

Unit 12 Dragon scales

Exploring pentatonic scales

ABOUT THE UNIT

This unit develops children's ability to recognise, and use, pentatonic scales and create short melodies and accompaniments.

In this unit pupils sing songs based on a pentatonic scale. They experiment with the five notes of a pentatonic scale and play them on a range of pitched instruments, individually and together. They use the scale to make up simple songs and accompaniments. This unit should be revisited during the key stage.

WHERE THE UNIT FITS IN

This unit builds on unit 5, and leads to unit 19. It is linked to the ongoing skills units (units 1 and 8) that encourage pupils to play call and response games based on singing two notes, 'soh' and 'me' (G and E).

It provides opportunities to link to work in RE and drama.

PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if children and teachers have:

- sung a wide range of songs that use different scales, *eg minor, major and pentatonic scales*
- used pitched instruments to create simple melodies
- developed skills through the activities described in unit 5

VOCABULARY

In this unit children will have an opportunity to use words and phrases related to:

- pitch, *eg staying the same, getting higher/lower, melodic ostinati drone, pentatonic scale*
- pulse, *eg steady pulse, word rhythm, rhythmic pattern*
- structure, *eg ostinati bass, drone, melodic ostinati*
- process, *eg composing using a given melodic pattern (pentatonic scale)*
- context, *eg use of pentatonic scale in different times and places*

RESOURCES

Stimulus:

- stories, poems and songs about dragons
- recordings, *eg Chinese music, jazz, blues*

Sound sources:

- a collection of classroom instruments, tuned and untuned

EXPECTATIONS

at the end of this unit

most children will:

compose and perform simple melodies and songs independently; create simple accompaniments for their tunes using drones and melodic ostinati based on a given pentatonic scale with confidence

some children will not have made so much progress and will:

compose and perform simple melodies and songs; make up accompaniments using drones and melodic ostinati based on a given pentatonic scale with some help

some children will have progressed further and will:

select the notes of a pentatonic scale and use them to compose the words and melody for a short song; add simple pentatonic accompaniments to their song

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS A PENTATONIC SCALE?

- about pentatonic scales and how they are used in music
- about pentatonic scales and how they are used in music
- Revise any pentatonic songs sung during key stage 1, eg Rain, rain go away.
- Sing a range of folk songs based on a pentatonic scale, eg Hush little baby, Land of the silver birch, I got a robe, Who built the ark, Little David play on your harp, Swing low sweet chariot. Explain that pentatonic songs are based on a five-note scale and have been sung for hundreds of years in many countries. If possible, play the pentatonic scale for each song to the class before the song is sung. [Link to unit 8: Singing]

- identify pentatonic scales in songs

- A common pentatonic scale includes the first three notes of any major scale, skips the fourth, continues with the fifth and the sixth note, and skips the seventh. The G scale creates G A B D E, and the F scale F G A C D. The C scale creates C D E G A. There are also pentatonic scales for minor scales, eg D E F G A. You can use any five notes but it can be a good idea to start with C D E G A.

EXPLORATION: HOW CAN WE USE A PENTATONIC SCALE?

- how simple tunes can be based on a pentatonic scale
- Use chime or tone bars to make up a pentatonic scale of C: C D E G A. Invite a few children to come forward, one at a time, to make up and play simple five- or seven-note melodies using the notes of the prepared pentatonic scale. Tell them that they can start and finish anywhere, they do not have to use all the notes, they can play any note more than once, and that they can either move in steps or jump around. It is likely that the children will keep to a simple rhythm based on notes of equal length. Play each tune two or more times. Copy the tunes by singing to 'la'. Talk about the tunes. [Link to unit 8: Listening (aural memory)]

- improvise simple tunes based on the pentatonic scale

- When children talk about the tunes they may say that they sound Chinese. This is because much music from China, and some from Asia and South-East Asia (the Far East), uses this scale. However, it is important not to call this 'Chinese music' as the pentatonic scale is used across the world.
- **Extension activity:** Continue this activity outside of the classroom lessons so that everyone can have a go. The children should first experiment with the five notes until they have made up a tune that they like, repeat it until they have memorised it, sing as they play (they can make up words if they like), then try to write it down for someone else to play. They may want to devise a rhythm to suit the tune.

- how to create different textures using the pentatonic scale
- Ask the children to try playing two pentatonic tunes together. *How can we make them fit together, eg playing them at the same speed (tempo)?* Encourage children to think about pulse and how this can be used to help the tunes fit together. Ask the children to repeat their tunes again and again as the class claps or taps the pulse.
- Using the pentatonic scale of C D E G A, make up an accompaniment to a pentatonic song sung in the key of C. There are several types of accompaniment you can use:
 - *Drone:* This can be either a single note or two or more notes played together. A drone sounds best when played slowly on an instrument with a sustained tone, eg *pitched percussion with metal bars*. Accompany the song with a drone using the bass note C and G played together
 - *Melodic ostinati:* Ask the children to make up a tune to the rhythm of words selected from the song using three notes of the C pentatonic scale. Play it over and over again throughout the singing of the song. Try just playing it now and then
- Try changing the notes to make different pentatonic scales. Discuss the different effects. *Which scales could be used to describe a misty day, a sunny day, a dark cave, a waterfall?*

- perform together keeping to a steady pulse
- explore and perform different types of accompaniment
- explore and select different melodic patterns in response to words

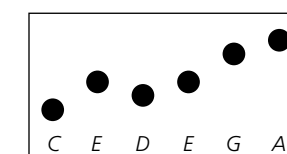
- Keep the melodies simple at first. Limit their length and keep the rhythms simple as well. Encourage the children to create 3–5–7 note melodies using rests.
- **Extension activity:** Ask the class to sing one of the tunes using 'la' or 'nu' as the other is played on a tuned instrument. Encourage the class to play more than two tunes. Try playing tunes together and discuss the different effects.
- Encourage the class to use descriptive words to describe the different effects. It can be helpful to start with strong contrasts.
- **Extension activity:** Continue this activity outside the class lesson so that everyone can find their own different scales to match some descriptive words written on cards or short poems.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

- how to create a class performance
- Using the pentatonic scale (C D E G A), make up a dragon song. First make a collection of sentences describing dragons. Start with the words 'Dragon, dragon ...', eg *Dragon, dragon breathing fire/ puffing smoke/swishing tail*. Invite individual children to make up a pentatonic tune for each sentence. Follow the simple rhythm of the words.
- Sit the players and their pitched instruments in a circle and ask them to play and sing their tunes one at a time. The listening children can sing each phrase back. Ask for comments. Put two, three or four phrases together to make an extended composition – think about the order of the tunes. *Which one makes a good start/finish? Do any go well together if they are played at the same time?*
- Create an accompaniment for the song. Experiment with drone and melodic ostinati, and with different tuned instruments, until you have created a satisfactory accompaniment to the whole dragon song.
- Make up dragon music for dancing in a procession. Use untuned percussion instruments to create an impression of fire and smoke, lashing tails and snapping teeth. Combine cymbals with drums and tambours to create a feeling of grandeur and movement. Jangling instruments could be used to suggest the dragon's heap of treasure.

- create a class song
- create an accompaniment to the song

- Dragons provide an exciting stimulus for creative work. The story of the slaying of the dragon by St George has been told to generations of children. Fire-breathing dragons, with wings and scales, are internationally regarded as fearsome and fabulous creatures.
- **Extension activity:** Create a more complex structure, eg *by asking the children to first sing the song unaccompanied, then sing again with the accompaniment, and the third time play the tune of the song with the accompaniment, but no singing*. Experiment with structure, dynamics and tempo.
- Try this activity in a different pentatonic key – check that the children can sing their songs at the new pitch of the new key; if not, try another.
- Remind the class they can use dot notation with letter names to help them recall their melodies, eg



EXTENSION AND FUTURE LEARNING

In addition to the examples given in the 'Points to note' section, children could go on to:

- compose music for different types of dragon, *eg water, air, earth or spirit*, using the techniques described in the activities
- listen to recordings of Chinese music with particular reference to instruments, the texture of combined instruments, the tunes and the rhythms
- find out about Chinese New Year celebrations and other festivals through work in RE
- listen to recorded music from other eastern countries, as well as other music that uses pentatonic scales, *eg Debussy, jazz, blues, early rock*
- enact the story of St George and the dragon and add expressive sounds
- make up a dragon dance with groups of four or five children joined together at the waist. They could weave in and out and move their hands like claws. The front child could snap jaws and roar. Accompany with the sound effects practised above

When this unit is repeated, the focus will remain the same, that is, understanding pitch, but the content and the expectations should change. The content is changed easily through the use of different examples, stories and other stimuli that could be used to explore pitch. Expectations are changed by expecting more of the children to achieve the 'most children' and 'some children will have progressed further' statements and by placing greater emphasis on the extension exercises in the 'Points to note' section.

ENRICHMENT

- Children could attend concerts where a pentatonic scale is used, *eg folk music from the British Isles*.
- Musicians who play music based on a pentatonic scale could visit the school.
- The class could work with a musician or music historian to explore the historic significance of pentatonic scales. *Why were they used, eg in Aboriginal tribes, as a means of identifying different tribes?*

