing notes into the other clefs/octaves that are unfamiliar to the student. Have everyone play as each note is drawn in, and the student can opt to change the note they wrote in if they don't like how it sounds. Once all 8 beats are up, ask if anything should be changed. Revise accordingly, play revisions, and discuss whether to keep the revisions.

5. Depending on time, repeat the above process for another 8-beat composition, and keep including the play throughs and revision discussion as part of the composition process

Small Group Collaborative Composition

Hannah O'Connor

Overview:
Working in small groups, students will develop their composition skills. They will also be developing their skills in music notation and their musical voice.

Age Range: Beginning-Advanced Players

Setting: Band Class in high school, first-fourth year players, sectional of about 20 students

Scope of Activity: One class for composition time, one class for performance time; this cycle can be repeated to incorporate new ideas from reading the compositions in class.

Materials: pencils, musical instruments, worksheet with specific instructions for activity

Steps:
Students are divided in groups of two or three (same clef/transposition in each group). Each group gets a worksheet, which has 4 blank staff lines, with clef and time signature already added.
Worksheet instructions:

1. Using a pencil, write an 8-beat melody on each line. The lines can combine into one longer idea if you would like.
2. Use notes from Concert A-Concert G (or some other limit to notes available, if desired. It is important that students write notes that are in their range.)
3. Use whole notes, half notes, quarter notes, and the corresponding rests (or some other rhythm limits if desired. It is important that students write rhythms that they know how to play.)
4. Once you write an idea down, test how it sounds by playing it on your instrument. Try out changing at least three things and edit your melody to keep the ideas you like best.
5. Once you finish one 8-beat melody, write another one.

At the end of the class, all compositions are collected. The teacher writes up the ideas in a music notation program and the whole class plays compositions during another class time, discussing positive aspects of the songs and room for growth/ideas for changes. If desired, take another class to further edit compositions in small groups, and then an additional class after that to perform the final drafts.

Open Ended Group Composition

Joshua Garver

Overview:
In this open-ended composition project, students are provided a series of open-ended composition prompts. Teachers may have their students work in a variety of groupings (pairs, sections, whole class). As the composition takes shape, the ensemble may begin to organize it into a series of movements and create an overarching theme. The ensemble may also decide on a theme beforehand to help frame the overall work. The teacher should be sure to try and frame the composition prompts using parameters and skills the students already know (technical and musical literacy skills).

Age Range: Beginning-Advanced Players

Setting: Ensemble Based Classroom

Scope of Activity: 3-5 Week Activity

Materials: Instruments. Blank sheet paper. Composition Software (Noteflight, Sibelius, Finale etc.).

Preparatory Steps:
1. Teachers need to frame the prompts with the musical skills they want to address in mind (i.e. What technical skills do students know? What can they read or write?)

2. Teachers should decide from the beginning how they want to have the students work. Independently? Pairs? Small groups? I recommend doing the first prompt as a full ensemble group composition in order to demonstrate how the process might best function.

Procedures:
1. **Large Group Prompt**: Introduce a short, open-ended composition prompt (i.e. Write a melody over four measures in common time using only quarter notes)
    a. Students can vote on a single set of notes to use (i.e. Strings can write notes from their D String using a major finger pattern).
    b. Have students share out their melodies by either playing them or having the teacher play them.
    c. Have students offer feedback on the melody. What did they notice? Do they have suggestions?

2. **Prompt #2**: Can you write a second four measures to turn your four-measure melody into an eight-measure melody?
    a. Students should use the parameters from the initial prompt
    b. Have students share out their melodies by either playing them or having the teacher play them.
    c. Have students offer feedback on the eight-bar melody. What did they notice? Do they have suggestions?

3. **Curation**: Teacher curates all the melodies for the students (can record and play them in notation software). Students vote on their favorites. This is the initial melody (A Section) for their first composition.

4. **Prompt #3**: Can you write another eight-measure melody that **contrasts** the selected melody? How can you make it different? Change the dynamics? Change the character? Change the articulation?
    a. Students can vote on how they would like to work. This does not need to be uniform. Students may prefer to work alone; others make want to work in a pair or a small group. Others may prefer to work with the teacher.
    b. Have students share out their melodies by either playing them or having the teacher play them.
    c. Have students offer feedback on the material. What did they notice? Does it contrast the initial melody? How? Do they have suggestions?

5. **Curation**: Teacher curates the contrasting material. Students vote on their favorites. This acts as the B section for the composition.

6. Combine the A and B material into an ABA form piece. Ask the students to brainstorm names for their piece of music. What about the music makes them think of this name? Students should be able to vote on these names.

7. The teacher may repeat this process with a variety of prompts with different parameters. The parameters change based on the skills the ensemble knows. A theme might emerge, or students may decide on a theme beforehand. The teachers job remains as facilitator and curator. The emphasis should be on the application of skills learned to a compositional process.

8. At the end of the process, the composition should be organized with facilitation by the teacher into a polished score and set of parts that then should be rehearsed and performed for a great audience.

Word Composition

Joshua Garver

Overview:
In this composition activity, students share some of their writing with their class. The writing can be poetry, opinion piece, narrative etc. Students listen to the poem read several times and choose the most evocative word from the poem. They then, as a full group, in pairs, small groups, or independently explore the word on their instrument to try and answer this fundamental question:

"What does this word sound like?"

Students share out their ideas, the teacher records and curates, and the students decide which sounds they want to form into a soundscape/composition, rehearse it, and then perform it, in tandem with the students reading the writing.

Age Range: Beginning-Advanced Players

Setting: Ensemble Based Classroom

Scope of Activity: 2-4 Week Activity

Materials: Instruments. Student Writing. Blank sheet paper. Composition Software (Noteflight, Sibelius, Finale etc.).

Preparatory Steps:
1. Have students submit some of their writing. The teacher curates those pieces that demonstrate rich, evocative vocabulary and prepares those students to read their writing to the class.

2. The teacher prepares the students as listeners and critics. Students need to be able to offer feedback in a kind and helpful way, but also develop active listening skills.

Procedures:
1. **Reading and Listening:** The first class should focus on the presentation of the writing. Have the student read their writing (or a section of a longer piece) multiple times. Each time prompt the students to listen for words that stick out. Write these words down.

2. **Exploration:** Once a list of vocabulary has been developed, spend a class period or two unpacking the words and have the students explore on their instruments how they would make each word sound. Curate the responses and ask students the following question:
   a. How does this sound/musical action represent the word?

3. **Curation/Voting:** The teacher curates the sounds that best represent the word being illustrated. Have the students vote on the sounds they think best represents the word.

4. **Organization:** Organize the sounds into a soundscape. Are there directions for the piece? What might they be?

5. **Rehearse:** Rehearse the soundscape. Use this phase to encourage student critique. Do they have suggestions? Should things be changed (added? Taken away?)

6. **Performance:** Record or present the writing and the soundscape. Ask the audience members to close their eyes while they listen. Were they able to hear the word through the sounds being produced? What type of experience did that create for the audience?

<u>**Finish this Melody**</u>

Karl Knapp

Overview:
This project is an individual exercise, focusing on melody creation. With the help of the first half or quarter of the melody written down, the student will have a starting point. The potential impact of this activity is demystifying composition.

Age Range: Intermediate Players

Setting: Musical Ensemble / Instrument Group Lesson

Scope of Activity: Take-home activity, 1 week

Materials: Instruments, Staff paper, Pen/Paper, OR Recording Device (phone)

Steps:
1. **Pre-game:** educator creates a 4-bar framework for a melody on a piece of staff paper. First levels of this game provide all information (key, meter, number of measures, possible rhythms), as well as the first two bars of the melody.

2. **The Game:** students in the class, as a group, read the melody framework.
   a. Student's responsibility is to finish the melody, using the provided information.
   b. Upon returning the project, instructor can choose to review everything alone or in class with student responses.

3. **Post-game:** more advanced versions of the game remove some or nearly all of the provided frameworks. IE: Only one bar of melody, longer composition, no key, no rhythm (just note heads).

String Band Project

Karl Knapp

Overview:
The goal of this project is for students to collaborate on the creation of an arrangement of a pre-existing piece/song. Students will develop skills of arranging, choosing what is important to include in an arrangement, deep listening, using composition software, and understanding chord notation. The potential impact of this activity for students is a deeper understanding of not only their own instruments, but also the others in the group, as well as develop deeper listening skills.

Age Range: Advanced Players

Setting: Musical Ensemble / Instrument Group Lesson

Scope of Activity: Quarter/Semester Project

Materials: Instruments, Composition Software, Recording & Listening Devices (phones)

Steps:
1. **Pre-game**: educator chooses a song for students to listen to and an arrangement of that song by a group such as Time for Three, Vitamin Quartet, or Portland Cello Project. Lead the students in a discussion of what worked, what possibly didn't work.

2. **The Game**: students split into groups of 3-5, encouraging mixed ensembles of instruments.
   a. Students choose a song. Confirm with instructor that it will work.
   b. Instructor provides tools/resources such as composition software, chords/tabs from sites such as ultimate-guitar.com.
   c. Final goal is for the students to perform these arrangements for the class. If possible, also find an opportunity for the students to perform outside of class, such as a coffee shop.

Create music using material you know!

Pilar Zorro

Overview:
The final objective of this project is to allow the students to explore creative ideas, using as a starting point musical repertoire that they already know and have at hand. The result may range from a variation of an original theme to a total re-composition. The role of the teacher is to guide the process towards a final analytic reflection of the experience.

Age Range: Intermediate-Advanced Players

Setting: Musical Ensemble / Instrument Group Lesson / Music Theory Class

Scope of Activity: 3 - 4 Week Activity

Materials: Instruments, music staff paper, pencils, recording device, music speakers.
Recording and music sheets of repertoire that the students have previously studied/performed.

Steps:
1. Introduce the project to the students, as an opportunity for them to create their own piece, based on music that they have been studying.
    a. There are no expectations for any specific results.
    b. This project can be done in small groups or with the whole class.

2. What is a Melody?
    a. Through open discussion, talk about what a melody is.
    b. Use recordings of the repertoire that the students have studied, with the intention to search and listen to different melodies.

Possible extra activity: Using the music sheet of this repertoire, have the students play/remember the melodies they heard on the recordings.

3. Students choose a short melody that they would like to use as one of the basic materials for the new musical creation.
    a. Students should transcribe or copy from the music sheet, into a blank music sheet, the selected melodic section.

4. What is an Accompaniment?
    a. Through open discussion, talk about what an accompaniment is.
    b. Use recordings of the repertoire the students have studied, with the intention to search and listen to different accompaniments.

Possible extra activity: Using the music sheet have the students play/remember the accompaniments they heard on the recordings.

5. Students choose a short accompaniment pattern that they would like to use as one of the basic materials for the new musical creation.

      a. Students will transcribe or copy from the music sheet, into a blank music sheet, the selected accompaniment.

Note: Students may choose an accompaniment idea from a different piece than the melodic idea. That is okay!

6. Time to create!
   a. Students can use the material collected with total freedom.
   b. Examples of possible creative decisions are:
      i. Use the notes sequence of the melody they chose to create a new melody.
      ii. Use the rhythmic pattern of the accompaniment they selected to create a new accompaniment.
      iii. Use the rhythm of the melody selected as a foundation for a new melody.
      iv. Use the notes of the accompaniment to create a melody.

7. Practice the new composition
   a. Students should prepare to present the piece to their classmates.

8. Wrap up!
   a. Students perform their new piece and compare the result with the original source material that they used. Through an open discussion, analyze the final music productions.

9. Possible questions for analysis:
   a. Is the final composition similar to the original source material?
   b. Can the original material be distinguished?
   c. Is it a variation or a re-composition?

Note: This project can be used as a way to introduce the terms of theme and variation, arrangement, re-composition, musical collage, and other aspects of basic compositional techniques. The introduction to these terms should happen as a result of the project.

Summary

We would love to hear about your experiences with these activities and encourage you to get in touch to share feedback and variations, to help us build what we hope will be a living document.

These lesson plans were always meant to be works-in-progress, which we now find ourselves adjusting to a wide range of virtual learning situations in the era of Covid-19. As young people come up against new challenges of access, of isolation, and of motivation, our roles in providing ways for them to create their own music is just as important as ever.

Thank you for all that you are doing to push yourself and encourage your students to grow and experiment with creative music-making.

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Information about the Authors (in alphabetical order)

Stephen Curtis
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In 1979, Stephen became the band director for the town of Southborough, Massachusetts. He served in this position until his retirement in 2017. He came on board with Making Music Matters-Boston in the fall of 2017. Stephen has studied extensively with Dr. Christopher Azzara who currently is head of the Music Education Department at the Eastman School of Music. Dr. Azzara has been a major influence in Steve's teaching career and style. Currently Stephen plays tuba with Boston's own Roma Band and trombone with the New Magnolia Jazz Band as well as the Point and Swing Big Band.

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Sean is a musician and music educator in an El Sistema-inspired music program based out of Pittsfield and North Adams, MA. At the program, Sean teaches music theory, composition, music technology, and general music. He holds a Master of Music Education and Trumpet Performance degree from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

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Joshua Garver
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Josh fell in love with the violin in the 4th grade and has never looked back. Inspired by the many music educators who helped him find a sense of belonging in the orchestral ensemble, Joshua went on to pursue his bachelor's degree in Instrumental Music Education from the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University before beginning his work as a Resident Artist at the Conservatory Lab Charter School. Wanting to build on his developing practice, Joshua recently graduated from Boston University's College of Fine Arts with a Master of Music Education. As an educator, Joshua wants to challenge and transform the traditional ensemble model into one that not only develops technical and musical skills in his students but also serves as a space that reflects the students' own musicking, creativity, and artistry.

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Prior to teaching young adults, she taught K-8 general music for several years, first at a New York City public school (PS 334) and then at an independent school in Dedham, MA. The lessons included here come from the composition-centered curriculum that she used with her young students. She discovered that through this work, the children retained complex knowledge and skills and ultimately identified themselves as composers. In 2016, she created the EcoSonic Playground Project (ESPP), an open-access, immersive, multi-disciplinary learning experience for people of all ages, learning profiles, and cultural contexts. Elissa holds a Master of Music Education degree and a Doctor of Education in Music Education degree with a concentration in child development from Teachers College, Columbia University.

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Karl is a cellist who is known not only for his solo and chamber music performances, but also as a devoted Suzuki educator. As an active music educator in Alaska, Karl helped found the Alaska Cello Intensive. He currently teaches a full studio in Amherst, MA, is Coordinator for the Sonido Musica Program, a music partnership program between the Springfield Public Schools and Community Music School of Springfield, MA, and performs extensively with his band 1200 Horsehairs: A Band of Cellos.

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is currently a band director in an El Sistema inspired music program at the Margarita Muñiz Academy, a bilingual high school in Jamaica Plain. Hannah has a background as a classical trumpet player through studies at Utrecht Conservatory in The Netherlands and Longy School of Music in Cambridge, MA. By expanding her music making beyond the classical realm, Hannah has discovered the powers and joys of improvisation and composition and strives to share these with her students.

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Rachel has been an artist-in-residence in neighborhoods, in schools, and in Zion and Acadia National Parks. She is the 2019 recipient of the W.K. Rose Fellowship in the Creative Arts. She is a Resident Musician with musiConnects, and a founding member of Thread Ensemble, which creates participatory works for audience, vibraphone and violins.

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Alex is an experienced music educator who has been teaching in classrooms and private studios since 2013. She is a trained opera singer with a Bachelor of Music Education and a Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance. Though she is primarily a singer, Alex has many years of experience in ukulele, violin, and viola performance, and often assists in orchestra classes. Alex views her students as collaborators in the classroom and believes that they should be mostly in charge of their learning. Her passion is joyful music-making and fostering enriching and creative musical experience for young students that will benefit them across the learning and social-emotional spectrum.

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Pilar Zorro
Violinist and Teaching Artist
Paterson Music Project, Wharton Institute for the Performing Arts
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Pilar's experience ranges from teaching private lessons to working as music director of youth orchestras in the U.S., as well as her native Colombia. Pilar began with a classical style focus, but her interests broadened into traditional Latin American folk music and improvisation. To that end, she earned a master's degree in Contemporary Improvisation. Now she encourages her students to learn music not only as an art of performing, but as an art of creating.

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Appendix

Rachel Panitch
Activities for *Composition Take-Home Project* (see p.16)

Assignment 1: Draw one type of written note that you've seen before:

Choose another type of symbol you've seen before (some Wingdings are here if you need some ideas!) and decide what you want that symbol to sound like.
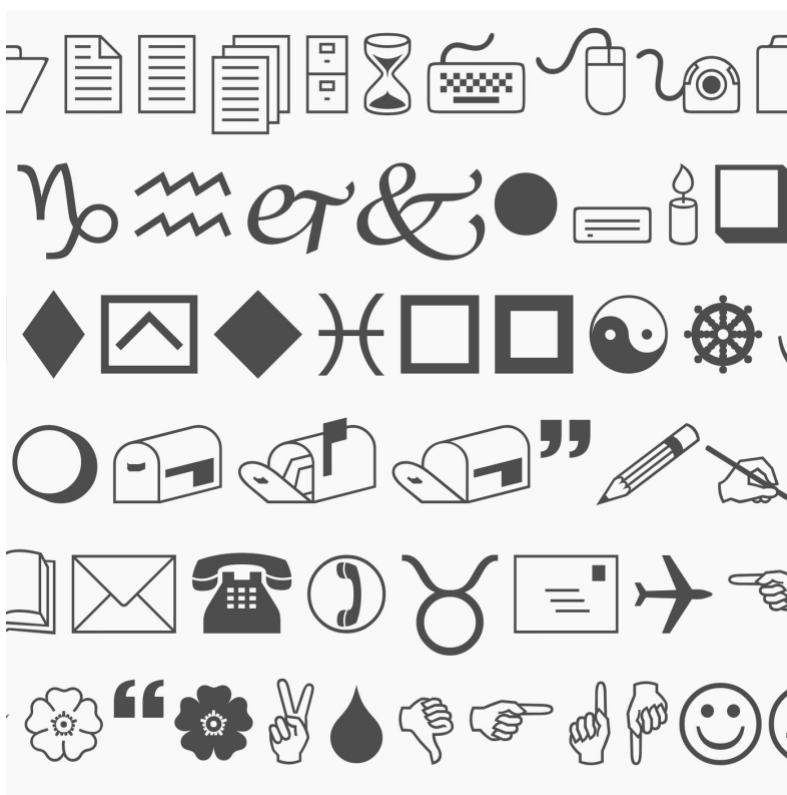
Try playing it. How would you describe the sound in words? How is it different from how you would play the first note at the top?

Assignment 2: Invent your own type of note and draw it here:

Try playing it. How would you describe the sound in words? How is it different from other symbols?

Try combining some "typical/regular" written notes, plus some other symbols, and your newly invented notes together in one piece of music on this page. Make sure there are at least 4 different types of sounds. Add some new note types if you need to!

Play this new piece a few times. Does it sound the same every time, or does it change?

Assignment 3: Play your piece from last time.
If you were handing your piece to someone who had never heard or seen it before, what other information would you want to tell them about how to make the sounds?

Create a "key" here for someone, so that they can understand how to play your piece:

How would you like to tell them what volume to play? You can invent your own method, or use "typical" Classical music words or symbols. Write the instruction here:

How would you like to tell them what speed to play? You can invent your own method, or use "typical" Classical music words or symbols. Write the instruction here:

How about higher notes and lower pitches? Do you want them to know which pitches to use?

Assignment 4:

Experiment with putting your piece (or a new version of your piece!) onto one or both of these staffs below, with your volume and speed instructions included.
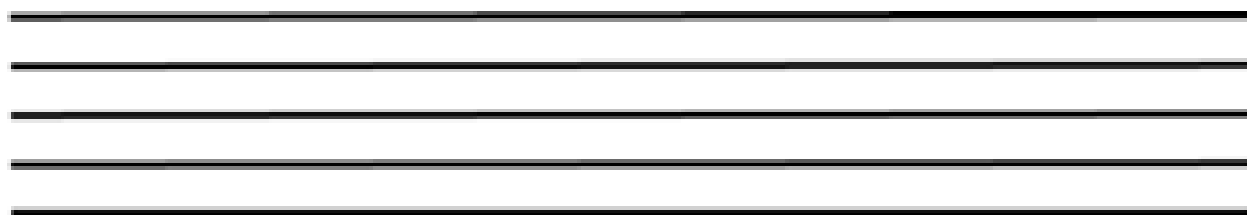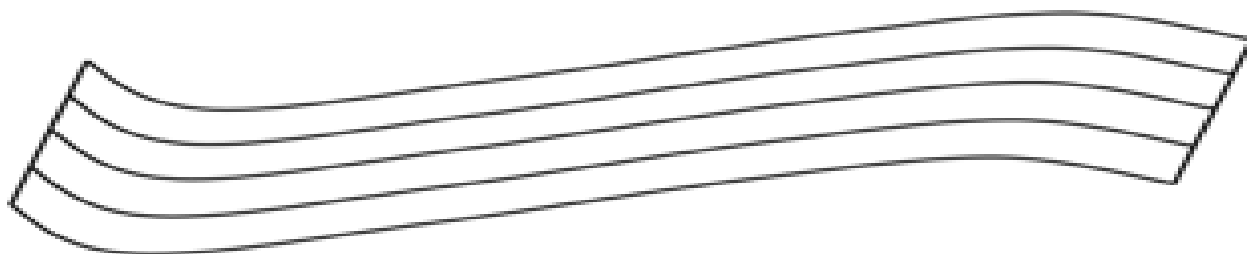
How does using a staff change the sound of the piece? Does it make it clearer or more complicated to understand?

Is there anything you'd like to change?

Bouncy Billy Boogie

Bouncy Swingin' Blues

Stephen Curtis

Bouncy Billy Boogie

Piano

Bouncy Billy Boogie

Bouncy Swingin' Blues

(for more bass effect play left hand 8vb)

Stephen Curtis

V.S.

2

Bouncy Billy Boogie

The Second Line

Wiz Band

Arr. by Stephen Curtis

The Second Line

Wiz Band

Arr. by Stephen Curtis

Piano *Jazz*

V.S.

Harvard to Yale
Wiz Band

Music & Lyrics
by Stephen Curtis

Singer lyrics: It's all right! It's o kay! We all are wor-kin' for a

9

32

FL.

CL. 1

CL. 2

ALTO SAX. 1

ALTO SAX. 2

TPT. 1

TPT. 2

TBN.

SINGER

BET-TER WAY IT'S AL-RIGHT___ IT'S O KAY! WE ALL ARE WORK-IN' FOR A

KEYS

Singer lyrics: bright-er day It's al-right   It's o kay!   a Hey! Hey! Hey!___

11

D

Singer: I feel nice!__ I feel good__ 'Caus all is happ'nin like I

Lyrics (Singer):
knew it would I feel nice____ I feel good____ 'caus all is happ nin like I

Singer lyrics: knew it would I feel nice — I feel good just like I should!

E Harvard To Yale
Open for Solos

19

Keyboard

Harvard to Yale
Wiz Band

Swing

♩ = 120

SOLO

A

mp

B

solo

solo

mf

V.S.

Harvard to Yale

Harvard to Yale

Harvard to Yale