

Unit 13 Painting with sound

Exploring sound colours

ABOUT THE UNIT

This unit develops children's ability to create, perform and analyse expressive compositions and extend their sound vocabulary.

In this unit, children develop understanding of how the sounds made on different musical instruments can be used expressively. They explore how sounds can describe the moods stimulated by pictures and words. They create simple compositions combining rhythm and melody and share these with the class. They begin to explore the more abstract use of sounds.

WHERE THE UNIT FITS IN

This unit links to the ongoing skills unit (unit 8) by reinforcing and extending understanding of the expressive use of the combined musical elements. It builds on units 2, 7 and 9 and leads to unit 18. This unit explores moods and emotions and has a direct link to PSHE.

PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if children and teachers have:

- listened to a range of music
- considered how different moods are created in music
- developed skills through activities described in units 2, 7 and 9

VOCABULARY

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

- elements, eg *pitch, dynamics, rhythm, texture, timbre, tempo*
- structure, eg *beginning, middle, end, repetition*
- processes, eg *composing music that describes feelings or moods using 'tense' or 'calm' sounds*

RESOURCES

Stimulus:

- pictures
- poems
- stories
- moods
- music

Sound sources:

- voices
- classroom instruments
- own instruments

EXPECTATIONS

at the end of this unit

most children will:

carefully choose, order, combine and control sounds with awareness of their combined effect; use sound to create more abstract images

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

describe different moods and extend their range of sound vocabulary; make sound effects, rather than create images

some children will have progressed further and will:

create compositions that use a wide variety of sound colours and make subtle adjustments to achieve the intended effect; explore how sounds can be used abstractly

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION: HOW CAN MUSIC DESCRIBE IMAGES AND MOODS?

- that music, like pictures, can describe images and moods
- Look at a selection of pictures that give strong impressions of mood. Relate the subject of the picture (place, still life, person, event), to its structure, colours, style. *What does it describe? How does it make you feel? What colours do you like and why?*
- Play the children music that describes an event, scene, person or animal, eg *Central Park in the dark by Charles Ives*, *On hearing the first cuckoo in spring by Delius*, *Albatross by Fleetwood Mac*, *Morning from Peer Gynt by Grieg*.
- Before telling the children the title or theme of the music, ask them to listen to it and talk about it. *What does it make you think about? Does it make pictures in your head? How does it make you feel?*
- Tell the children the titles of the music they have heard and then ask them to identify specific musical elements and discuss their effectiveness, eg *the calm swaying melody of Morning in Peer Gynt*, *the repetition of the bass line in Albatross*.

- identify descriptive features in art and music
- analyse and comment on how sounds are used to create different moods

- You may wish to consider the strong colours and shapes of Gauguin, the gloomy colours of Goya, the effects of sun on water in Monet, the fun in Hockney, the drama of Turner, and so on.
- Encourage different responses and make sure the children are aware that music and pictures can evoke different reactions in different people. *Is there any music that makes everyone feel the same and if so, why?*
- There is an important step from literal use of sounds, eg *heavy sounds for an elephant (unit 9)*, to more abstract use of sounds to describe a mood or feeling. Encourage the children to consider, and apply, the more abstract use of sounds. Some children will need more help than others to make this step.

EXPLORATION: HOW CAN WE USE SOUNDS TO CREATE A PICTURE OR MOOD?

- to relate sounds to visual images
- to select appropriate instruments
- Choose a picture that allows scope for aural interpretation, eg *The fighting Temeraire by Turner*, *pictures by Jackson Pollock*, *Bridget Riley and Mondrian*. Talk about it with the children and brainstorm descriptive words and phrases – write them down for everyone to see. Tell the children they are going to try to paint the picture in sound. *Which instruments would effectively match the mood and subject of the picture?*
- Before actually playing the instruments, ask the children to try to remember what they sound like (internalisation) and encourage the children to justify their choice, eg *I think a quiet cymbal roll would be good for smoke because it sounds soft and billowing*.
- Play the suggested instrument and discuss its effectiveness. *Can we adapt the way of playing to make it even more effective?* Experiment with three or four different aspects of the same picture, eg *smoke, fire, falling timbers, panic*.
- Ask the children to help you choose a second contrasting picture and treat it in the same way.

- select instruments and create sounds to describe visual images
- choose instruments on the basis of internalised sounds
- analyse and comment on the effectiveness of the sounds and instruments selected

- Imagining sounds in the head before experimenting is another important aspect of musical development. This should be developed throughout key stage 2. The aim should be to develop an internal sound vocabulary that they can use when selecting sounds. The children may find it helpful to have the instruments in front of them. Encourage children to explore different sounds on the same instrument.
- At this stage restrict the use of instruments to one or two instruments per mood/image. However, remember to use voice sounds as well.

- how sounds can be combined to make textures
- Explore the effect of sounds played on their own and played together. *Do the two sounds go well together? Are they similar or contrasting? How loud and fast should each be played? Are they short/staccato or long/sustained sounds? Regular or random (now and then)? Should they come in/finish at the same time?* Experiment, discuss and modify.
- Find a picture that evokes a specific mood, eg *The scream by Munch*, or *Starry night by van Gogh*. Find sequences of sound to describe the mood. *Which works better – a single sound or a combination of sounds?*

- create textures by combining sounds in different ways

- Some children may find it easy to think about how sounds describe colours. This relationship can be used when talking about the music.

- how mood and emotion can be illustrated in music
- Ask the children to make a collection of experiences/moods/emotions, eg *anger, nightmare, sorrow, joy, fear, peace*.
- Listen to *Åse's death* in *Peer Gynt*. *How does it make the listener think about death and sadness?*
- Divide the class into small groups and ask them to make up sound sequences using one or more instrument to describe each emotion. Ask them to think about pitch, tempo, rhythm, dynamics, timbre, texture. Remind them not to forget to use voices and silence if appropriate.
- Ask the children to listen to and compare each mood sequence. Modify if appropriate. Play two contrasting pieces one after the other. Think about the overall structure, eg *beginning, middle and end*, and discuss the order of performance.

- create music that describes two contrasting moods/emotions

- This activity has a direct link to personal and social development.
- Not everyone in the group has to play an instrument. Everyone should, however, be involved in discussion and use voice sounds.

- how pitched sounds can be combined
- Explore combinations or clusters of pitched sounds. Start by putting out all the tuned instruments, eg *octave or pentatonic set of chimes, tone bars, hand chimes, plus xylophones, glockenspiels, metallophones, keyboards*. *Recorder and other instrumental players could work together*. To start with the children should work with one instrument each/per pair. Ask the children to play together two notes that are far apart, next to each other, next door but one to each other, etc. Experiment with accidentals, the sharps and the flats (the black notes on a keyboard). *Do you like the effect? What is it like? Is it 'comfortable' or 'uncomfortable'?* Try three notes. The children could make a list of 'uncomfortable' and 'comfortable' combinations. Another time, experiment with two or more tuned instruments, eg *piano and chimes*.

- recognise and explore different combinations of pitch sounds

- Remember that these are subjective impressions and that not everyone will have the same ideas.
- The use of three notes greatly extends the variety of different effects.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

- how rhythmic sounds can be combined
- Ask the class to explore the use of rhythmic and non-rhythmic sounds to create comfortable or uncomfortable and tense or relaxed (calm) feelings.

CHILDREN

- recognise and explore different combinations of rhythmic and non-rhythmic sounds

- Highlight the difference between rhythmic and non-rhythmic sounds, eg a sequence of long notes played on a chime bar against a steady pulse (rhythmic), and a series of drum sounds played at random (non-rhythmic).

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

- to use sounds expressively
- Reinforce the analogy between sound and colour and ask the children in groups of three or four to select a picture and then compose music to describe it. Each child chooses one aspect of the picture to paint in sound, and then selects a colour (instrument). They mix their colours (sounds on different instruments, including the voice) to create a range of textures that are combined to make a complete sound picture. Attention should be given to all the musical elements: timbre, texture, tempo, dynamics, pulse, rhythm and pitch. *How are you using timbre, texture, etc to help to create your sound picture?* Practise and refine.
- Ask the children to record their sound pictures, developing the symbols used in previous units. Encourage the children to combine sounds and to show when the sounds are combined in their notations. Display the finished scores (notations for several instruments) around the room.

- compose music to describe a picture in groups of two or three

- **Extension activity:** Display the pictures around the room and ask one child to walk around the art exhibition and pause to look at each picture. As he/she stops, the accompanying music should be played. Invite other people to visit your musical art gallery. Write a brochure describing each sound picture and give copies to visitors.
- Listen to extracts from *Pictures at an exhibition* by Mussorgsky.
- Help the children to combine sounds so that they are developing the ability to layer sounds.
- Note the children who create abstract images through subtle combinations of sounds.

EXTENSION AND FUTURE LEARNING

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

- combine instruments and different timbres with greater variety and subtlety
- use sounds in a more structured way, *eg making use of repetition*
- use symbols as a support during the development of ideas
- imagine sounds and discuss possible uses before using instruments
- extend their own composition out of lesson time and perform to the class and other classes
- use their own instruments (where applicable) to add a greater variety of sounds
- identify music that creates different moods and bring some examples to school from home
- record their own performed compositions and use this as a stimulus for a dance
- celebrate their work in this unit by performing mood pieces to other classes. All classes could create their own mood and be brought together through recordings to be played in a school assembly. Each class could nominate a group to represent the class and these then join with other groups to create a school mood composition

When this unit is repeated, the focus will remain the same, that is, exploring sound colours, 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 timbre. 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

- The class could visit an art gallery, art school or music centre, or attend concerts or invite ensembles to school.
- Visiting ensembles could come into the school and invite children to add sections or additional layers to their performance.
- A composer could start with the same picture and compare their composition with those of the class.

