

Unit 4 Feel the pulse

Exploring pulse and rhythm

ABOUT THE UNIT

This unit develops children's ability to recognise the difference between pulse and rhythm and to perform with a sense of pulse.

During this unit, children use songs and activities to develop confidence in singing and playing to a common pulse. They respond to and explore changes of speed (tempo) and repeat and create simple rhythmic phrases. They use these skills to create an accompaniment for a song or chant. This unit should be revisited during the key stage as many times as needed to ensure that all, or at least the great majority, of the class have achieved the expectation.

WHERE THE UNIT FITS IN

This unit links to the ongoing unit (unit 1) by developing a sense of pulse and reinforcing and extending understanding of rhythm. Teachers are advised to include those activities concerned with pulse and rhythm which are described in unit 1. This unit also builds on unit 3 and leads to unit 10.

The unit links to work in physical education in dance. It also has a direct link to English in identifying syllables in words and composing sound patterns. It provides an opportunity to learn information through chants, *eg the months of the year*. This unit also develops children's ability to work together with concentration and awareness of others, and links to PSHE.

PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if children and teachers have:

- moved and danced to music with a strong pulse and a variety of rhythmic styles
- learnt to recognise different speeds (tempo) in music
- explored how words have a different number of syllables
- developed skills through the activities described in unit 3

VOCABULARY

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

- duration, *eg long, short, pulse, beat, rhythm*
- tempo, *eg fast, slow*
- dynamics, *eg loud, quiet*
- structure, *eg phrase*

RESOURCES

Stimulus:

- songs and chants

Sound sources:

- body percussion sounds, *eg clapping, hands on knees, untuned classroom percussion instruments*

EXPECTATIONS

at the end of this unit

most children will:

identify pulse in music; repeat and create short rhythmic phrases confidently

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

recognise and respond to changes in tempo (speed of the pulse)

some children will have progressed further and will:

create and control rhythmic patterns with a strong sense of pulse; set a tempo for others to follow

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS PULSE?

- what is meant by pulse or steady beat
- Listen to some recorded music which has a strong pulse and ask the children to tap their knees in time with it. Everyone should be tapping at the same time. Establish whether to clap a fast or slow pulse. Listen to some music which does not have a strong pulse.
- Talk about the pulse in our body and how it makes a regular pattern. Talk about how it gets faster and slower.
- Sing some songs with a strong pulse, eg The grand old Duke of York, Here we go round the mulberry bush, Pop goes the weasel, and tap, clap or walk the beats as you sing. *What is the effect of this strong pulse? Does it make you want to move or sit still?*

- identify the pulse in different pieces of music

- Use music which has contrasting tempi (speeds), eg Bach's Air from Suite No. 3 in G and Winter from Vivaldi's Four seasons.
- The children might not always clap the same pulse, eg in The grand old Duke of York, the children would probably clap the quick pulse, that is, on the words grand/duke/York. They might, however, clap on a slower pulse, eg on the words 'grand' and 'York'. At this stage it is advisable to encourage children to clap the same pulse or beat.
- Always encourage children to respond physically, using movement and dance to reinforce the enjoyment of music and the sense of pulse.

EXPLORATION

- how to control a pulse
- Can you think of some songs with a fast speed or tempo? What sort of songs would have a slow tempo? Try singing a few songs at an unsuitable tempo, eg sing The grand old Duke of York very slowly, and Rock a bye baby very quickly.
- The pulse of music can speed up and slow down for special effect, eg the last verse of My grandfather's clock could get slower and slower as the clock stops ticking. Music often slows down at the end.
- Ask the children to 'catch' the speed/tempo set by the teacher. Tap a steady pulse on both knees and after about eight taps, nod at the children to indicate that they can join in. They should stop when you stop. Try again at a faster or slower tempo.
- Ask the children to watch and copy you carefully. Start by tapping a steady pulse on both knees. When everyone is joining in, either slow down or speed up. Ask the children not to 'run away with' the beat as it gets faster.

- identify the pulse and join in getting faster and slower together

- Use both the words 'speed' and 'tempo' – the children will soon realise they mean the same thing.
- **Extension activity:** Identify the stronger beats in music (that is, where the beats are grouped into a pattern of strong and weak beats – the 'metre'), eg a waltz has a three-beat pattern (strong, weak, weak), a march has a two- (strong, weak) or four-beat (strong, weak, medium, weak) pattern.

- what is meant by rhythm
- Choose one of the songs to which the children have already tapped, clapped or walked the pulse. Explain that this time the children are going to clap the *rhythm* of the words, that is, one clap for each word, or each part of a word (syllable). Give the children a strong lead as you clap the rhythm together. Keep the clapping light. Sing as you clap.
- Tap the rhythm of well-known chants and songs. Invite the children to guess the chants/songs.
- Divide the class into two groups. One group claps and chants or sings the rhythm of the first line of a well-known chant or song then stops. The other group takes over without a break and claps the rhythm of the second line, and so on until the end. Try with a different group for each line of the chant or song. Try without chanting or singing.

- identify the rhythm of the words

- Keyboards could be used to illustrate different rhythmic styles, eg salsa, bossa nova. These could be used to accompany the rhythmic patterns created by the class.

- how to combine pulse and rhythm
- Stand a child at the back of the group and ask him/her to tap the pulse on a tambourine or tambor while everyone else claps a rhythm. Encourage the children to listen out for the pulse. *Is it sometimes the same as the rhythm? When is the rhythm faster or slower?* Try again with half the class tapping the pulse on their thighs, and the other clapping the rhythm.

- perform rhythm to a given pulse

- **Extension activity:** Ask the children to mark the pulse with their feet and clap or tap the rhythm with their hands at the same time.

- how to recall and copy rhythmic patterns
- 'Copy cats': Clap or tap a rhythmic pattern which is echoed by the children. This is immediately followed by a new pattern. The activity continues to a steady pulse. Repeat any patterns that the children find difficult to copy.
- 'Pass the tambourine': Sit in a circle. The teacher has one tambourine and another is passed quietly around the circle to a steady pulse. A thrown dice determines the number of times the instrument is passed. Set a slow tempo and ask the children to chant the numbers in time with pulse. Whoever is holding the tambourine on the final number copies a short rhythmic pattern tapped by the teacher.
- Ask the children to copy a leader as he/she claps and chants the names of classes, teachers, football teams, food, etc. Controlled by a steady pulse, chant and clap or tap the rhythm of all the days of the week, months of the year and seasons. Chant and clap instructions, greetings, farewells, playground chants, eg What's the time Mr Wolf?

- recall and perform rhythmic patterns to a steady pulse

- When playing 'Copy cats' and 'Pass the tambourine', the leader should make each rhythmic pattern fit in with four beats. This could include claps on the beat, slower claps lasting for two or more beats, claps which are faster than the beat. The rhythmic patterns will be made up of combinations of these, eg

1 2 3 4 1 (2) 3 (4) 1 2+ 3 4 1 (2) (3) (4)

(Saying 'and' after a number, eg 2+, helps to reinforce the subdivision of the beat into half beats.)

- how to create rhythmic patterns based on words and phrases
- Ask children, one at a time, to think of a word or a phrase, to keep it in their heads, then clap its rhythm. Check the rhythm against the spoken word. Repeat four times. The rest of the children should be thinking (but not saying out loud) the words on which the rhythm is based.
- Sit in a circle and ask the children to clap the rhythm of the days of the week or months of the year in sequence, one at a time. There should be no speaking. Try more slowly or more quickly.

- begin to internalise and create rhythmic patterns

- The final stage for key stage 1 pupils is to make up short rhythmic patterns in the abstract – that is, without the help of words. This will only be achieved after a lot of practice.
- When chanting help the class keep to a steady beat.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

CHILDREN

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: CAN WE USE PULSE AND RHYTHM TO MAKE ACCOMPANIMENTS?

- to use pulse and rhythm to create an accompaniment for a chant or song
 - Teach the children a chant, eg *Mrs White had a fright, in the middle of the night*; or a simple song. Accompany the chanted rhythm with clapping. Transfer the rhythm to an untuned percussion instrument, eg *woodblock*, and use it to accompany the chanting. Add the pulse on another instrument. *How can we make the performance more effective?* Experiment with different tempi, voices, dynamics and instruments. Add a few sound effects, eg *spooky sound for Mrs White*.
 - Help the children to plan a performance of the chant or song. Rehearse an extended version, eg *first play four steady beats on an unpitched instrument, then chant/sing once through accompanied by the pulse. Keep the pulse going and clap the rhythm of the words without chanting/singing. Finally, combine pulse, clapped rhythms and chanting/singing.*
- accompany a chant or song by clapping or playing the pulse or rhythm
 - Choose a word phrase from the chant or song and use the rhythm created by the words as an accompaniment. A few children can chant it quietly while the others chant or sing the whole song. It could be played quietly on one or more unpitched instruments. This is called rhythmic ostinato. Try with another phrase from the chant or song.
 - Note those children who find pulse difficult and look to reinforce their understanding of it in future work.

EXTENSION AND FUTURE LEARNING

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

- play and make up longer rhythmic patterns
- use symbols that define the different lengths of the sounds used in the pattern
- watch musicals, eg *Grease*, *West side story*, and identify how the dances match the music
- create dances that explore and use different rhythmic patterns in sequence and together, eg *folk dance patterns*
- celebrate their work in this unit by creating a class performance containing different rhythmic patterns. This could be extended into a whole school performance bringing together the different class compositions

When this unit is repeated, which should occur at least once, the focus will remain the same, that is, understanding pulse and rhythm, but the content and expectations should change. Content is changed easily through use of different examples of music. Expectations are changed by expecting more to achieve the 'most children' and 'some children will have progressed further' statements and by placing a greater emphasis on the extension examples in 'Points to note'.

ENRICHMENT

- The school could link up with a local dance school, dance group, folk dance group or youth theatre, and devise some collaborative work focusing on dance patterns/steps.
- African musicians and dancers could be invited to present a performance to the class, school or community.

GLOSSARY

Pulse: A regular pattern that can be felt constantly throughout much music. It can change speed.

Beat: As for pulse. The words pulse and beat are generally used in the same way. However, beat tends to be used to describe the way pulse is used in music – some beats are stronger than others. The pattern of stronger and weaker beats is what makes a waltz (with three beats – strong, weak, weak) sound different to a march (with two beats – strong, weak, or four beats – strong, weak, medium, weak).

Rhythm: A sequence of shorter and longer sounds that can fit to a steady beat.

Chant: Words spoken to a steady beat.

Metre: The grouping of beats into stronger and weaker beats.

