

# Let's Compose

Strand: composing

Strand Units: improvising and creating; talking about and recording compositions

**C**omposing develops the child's creativity and uniqueness, and also deepens his or her understanding of music. In the strand unit *Improvising and creating*, the child selects and organises sounds from the range of sounds available. These sounds may be vocal, body percussion (eg clapping, stamping, clicking), environmental (using everyday objects to create the desired sound effect) and instrumental (usually classroom percussion instruments).

**Experimentation:** The child experiments with different sound effects and sound sequences, until

s/he comes up with an arrangement that satisfies him/her. While s/he is doing this, s/he is engaging with the strand unit *Exploring sound*.

**Performance:** After some rehearsal, the child may be ready to perform the new composition; (Strand unit: *Performing*).

**Discussion:** After performing the composition, the child is encouraged to talk about his/her work, to say what worked well, and how it might be improved. (Strand unit: *Talking about and recording compositions*).

**Recording:** The work may then

be recorded in some manner, so that the child can re-visit it in the future. The recording may be done just by making a visual map of the music, as in a graphic score, or it may be recorded digitally. (Strand unit: *Talking about and recording compositions*). Thus we can see the integrated and interrelated nature of the Music curriculum.

#### Use of Stimulus

As with other creative activities, the use of a stimulus to generate the composition is very useful. The stimulus can be anything that will stimulate the child to manipulate sound, for example, a poem, a story, a song, a picture, a piece of music, a sound. Using a poem

#### Noises in the Night

(Lilian McCrea)

When I'm in bed at night,  
All tucked up warm  
and tight,  
All kinds of noises  
Go in at my two ears.  
Brr... go the motor cars  
Out in the street.  
Whirr... sings the wind.  
Ting-a-ling-ling  
Ring the bicycle bells  
And ding-dong, ding-dong  
Sings the Grandfather clock  
downstairs.  
Then I hear nothing –  
nothing at all,  
Because I'm asleep, sound  
asleep.

*Mutter Henne?* by Lilian McCrea  
and Edda Reinl,

©1987 NordSüd Verlag AG,  
Gossau/Zürich/Schweiz

**Strand unit**

**Exploring sound**

**Curriculum Objective**

- Discover ways of making sounds using body percussion, in pairs and small groups.
- Explore ways of making sounds using manufactured and home-made instruments.
- Explore how the tone colours of suitable instruments can suggest various sounds and sound pictures.

**Listening and responding to music**

- Describe initial reaction to, or feelings about, his/her compositions and the compositions of others, giving preferences.

**Playing instruments**

- Discover different ways of playing percussion and melodic instruments.

**Improvising and creating**

- Select different kinds of sounds (voice, body percussion, untuned and tuned percussion, simple melodic instruments, electronic instruments) to portray a character, a sequence of events or an atmosphere in sound stories.

**Talking about and recording compositions**

- Describe and discuss his/her work and the work of other children.
- Devise and use graphic symbols and/or use standard notation to record simple musical patterns and inventions.
- Record compositions on electronic media.

**The Lesson**

The teacher asks the class to imagine they are in bed. It's night, and the room is dark. What sounds can they hear? Get the children to close their eyes, really concentrate and hear the sounds internally. After a few moments, take feedback on the sounds they 'heard'. Then read the poem to the class. Ask them to try to 'hear' the sounds mentioned in the poem. Encourage a brief discussion on the poem, and list the sounds described.

Next tell the children that they are going to make a little soundscape or sound picture in response to the poem. A soundscape could be described as a painting with sound. Depending on the age of the children and their prior experience in composition and collaborative work, they may work in pairs or in groups – the teacher is the best judge of this.

Tell the children that they may use any kind of sounds in their sound picture – vocal sounds, sounds made with their hands and feet (body percussion), sounds made with objects in the classroom (environmental sounds) and the instruments that are available in the classroom.

The teacher then circulates among the children, encouraging, questioning, and prompting them. Finally, they are encouraged to perform their little pieces. Younger children may come up with compositions that are just ten or twenty seconds long, and this is very appropriate. Older or more experienced children could be encouraged to extend their pieces by making them a little longer, by

repeating certain sections, or by creating a contrasting part.

**Reflection**

It may be useful to treat composing as you would a writing activity. When the children come up with the first draft, ie, the first composition, encourage them to talk about it, and to suggest how it might be improved. Tell the children that they are going to re-visit the piece on a different occasion. How will they remember their composition? Will they make a picture of it – a graphic score? Will they make a digital recording? (Strand unit: *Talking about and recording compositions*). When the children re-visit the piece, encourage them to improve it as much as possible – the re-drafting

**Class Suitability**

The above activity could be adjusted to suit any class in the primary school, and it is also very suitable for a multi-class situation. All children can participate regardless of ability, as the stimulus and the lesson outline will remain the same but will vary with the response of the children. The teacher is the person best positioned to tailor it to the needs of his/her particular situation. Infants might be asked to make just one of the sounds mentioned in the poem, children from middle classes might be asked to work in pairs to make a little sound picture which incorporates three of the sounds mentioned in the poem, while children from senior classes might be asked to work in small groups devise a composition one minute in length, which includes some of the sounds from the poem, as well as other sounds they consider could be heard at night.

For example, this activity would address all of the following objectives of the music curriculum for third and fourth classes:

**Extension Work**

There are lots of other poems which could be used as a stimulus for composing in the above manner. You may also like your local Music Cuiditheoir to visit your school. S/he is available to give you lists of suitable resources, to support you in classroom or school planning, or to teach a demonstration lesson in your class. To request a visit from a Music Cuiditheoir, contact your local Education Centre. You will also find other useful music-making ideas on our website, [www.pfsp.ie](http://www.pfsp.ie).

**This article was written by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme Science team. Visit their website [www.pfsp.ie](http://www.pfsp.ie) for further ideas on music.**



process. Various shorter pieces could be put together to come up with a class composition, which could then be rehearsed, and performed for another class. The possibilities are endless.