

Musical poetry

Primary: (ages 7 – 11)

Music

Students are challenged to create a musical soundscape to accompany a selected poem, for example a train poem. Students experiment with and discuss the expressive qualities of dynamics and tempo. They compose, perform, and respond to music and connect it to literature and poetry. Finally, they listen critically to evaluate the expressive qualities of dynamics and tempo in the compositions of other students.

NB: This lesson plan includes annexes with adaptations for [remote](#) learning and additional [assessment](#) possibilities

Time allocation 2-3 lesson periods

Subject content Understand and use dynamics and tempo contrasts
Experiment with timbres to create sound effects
Evaluate dynamics, tempo, and soundscapes as expressive elements

Creative and critical thinking This unit has a **creativity** focus:

- Explore and generate ideas for musical expression
- Make connections between music and poetry
- Produce a musical performance with expressive qualities
- Reflect on the consequences of creative and unusual musical choices

Other skills Collaboration

Key words tempo; dynamics; timbre; soundscapes; expressive qualities; contrasts; composing; performing

Products and processes to assess

Students work in small groups or individually to compose and perform. They make connections, generate musical ideas, play with original ideas, organise them in an appropriate way, and reflect critically on their and one another's work. At the highest levels of achievement, they create an imaginative accompaniment that features some risk-taking in its composition. Their work process shows willingness to explore a variety of ideas about what can be expressed with changes to dynamics and tempo, and an ability to articulate why final choices have been made and how they relate to the poem.

Teaching and Learning plan

This plan suggests potential steps for implementing the activity. Teachers can introduce modifications as they see fit to adapt the activity to their teaching context.

Step	Duration	Teacher and student activity	Subject content	Creativity and critical thinking
1	Lesson period 1	<p>Teacher may choose to introduce the topic by reviewing the concepts of dynamics and tempo and giving examples and definitions.</p> <p>They then distribute or read the chosen poem, or ask students to select one among several with musical affordances, asking students to start imagining what sort of music or sound effects would go with it. Any poem with contrasts and some obvious rhythmic potential would work, for instance a train poem</p> <p>It may be useful to facilitate a short discussion (as whole class or in small groups) of the poem at this point. What do students notice about the poem? How does it make them feel?</p> <p>Teacher then asks for a couple of examples of how, where, and why different sound effects could be used and discusses with students how they could create these effects (from objects, body percussion etc.)</p> <p>Teacher can then ask about different kinds of dynamics or tempo and discuss what difference this makes. As appropriate, this could be extended to a discussion of what dynamics and tempo would be unexpected or unusual for this poem and why</p> <p>Teacher asks students (individually, in pairs, or in small groups) to create a performance in which the poem is read with accompanying sound effects or music. Students can be given access to instruments or can simply use body and mouth percussion.</p> <p>Teacher circulates, listening to progress and encouraging students to add more ideas or think more critically about their ideas</p>	<p>Developing or identifying ideas for sound effects, dynamics, and tempo changes</p> <p>Demonstrating understanding of the expressive qualities of dynamic and tempo contrasts</p> <p>Composing together in a group, listening to ideas of others</p>	<p>Observing and describing the feelings in poem and their experience of it</p> <p>Articulating connections between emotion in the poem and musical expression</p> <p>Generating ideas on dynamics and tempo and stretching and playing with those ideas</p> <p>Imagining and evaluating possibilities for musical expression and producing a performance</p> <p>Reflecting on and critically evaluating ideas</p>

		Composing original music or sound effects	
2	<p>Lesson period 2 (this may also be continued in a third lesson period) Extra time may need to be built in if working online</p>	<p>Students have time to review work they created in previous class and practice for performing in class.</p> <p>Teacher distributes a 'listening worksheet', reads it over, and asks if there are any questions about it. Teacher reminds class of appropriate audience behavior.</p> <p>Students perform their compositions for the class. After each soundscape/composition, students fill out a listening worksheet on what they heard. Teacher leads discussions about why students have made particular choices in order for the class to reflect on strengths and weaknesses and compliment particularly interesting musical examples.</p>	<p>Performing music and appropriate sound effects with dynamic and tempo changes</p> <p>Listening to performances of others respectfully and carefully</p> <p>Offering accurate and thoughtful written and spoken comments about compositions of peers</p> <p>Reflecting on the novelty of compositions and performances and choices regarding dynamics and tempo</p>

Resources and examples for inspiration

Web and print

- Photocopies of poem (one per working group)
 - A train poem could be an example
 - Any poem with contrasts and some obvious rhythmic potential
- Photocopies of critical listening worksheet (one per student)

Other

- Instruments can be made available. However, they are not necessary; students can simply use body and mouth percussion.

Opportunities to adapt, extend, and enrich

- Students could be asked to notate dynamic and tempo changes as appropriate to teaching context
- Poems with different subject matter, emotions, or rhythm could be used and/or compared
- The lesson could be used to introduce music using the idea of trains (or the selected poem's idea):
 - Excerpts of Different trains by Steve Reich (classical music - instrumental)
 - Take the A train by Duke Ellington (in English)
 - Pedro Pedreiro by Chico Buarque (in Portuguese)
 - Examples of pop songs about trains: <https://www.ranker.com/list/songs-about-trains/ranker-music>

Creativity and critical thinking rubric for music

- Mapping of the different steps of the lesson plan against the OECD rubric to identify the creative and/or critical thinking skills the different parts of the lesson aim to develop

	CREATIVITY Coming up with new ideas and solutions	Steps	CRITICAL THINKING Questioning and evaluating ideas and solutions	Steps
INQUIRING	Make connections to other musical styles concepts or conceptual ideas in other disciplines	1	Identify and question assumptions and conventional rules in a musical performance, composition or analysis	
IMAGINING	Play with unusual and radical ideas when preparing to perform, compose, orchestrate, or analyse a music piece	1	Consider several perspectives on a musical performance, composition, interpretation or analysis	2
DOING	Perform, compose, or analyse music with expressive qualities or relating to personally meaningful subject matter	1-2	Explain both strengths and limitations of a performance, a composition or an analysis of a music piece	2
REFLECTING	Reflect on steps taken to create performances, compositions or analyses of a music piece	1-2	Reflect on the chosen way of performing, composing or analysing a music piece relative to possible alternatives	2

Annex 1: Remote learning adaptations

This plan suggests potential steps for implementing the activity in online modes of delivery. Teachers can introduce modifications as they see fit to adapt the activity to their teaching context.

Step	Duration	Teacher and student activity	Subject content	Creativity and critical thinking	Adaptions and considerations for online modes of delivery
1	Lesson period 1	<p>Teacher may choose to introduce the topic by reviewing the concepts of dynamics and tempo and giving examples and definitions.</p> <p>They then distribute or read the chosen poem, or ask students to select one among several with musical affordances, asking students to start imagining what sort of music or sound effects would go with it. Any poem with contrasts and some obvious rhythmic potential would work, for instance a train poem</p> <p>It may be useful to facilitate a short discussion (as whole class or in small groups) of the poem at this point. What do students notice about the poem? How does it make them feel?</p> <p>Teacher then asks for a couple of examples of how, where, and why different sound effects could be used and discusses with students how they could create these effects (from objects, body percussion etc.)</p> <p>Teacher can then ask about different kinds of dynamics or tempo and discuss what difference this makes. As appropriate, this could be extended to a discussion of what dynamics and tempo would be unexpected or unusual for this poem and why</p>	<p>Developing or identifying ideas for sound effects, dynamics, and tempo changes</p> <p>Demonstrating understanding of the expressive qualities of dynamic and tempo contrasts</p>	<p>Observing and describing the feelings in poem and their experience of it</p> <p>Articulating connections between emotion in the poem and musical expression</p> <p>Generating ideas on dynamics and tempo and stretching and playing with those ideas</p>	<p>NB: Many of these adaptions rely on students having access to internet-connected devices. In contexts where this is not the case, more substantial adaptions may be needed.</p> <p>In recorded video (or live video conference session).</p> <p>Students can select poem in independent asynchronous work.</p> <p>Important to form students into small groups/pairs early on in process & explain what method they should use to communicate and any ground rules for communication as appropriate to context</p> <p>Discussions can take place in live sessions with students using hands-up function. Breakout sessions or small group calls can be useful so teacher can have a series of more focussed discussions with smaller groups</p> <p>Live session, group communication set up above, or on a discussion forum</p>

	<p>Teacher asks students (individually, in pairs, or in small groups) to create a performance in which the poem is read with accompanying sound effects or music. Students can be given access to instruments or can simply use body and mouth percussion.</p> <p>Teacher circulates, listening to progress and encouraging students to add more ideas or think more critically about their ideas</p>	<p>Composing together in a group, listening to ideas of others</p> <p>Composing original music or sound effects</p>	<p>Imagining and evaluating possibilities for musical expression and producing a performance</p> <p>Reflecting on and critically evaluating ideas</p>	<p>Students discuss and practice in breakout rooms. Teacher joins regularly to ensure process is visible and feedback is given OR groups practice independently over video conferencing with regular calls with the teacher to discuss progress and clarify.</p>
2	<p>Lesson period 2 (this may also be continued in a third lesson period) Extra time may need to be built in if working online</p> <p>Students have time to review work they created in previous class and practice for performing in class.</p> <p>Teacher distributes a 'listening worksheet', reads it over, and asks if there are any questions about it. Teacher reminds class of appropriate audience behavior.</p> <p>Students perform their compositions for the class. After each soundscape/composition, students fill out a listening worksheet on what they heard. Teacher leads discussions about why students have made particular choices in order for the class to reflect on strengths and weaknesses and compliment particularly interesting musical examples.</p>	<p>Performing music and appropriate sound effects with dynamic and tempo changes</p> <p>Listening to performances of others respectfully and carefully Offering accurate and thoughtful written and spoken comments about compositions of peers</p>	<p>Reflecting on the novelty of compositions and performances and choices regarding dynamics and tempo</p>	<p>Breakout rooms or independent group work</p> <p>Performance can take place in a live video conferencing session or multi-screen videos of performances can be created (made on Imovie for e.g.) for other students to view and comment on independently.</p> <p>For live sessions, teacher may need to explain how to be an online audience as appropriate (mute, use of chat, active listening etc.). Live sessions can be challenging if there are varying internet speeds between group members or for cuing entry. Recorded videos can require specific software and expertise and teachers may need to do this themselves, which is time consuming (tutorials available on Youtube). Students can be engaged in discussion of the challenges/affordances of the technology and the effects of performers being in different places on the musical experience/qualities. Assessment should take into account the challenges involved in online musical collaboration and performance.</p>

Annex 2: Additional assessment activities

There are many ways this activity can be assessed in addition to attention to the processes and products already outlined. Here are just some possible activities, many of which can be used for either formative or summative assessment and which aim to assess both subject knowledge and creative and/or critical thought.

	DETAILS	POSSIBLE CRITERIA	POSSIBLE ONLINE MODES OF DELIVERY
HOMEWORK/ CLASSWORK	<p>Students can be tasked with finding and listening to a piece of music/song inspired by a poem (or this can be assigned. E.g. <i>The Lark Ascending</i>). After having also read the poem, they can be asked to imagine they are interviewing the composer. Come up with some <i>interesting</i> and <i>unusual</i> questions to ask about the musical choices the composer made, why they made them, and how they relate to the poem. Depending on the context, they could also be challenged to briefly summarize what they think the greatest strengths and limitations of the piece are (and why) and come up with appropriate questions about these aspects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and quality of questions • Use of musical vocabulary and extent to which questions ask about specific musical qualities the student has noticed • Extent to which questions make connections between music and poem that inspired it • Extent to which questions are unusual or interesting in relation to the student's personal experience (as opposed to predictable or standard) • Quality of reasoning regarding strengths and weaknesses 	Homework, asynchronous, offline
PORTFOLIO/ PROJECT	<p>Students can be tasked with producing a record of their investigations of 'how poems inspire music'. They can be asked to include any number of sections (or they could design their own structure), such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notation/description/video recording of my piece/s inspired by poems • Some of the musical choices I/we made and why I/we made them • What was the best and worst bits of our/my composition/s? • Other examples of music inspired by poems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effort put in to creating a high quality output • Use of musical vocabulary • Ability to take a position and justify it with quality reasoning • Extent to which connections are made between poems and musical pieces • Ability to imagine how the same task might be approached by another composer 	Iterative assignment – students can use an online portfolio site or discussion forum or closed website to document their project. Formative feedback can be given by video or audio to ensure student stays on track

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the musical choices made in these other examples and why I think they made them • Some of the ways that I/we/they could have made the piece of music more unusual/interesting/exciting. What would have been some really radical choices? • What I think another composer (the specific composer/musician can be chosen or assigned) would have done differently and why • Why it is/isn't a good idea to use poetry as inspiration for music • Self-assessment according to rubrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to generate radical ideas for choices that they or others could have made in their compositions • Ability to acknowledge strengths and limitations of their own work and the work of others 	
EXAM/QUIZ	<p>Students can be asked to listen to extracts from a piece of music inspired by a poem or regard the notation of such a piece. After also reading the poem/an extract from the poem, they can then be set questions that call on their musical vocabulary and questions that require them to critically assess the creativity of the piece.</p> <p>Multiple choice, one-word or short answers e.g. This is an example of x dynamic; this is an example of x tempo; This choice was predictable/unusual because x; The poem makes me feel x; the music makes me feel x; Why I think the composer used x; This extract is similar/different to the poem because x; Some things the composer could have done to make this more unusual are x, y, and z.</p>	<p>This will depend on the specific questions asked but may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct use of musical vocabulary • Ability to identify their own emotions and connect them to emotions in the musical piece • Ability to make connections between the poem and the music • Ability to come up with ideas for what makes a musical choice predictable or unusual and why choices have been made • Ability to justify their position 	Live session or take-home exam
CREATIVE OUTPUT	<p>Students can be asked to imagine they are the poem and write a monologue about how the poem feels about being turned into music and whether the poem agrees with the musical choices that the composer has made</p> <p>Alternatively, students can be asked to compose a second piece, which is either a very different interpretation of the poem (or they can be asked to change the end of the poem)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of musical vocabulary and extent to which monologue refers to specific musical qualities or choices the student has noticed • Ability to imagine what perspective the poem might have on the musical piece • Ability to generate alternative musical ideas for the same poem 	<p>This could take place as homework, asynchronous, off-line</p> <p>Students can record audio or video of their second piece (or</p>

	or makes different musical choices to convey the same emotions and be asked to compare and contrast the two pieces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of reasoning and use of musical vocabulary when comparing and contrasting 	provide notation), or perform it during a live session
PERFORMANCE/ PRESENTATION	Students can be asked to perform their final piece and give a presentation talking about how they used the poem as inspiration, why they made the musical choices they did, what was different or unusual about these choices, and what the limitations of their piece were	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of performance and presentation Quality of reasoning used to justify musical choices Ability to identify and explain unusual or interesting musical choices and strengths/limits 	Students can record audio or video of their piece (or provide notation), or perform it during a live session