

Unit 19 Songwriter

Exploring lyrics and melody

ABOUT THE UNIT

This unit develops children's ability to compose a song with an awareness of the relationship between lyrics and melody.

In this unit, children learn of the important role played by lyrics in songs. In particular they focus on the different functions of lyrics in conveying mood, expressing attitude or telling a story. They employ simple techniques for composing lyrics of their own and setting these to melodies. They learn about the cultural and social significance of many lyrics and how that meaning should be reflected in performance as well as in the composition itself.

WHERE THE UNIT FITS IN

This unit should draw on work from the ongoing skills unit (unit 15), particularly in relation to skills in singing and performance. It builds on units 5, 12 and 14. It leads to unit 20.

It has a direct link to PSHE, as it explores social influences and how music affects the way people feel and act. It also links to history in exploring changing times and social interests and conditions.

PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if children and teachers have:

- become familiar with a range of songs of different styles
- become aware of simple song structures such as verse/chorus
- understood the concept of melody
- some experience of group composition
- developed skills through the activities described in units 5, 12 and 14

VOCABULARY

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

- sounds and structures, eg *melody, rhythm, phrase, repetition, song structure*
- processes, eg *songwriting, lyrics, attitude*
- context, eg *social messages*

RESOURCES

Stimulus:

- recorded music
- printed songs
- newspapers

Sound sources:

- voices

EXPECTATIONS

at the end of this unit

most children will:

create melodies with an understanding of the relationship between lyrics and melody in songwriting; create their own simple songs; perform songs in a way that reflects their meaning

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

show an awareness of the relationship between lyrics and melody; create and perform melodies with some help

some children will have progressed further and will:

show an understanding of how lyrics can reflect the cultural context and have social meaning; use this knowledge to enhance their own compositions and performances

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION: HOW DOES A SONG USE LYRICS?

- what is meant by the term 'lyrics' and how they can reflect the time and place in which they were written
- Play a song from the charts that the children know. Ask the children to listen carefully for the key phrases. Write them down for everyone to see. Discuss the phrases they identify. *Why did you pick them out? Do they tell a story or convey an attitude or mood?* Listen to the song again. Introduce the term 'lyrics'. [Link to unit 15: Listening]
- Play and sing a song from a Broadway musical of the thirties, forties or fifties (or from any contrasting musical genre). Compare the use of lyrics in this song with the pop song you have already discussed. Introduce the idea that lyrics can help to create and reinforce mood or reflect a particular attitude as well as tell a story. [Link to unit 15: Singing]

- identify how lyrics can be used to convey mood, attitude or tell a story
- recognise that lyrics reflect the time and place in which they were composed

- Choose songs in which the lyrics play an important role.
- **Extension activity:** Ask pupils to find examples of song lyrics that convey moods, attitudes or tell stories.

EXPLORATION: HOW ARE LYRICS AND MELODIES USED TOGETHER IN SONGS?

- that lyrics have social and cultural meaning
- Choose two songs with meaningful lyrics, eg a protest song by Bob Dylan, a music hall song or a spiritual song. Sing one of these and discuss its possible impact on the society in which it was created.
- Ask the children about the occasions when they sing outside school, eg at football matches, discos, birthdays, car/coach journeys. Sing a football chant as a chorus and ask the children to make up different verses using words based on different teams. Perform as a class with each group singing their own verse in between each chorus. *What performing style will be most appropriate for this song?* Explore another example, eg songs sung for worship. Highlight how singing brings everyone together.

- recognise how lyrics often have cultural, historical and social meaning
- compose lyrics for a known song

- Ask the children to find out what songs their parents like best because of the words and why. *How do these songs relate to their different contexts?*
- Use examples from a range of old pop songs to illustrate how 'catch' phrases or words often characterise different decades of pop music.

- how melody reflects the lyrics
- Sing and/or listen to a variety of songs and explore how the melody reflects the lyrics. Ask the class to identify three contrasting examples. Help the class identify 'catch' phrases that are used and repeated frequently within popular music. Explore how the melody reflects these phrases, eg a short sequence of notes that is easily remembered. Explore and discuss the extent to which the melody reflects: the way a word or phrase is said, eg strong to weak, high to low; the purpose of the words, eg to instruct, to command; the meaning or mood of the words, eg relaxed or excited.
- Listen to music that uses these techniques, eg the national anthem and those from other countries.

- identify how repetition can make the words and melody easier to remember

- Keep a record of the examples chosen by the class as these can be played when this unit is used with another class.
- Refer back to the way a melody uses steps/leaps, rhythmic interest, rising answered by falling, steps answered by leaps, repetition of phrases.
- **Extension activity:** Ask a few children to bring in their favourite pop songs, chosen particularly for their lyrics. They must analyse the songs and explain to the class why the lyrics work well.

- how musical structures are used in song
- Analyse some songs to identify where phrases are repeated. Use letters to show different sections and where they are repeated, eg popular songs often use a structure such as:
Introduction chorus verse chorus verse instrumental section chorus chorus
A B C B C D B B
Highlight how the 'catchy' lyrics and melodic phrases are often contained in the chorus (B).

- identify song structures

- Most songs have a simple structure of verse and chorus. This structure is used in popular music and the chorus is repeated often to help the listener to remember the 'catch' phrases. Use other examples, eg John Brown's body, which uses simple repetition of three phrases (A) and a different last line (B) – AAAB.

- how lyrics can be generated and organised
- Choose a current chart song and a recent daily paper. Ask the children to listen to the song and join in with the chorus. Ask the children to pick out some key headlines from one section of the paper, eg sport, national news. Cut them out and give two to each group. Ask them to try and fit their headlines into the melody of the chorus. Tell them they can change the melody or the words in small ways to make their choruses sound better. Ask the children to perform their choruses to each other. Evaluate the effectiveness of their choruses and discuss what they had to do to make the lyrics fit the melody.

- create their own lyrics based on headlines and common phrases
- create a bank of song lyric material

- Help pupils recognise how current issues and language change so that songs can reflect a particular time and place. Discuss how songs can quickly sound 'old-fashioned'.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: HOW CAN WE COMPOSE OUR OWN SONG?

- about writing songs
- Prepare for this part of the unit by asking the class to keep a diary of phrases they hear each other say often. Discuss some of the more common ones. *Why are they used so frequently? How are they said?*
- In pairs, or in slightly larger groups, ask the children to select and arrange some of these phrases to make a short song/chorus. Remind them that they can repeat and change the order of the words.
- Ask the children to write their own song, with or without a chorus. They can base it on 'catch' phrases or something topical, a point of view, someone they know, a pet or they can tell a story. They should remember to use repeated melodic phrases and 'catch' phrases and make a single structure for their songs.
- Perform these songs to the class and record them. *Which are most effective? Why? Which ones didn't quite work? Why not? How could they be improved?*

- compose a short song to their own lyrics based on everyday phrases
- evaluate and improve work through discussion

- Discuss how keeping a diary of common phrases is one way that songwriters find new ideas for their songs.
- Point out that the process of trial, error and refinement is crucial for all songwriters.
- The use of repetition is a key part of this unit and will make this task much easier for many children in the classroom.
- Some children will find it difficult to compose both lyrics and melody. These children could use a poem with a simple structure and use this as the stimulus for the melody and song.

EXTENSION AND FUTURE LEARNING

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

- make sets of songs for specific occasions, *eg the birth of a child*
- create lyrics and/or raps for a dance
- create songs for a school theatre show or as an interval entertainment
- explore songs from around the world, *eg African songs, Aboriginal songs, songs for different occasions, such as weddings, Christmas*

ENRICHMENT

- Visiting songwriters could come to the class and play a number of pieces and collaborate with the children to explore the relationship between lyrics and music.
- Children could visit a local hospital or other similar venue to perform their songs to an audience who otherwise would not hear live music.
- Children could see an opera and discuss the use of sung text.