

Composing with Rhythm

Children experience a wide range of musical activities through the three strands of the Music curriculum. An integral part of these activities is the exploration of sounds of different duration and the notion of rhythm patterns. Children are exposed to rhythm patterns aurally in the initial stages as they are involved in singing, playing and listening activities.

They are given opportunities to explore them in written or notated form at a later stage.

The Literacy strand aims to enable children identify and perform familiar rhythm patterns from infant classes onwards. They do this using voice, instruments and body percussion. All of these activities form the basis from which children will improvise and create, using rhythm.

The Composing strand aims to enable children *'to recall, answer and invent rhythm patterns (and melodic), using voices, body percussion and instruments'*.

1. Word Syllables:

Using syllables of words and themes can be an ideal way to develop rhythmic awareness. Themes can be drawn from any number of sources: e.g. names of children, place names, food, models of cars, football teams or any subject topic being currently explored.

Once the theme has been selected, children choose words or phrases with one, two, three or four syllables.

Try some of these:

Topic	Suggested words
Food	Bur-ger pizz-a cheese chips mac-a-ro-ni
Children's names	John Mark Ver-on-i-ca Trac-ey
Animals	Cat rabb-it pol-ar bear
Drinks	Tea coff-ee lem-on-ade co-ca co-la
Football teams	Liv-er-pool Chel-sea Nott-ing-ham
Insects	Ant bee-tle spi-der cat-er-pill-ar
Jungle	Mon-key tree co-co-nut
Pirates	Rum pir-ate treas-ure map long john sil-ver

The syllables of words are used to 'hang' the pattern on and say mentally when making the rhythm pattern. Pictures can be arranged and used to assist in this or children may notate the syllables/pattern, using stick or standard notation.

Once the words or phrases have been chosen, sequences of these can be put together to make rhythmic patterns. A four beat structure is easiest to build on in the beginning, but other variations in three and five can be explored at a later date.

Some options for performance:

- Clap the pattern
- Play the pattern using one aspect of body percussion eg slapping
- Choose an aspect of body percussion for each word eg Clap on train; click, click on engine
- Transfer on to percussion instruments- using one type of instrument of different instruments for different words
- Try playing the sequences on junk materials/instruments
- Transfer on to melodic instruments or tuned percussion (eg chime bars) and create a tune
- Introduce a transition between lines or verses.
- Individuals may perform a given line or the group may perform together.
- Lines may be varied by adding rests or lines could be repeated
- The elements of music can be explored for example changing the dynamics (loud and soft), the vocal range (high and low voices) or changing the tempo (speed).
- The grid can be read from back to front or from top to bottom.
- Children can experiment playing two lines simultaneously.
- Use the patterns to introduce call and answer patterns
- Experiment with lengthening or shortening the notes
- Investigate putting rhythm and melody together

The compositions may be recorded in different ways. Examples of some grids are shown below:

(See PPDS website- [Grids for Compositions](#))

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Experiment with other grids eg a 3X4 grid for ¾ time

2. Using phrases or sayings

In a similar way, phrases or sayings could be used to create rhythm patterns.

Take a theme e.g. 'food'. Discuss with children e.g. – their favourite dinner. Children must think of phrases on the theme. Here are some examples: 'Pizza and chips'; 'Chicken curry and fried rice'; 'Spaghetti bolognaise and garlic bread'. These phrases could form the basis of a class, group or individual composition. Some approaches may include:

- Chanting the phrases one after the other, experimenting with different sequences
- Chanting the phrases simultaneously, exploring different textures
- Playing the rhythms of the phrases on groups of instruments
- Transferring the rhythms on to junk instruments
- Playing the patterns using body percussion
- Exploring combinations of any of these to a different tempo or dynamic

3. Using rhymes/poems

Eg Juba

Juba this, Juba that, Juba saw a yellow cat Juba up and Juba down Juba running all around
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An approach may be to.....

- Ask the children to listen to the poem in order to count the number of times that the name 'Juba' is used (6)
- Suggest that they substitute some body percussion for the two syllables of 'Juba' , eg stamp, stamp.
- Ask for suggestions to replace other words with body percussions.
- Continue with all the words until the full rhyme can be done using body percussion
- Perform this as a class
- Invite the children to create their own body percussion to the rhyme, individually or in groups
- Play the patterns on percussion or melodic instruments

4. Experiment with combinations of notes (stick or standard notation) within a 4 beat structure

(See PPDS Website- Video on Composing with Seniors for examples of this)