

Unit 20 Stars, hide your fires

Performing together

ABOUT THE UNIT

This unit develops and demonstrates children's ability to take part in a class performance with confidence, expression and control. In this unit children sing and play a two-part song, play instrumental accompaniments and rehearse and develop musical and performance ideas with understanding of how to achieve a quality class performance. The skills required of the teacher may make this unit more demanding for a class teacher without specialist support. However, the song could be recorded by colleagues, parents or pupils, and this recording used as a means of teaching the song to the rest of the class. In this case, teachers may wish to place a greater emphasis on the descriptive activity included in the final section, 'Bringing it all together'.

WHERE THE UNIT FITS IN

This unit links to the ongoing skills unit (unit 15) by reinforcing and consolidating singing skills and the ability to listen and perform from memory and notations. It builds on all previous work especially the class performance units 11 and 17.

PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if children and teachers have:

- performed music together as a class
- used notations as a support when creating and performing music
- recognised how different parts fit together
- developed skills through the activities described in units 11 and 17

VOCABULARY

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

- sounds, *eg harmony, rests, timbre, accents*
- process, *eg arranging a given song*
- context, *eg venue, occasion*

RESOURCES

Stimulus:

- original song by Lin Marsh (see musical score and song parts for this unit)

Sound sources:

- voices
- classroom instruments
- children's own instruments

EXPECTATIONS

at the end of this unit

most children will:

sing confidently and expressively with attention to dynamics and phrasing, with good intonation and a sense of occasion; play the simpler accompaniment parts on glockenspiel, bass drum or cymbal

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

sing confidently and expressively, following the shape of the melody

some children will have progressed further and will:

sing the harmony part confidently and accurately; play the more complex instrumental parts, *eg xylophone, flute/recorder, violin, cello or clarinet*, with rhythmic and dynamic control

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS THE SONG ABOUT?

- about the context of the song selected
- Set the scene – Macbeth and the witches. Describe the mood. Sing the song *Stars, hide your fires* to the class or play a recording. Let them hear it several times. In between the hearings look at the lyrics and discuss what the song is saying. Many of the words come directly from Shakespeare’s language in the play *Macbeth*. The verse has a dark feel, suggesting something strange and fearful, but there is a moral in the story, and the chorus should be clearly stated.

- identify how a mood is created by music and lyrics

- Link to work in English. Use the introduction to create interest and excitement. Try to help the children feel the mood they are going to create through the lyrics and the music.
- Extension activity:** Reinforce the way music creates a mood by listening to *Revelation and fall* by Maxwell-Davies (especially the sustained violins followed by the contrast in the beating drum), *Phantom of the opera – Music of the night* by Lloyd-Webber (especially the descending scale and lyrics).

EXPLORATION: HOW CAN WE INCREASE THE IMPACT OF THIS SONG?

- how to improve diction and sing in two parts
- Teach the song using the words and echoing each phrase until it is remembered. Encourage the children to use their faces to communicate. Pay close attention to diction, particularly the letter ‘T’. Practising the words in a whisper helps good articulation and clarity.
- When the song has been learned securely, select a few children who will be able successfully to maintain the second voice part. Practise the movement from bar 21 to 22, noting that the interval is very small (a semitone).

- learn a new song quickly and sing it confidently from memory

- Show children where a breath should be taken, eg *the phrase from bar 14 to 17 should not be broken*. The octave leap (bar 12) will need practice. Bar 14 begins quietly; make sure the singers breathe in good time to start the bar. Notice the accents on the words in bar 25. Look closely at changes of dynamics.
- When adding the second part, watch the balance and place pupils where they can hear each other sing and where they are adjacent to others singing the same part.

- how to play instrumental accompaniments
- Teach the rhythmical accompaniments by rote. Select children to play these parts.
- Teach the pitched percussion parts by rote to selected children.
- Discuss the different types of beater for xylophone and glockenspiel, with a view to achieving a good balance between singers and players.

- sing songs written in two parts, maintaining their own parts confidently

- It is not necessary to use all the instruments scored in this piece. The intention is to select appropriate players who may learn orchestral instruments as well as the tuned and untuned instruments found in every school. Make sure players tune their instruments before starting.
- Check tuned instruments have the correct notes attached, that is, check the B and F bars. Ensure pupils are sitting, kneeling or standing in a position where they can play the instruments without undue strain.

- how to practise and rehearse individually and as a class
- Practise those parts that are not correct separately and then put them together in the whole performance.
- When words and notes are secure, decide on the position of performers. *Can everyone see the conductor? Can all the performers be seen? Can you perform without copies? Do you know when to come in? Can you follow directions such as sitting or standing quickly and effectively?*
- Discuss how movement and gesture might enhance the performance.

- play accompaniments with control and accuracy, using notations as a support

- It is helpful to plan rehearsal time carefully; too much leaves pupils bored and unmotivated and the performance loses its freshness; too little and a quality performance cannot be achieved.

- about presenting performances to different audiences
- Help pupils to understand how different venues and occasions affect presentation. Some issues to discuss may be: *What kind of dress code would be appropriate? eg school uniform, concert dress, costume. How do you walk on and off the stage or performance area? Are you standing with good balance and deportment? How does the piece begin? Is there a silence before the music begins and after the end? How shall we acknowledge applause, that is, take a bow? Are you maintaining your focus (concentration and commitment) throughout the performance, including the introduction and rest bars? How will the song sound in the performance space?*

- present performances effectively with awareness of audience, venue and occasion

- This discussion should draw upon all previous work on how music reflects time and place. Consider the acoustics of the place in which the music is to be performed, eg *large ‘echoey’ spaces will need the words to be kept short, with very clear diction; smaller ‘dead’ spaces will allow more flowing sounds to be used, with open sung sounds made as full as possible.*

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

- how to achieve a high quality performance that creates the intended effect
- Look again at the text from *Macbeth*. Use the witches’ words to compose rhythmic patterns and chants. How could these be used with the unvoiced sounds to build a composition that creates a feeling of suspense? Try linking this to the song – it could be as an introduction – or you could add whispers and chants to the instrumental sections.
- Rehearse the whole performance and work to improve individual parts and the whole ensemble.

- contribute to a class performance and help achieve a high quality performance

- The main aim is to produce a performance that is of the highest quality achievable by the class. The children will need to be challenged and helped to see how improvements can be made. The use of a tape recorder can be helpful. Make the recording exercise into an important part of the unit. Set it up as a professional recording – make sure there is complete silence before and after the music is sung and played. Give a silent count into the song. In the recording studio a red light is used to show when everyone has to be absolutely silent. Some recordings require a large number of ‘takes’ to get them right.

EXTENSION AND FUTURE LEARNING

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

- use the instrumental parts and vocal harmony as a starting point for further development, improvising or creating other parts
- examine themes from *Macbeth* such as ambition, greed and envy, discuss guilt and how individuals react
- look at other text from *Macbeth*. How does Shakespeare use rhyme? Memorise the witches' chant

ENRICHMENT

- Children could do further work based on Shakespeare's plays.
- Children could visit the theatre to see what happens backstage.
- Children could participate in an opera company's workshop programme.

