

Stories in Music

The listed ideas provide an overview of the topic which is written in more detail on the next page(s). Lessons may be used in any order as long as the initial discussion has taken place. If you wish to further develop any ideas or have any ideas to add, then please do.

Discuss the different ways in which a story can be told through music: songs, music, narrated piece, opera, musicals, ballet etc. Talk about and listen to a selection of this music to gain a picture of how musical stories can be put together.

Listen to the 'Sorcerer's Apprentice' by Paul Dukas. Discuss the pictures the music creates, use of instruments, volume, speed and timbre. Tell the story and listen to the music again. Show video of 'Fantasia'. Children to record the story in a strip cartoon or written version.

Listen to 'The Hut on Chicken's Legs' from 'Pictures at an Exhibition' (Adventures in Music book 4) and discuss how the story is brought to life by the use of instruments, motifs etc.

Listen to music from 'Swan Lake' (Adventures in Music Book 2) and if possible watch a small clip of the ballet to see how the music and dance are linked. ('Riverdance' and 'Lord of the Dance' are two more possibilities.

Sing 'Clementine' and 'Michael Finnigan'. Discuss story line of each, aswell as musical features of the song, such as time signature, dynamics etc. In pairs, ask one child to rewrite the story of a song and the other to show it in cartoon strip form. Reverse tasks for 'Sorcerer's Apprentice' work.

Listen to 'Peter and the Wolf'. Many of the children should already be familiar with this piece from lower school. Discuss the use of instruments to represent the different characters. Note how the story is put together using the spoken word aswell as music. (Look at or listen to other examples such as 'Tubby the Tuba'.)

In groups of 3 to 6, tell a well known story, (probably a fairy tale,) using music. Use previously gained knowledge to choose a suitable method of telling the story through music, music and singing, music and speaking or music and mime. Make use of different instruments or tunes to represent the characters in the story. Record results on cassette.

Lesson: Stories told through music – Paul Dukas: ‘The Sorcerer’s Apprentice’

Learning Intention: To learn that stories and moods may be conveyed in music by using the imagination of the listener.

Play a couple of minutes of the CD of ‘The Sorcerer’s Apprentice’. Ask the children if anyone recognises the music. If they do then ask others in the class first what they think the music might be describing. Then ask those who know what it is, the name of the composer, how they know the music etc.

Either ask the children who know the story or retell the story yourself.

Play the whole piece of music now that the children know the story. If possible, put in parts of the story as the music is playing.

Children to work in pairs. One member of partnership to draw a cartoon strip of the story (6-8 pictures) Discuss what will go in the pictures, the other to record the story in written form. (This activity to be reversed for ‘Clementine’ / ‘A mouse lived in a windmill’ Replay the music as the children are drawing.

Plenary: Play the ‘Fantasia’ video and discuss how the music portrayed the different parts of the story.

Lesson: Stories told in Ballet

(this may be used over 2 lessons if all work is to be covered)

Learning Intention: To appreciate that the medium of dance coupled with music can be an exciting way of telling a story.

Using ‘Adventures in Music’ Book 2, read through pages 17 and 18 telling the story and giving notes on the composer.

Read through page 19 and then play the music, encouraging the children to follow the structure of the music by looking at each section as they hear it.

Divide the class into groups of 6-8. They are going to re-enact part of or all of the story. Characters needs to be Sigfried and friends, Odette and friends, Von Rothbart and Odile. Play the music a few times to give them a chance to rehearse. (Although this is a ballet, I only ask the children to act out the parts.) The characters are not allowed to speak.

Watch performances and discuss positive elements – in particular, how did the characters tell the story without speaking. How much did the music help in the telling of the story?

If possible, watch a video of part of the story.

Written activities and questions are on page 22 and the Spanish dance is described on 20 and 21.

Plenary: Mark any written work/ask questions on the story/ask questions about the instruments used in ‘Swan Lake’.

Lesson: Stories told in song

Learning intention: To learn one or more songs which tell a story and to provide a percussion part to go with the song.

1. Look at the words for ‘Clementine’, ‘Michael Finnigan’ or any other song which tells a story. Play the music and learn the song to sing as a class.

2. In small groups (2-5) explain that their task is to make up a percussion part to fit with the song. Each person must play a different instrument and a different rhythm. The children may either play a repetitive rhythm to fit with the music or decide on certain words to play with. (eg. First word of each line, repeated words, last word of each line.)
3. Allow rehearsal time before each group performs. Sing through the song again, allocating a verse or chorus for each group to play with whilst the rest of the class sing.
4. Children should then write out the verse/ chorus their parts fitted with inside a border, underlining the words each person in their group played using colour code for each instrument. If a rhythm was played then they should write out the rhythm (with help if necessary) and put it underneath the words. The border can then be decorated with a design appropriate to the story. Alternatively, the task for cartoon strip/written version could be reversed from 'Sorcerer's Apprentice'.

Plenary: The children could be encouraged to mark or comment on the performances of other groups or fill in an evaluation sheet on how their group performed.

Lesson: (2 lessons) Stories told through music

Learning intention: To compose a piece of music with different motifs to represent the characters in the story along with descriptive music to help tell the story.

1. Play the first section of 'Peter and the Wolf' to the class and discuss the way each character is given their own motif and is represented by a particular instrument.
2. Explain that the children are to make up music to fit with a fairy tale (Little Red Riding Hood, 3 little pigs, Goldilocks and 3 bears, Jack and the beanstalk) In groups of 3-6 rehearse story using a selection of instruments. Stress that each character or groups of characters should have their own short melody/motif. The story may be told in just music or with words and music.

Plenary: Fill in an evaluation sheet for this lesson and for next week when the pieces are performed.

Week 2: Record result on cassette to play back to the class and discuss.