

Exploring Sound Instruments

Ideas and activities for exploring instrumental sounds for all classes

Strand : Listening and responding

Strand unit: Exploring sounds

Exploring sounds involves listening to and creating sounds from a wide variety of sources using

- the environment
- the voice
- the body
- **instruments**

This document will suggest some activities which can be used to explore instrumental sounds across all classes. Suggestions for linkage and integration will also be made where appropriate.

The language used in the objectives for exploring sound asks children to

- Identify/recognise
- Explore / Experiment
- Describe sounds using: language, movement symbols (pictures, drawings, notation)
- Investigate sound makers
- Investigate musical concepts (loud, long, quiet etc)
- Discover
- Make

Exploring sound is a prerequisite for Composing. In the composing strand, children are asked to select sounds from variety of sources for a range of musical purposes. Children who have experienced lots of activities in exploring sound will find it much easier to use a variety of sounds in their compositions.

It is important that teachers emphasise the importance of handling the instruments with care. Establishing signals for **Start** and **Stop** and for playing loudly and quietly is also important.

The **Music teacher guidelines** has useful information about the names of common percussion instruments and how to play them on pages 132 – 136.



Infant classes

Objective Explore ways of making sounds using manufactured and home-made instruments

manufactured

triangle, tambourine, drum, chime bars, xylophone

home-made instruments

shakers, metal or wooden objects

Activity Choose an instrument song

Sung to the tune of London Bridge is falling down

This song can become a game. Children sit in a circle and pass a beater or beanbag around while singing the song. The beater is passed on the pulse on the song. The child holding the beater at the end of the song chooses an instrument for him/her self. Name the instrument for the child and discuss the kind of sound it makes. The last verse can be sung to put the instruments away carefully.

Chose an instrument you can play.

You can play, you can play.

Chose an instrument you can play.

What's your favourite ?

You can play the Tambourine (triangle, wood block, shaker, sleigh bells etc)

Tambourine, Tambourine

You can play the Tambourine

That's my favourite.

Put the tambourine (name other instrument) in the box,

In the box, in the box.

Put the tambourine in the box,

Nice and gently

Activity Play and Stop

Use the same song as the activity above to teach playing and stopping. When all of the children have an instrument, they must play and stop as the song suggests.

You can play and you can stop
 You can play, You can stop
 You can play and you can stop
 Play and STOP

Activity Make simple shakers

Children in infant classes can make simple shakers with a variety of materials.

Use a variety of different fillings e.g. salt, sugar, dried peas/lentils, popcorn seeds, pebbles etc. to fill a variety of containers e.g. vitamin pill jars, hot chocolate/ "Bisto" containers, plastic kinder eggs, yoghurt drink bottles, camera film holders etc. It is wise to tape the lids with masking tape or sellotape so that inquisitive fingers do not open them once they have been made.

Further activities:

- Investigate all of the sounds that can be made with the shakers, rolling them, tapping them, loud / quiet sounds and long / short sounds.
- Compare the sounds that different containers make.
- Try to find the shakers that sound the same.
- Decorate the shakers with stickers, glitter, coloured tape or paint.

Objective Experiment with a variety of techniques using manufactured and homemade instruments

different ways of making sounds with a drum: using a variety of beaters; striking loudly, softly; playing different parts of the drum (e.g. rim, centre, side).

Activity Shakers, strikers, scrapers

The teacher uses three large hoola hoops and three name cards – shakers, scrapers and strikers. Children play their instruments (both manufactured and homemade) and decide which group their instrument belongs to. They place their instrument in the hoop.

Some children may notice that you can play the instrument a few ways – for example: a tambourine can be struck and shaken – therefore it can belong to two categories. The hoops can be overlapped like a Venn diagram.

Variations

- Classify the instruments according to materials – wood, metal, skin
- Classify the instruments according to sound – long, short, medium
- Classify the instruments according to timbre – gentle, rough

First and Second Class

Objective Explore ways of making sounds using manufactured and home-made instruments

manufactured

triangle, tambourine, drum, jingle stick

home-made

shakers, metal or wooden objects, fibres

striking or shaking in a variety of ways

Activity What's in the box?

The teacher places a variety of instruments in a bag or box. He / she then plays one instrument. The children try to guess

- which instrument it is
- How it was played (shaken, struck, scraped)
- What the instrument was made from (metal, plastic, wood, skin)

This activity could also be done with a screen to hide the instruments and the children can take turns to be the person who plays the instrument.

Activity The Chain Game

This is a game that requires lots of concentration and listening skills. The children sit in a circle with a percussion instrument each. In turn, they each make one sound with their instrument but they do not play until the sound of the previous instrument has totally faded. This is particularly effective with metal instruments such as triangles, chime bars, metal agogo etc...

Variations:

- Find an unusual way to play your instrument
- One person stands in the centre of the circle with a cymbal – they play the cymbal and point to someone else who must play before the sound of the cymbal dies away

Activity Make a Shaker -

See the **Make simple shakers** activity above and experiment with a wider variety of fillings – pasta, rice, shells, metal objects – such as tacks or nails.

Activity Make a Scraper

Guiro Use any empty plastic bottle with a ridged surface (e.g. cooking oil). Remove label, soak to remove any residue and play by scraping with a dowel. The bottle can be decorated with stickers, tape, glitter etc.

Sand blocks Cut out two pieces of sandpaper and super-glue onto wooden blocks. Play by scraping one off the other. You can try different types of sandpaper (coarse, fine etc.) to explore different sounds.

Activity Listen to the East

The children chant the rhyme below. The teacher plays an instrument while the children have their eyes closed and identify the instrument and say how it is being played.

Listen to the east.....

Listen to the west.....

Listen to the sound and play the listening test

Activity Can you play it another way?

When the children have been taught the correct way to play the instruments they can experiment with other ways to play the instruments and other ways to make sounds.

Objective Explore how the sounds of different instruments can suggest various sounds and sound pictures

rustling paper to represent leaves in the wind

coconut halves to represent galloping horses.

Activity Sounds with instruments only

Encourage the children to experiment with instruments to describe various scenes. They may be tempted to use body percussion or vocal sounds but challenge them just to use the instruments. Some sound scenes:

- Wind
- Leaves
- Snow falling
- Bonfires crackling
- The sea
- Rain
- A chick hatching
- Hammering
- Building
- Galloping horses
- Thunder
- Machines

Third and Fourth Classes

Objective Explore ways of making sounds using manufactured and home-made instruments

manufactured untuned percussion instruments

drum, jingle stick, triangle

manufactured tuned percussion instruments

chime bar, xylophone

melodic instruments

tin whistle, recorder

home-made

shakers, metal or wooden objects, fibres, beads, pipes, comb-and-paper kazoo

blowing, striking or shaking in a variety of ways

Activity Play and Pass

The teacher counts and plays a pulse for 8 beats on an instrument with a strong clear sound (such as the tambour). When the teacher has played the introductory 8 beats each child plays his/her instrument for eight beats. Each child then passes on his/her instrument to the child on his/her left while the teacher plays another 8 beats. Each child now has a new instrument on which they play the next 8 beats. The teacher counts and plays another 8 beats while the child passes his/her instrument to the left and take a new instrument from the child on his/her right. Repeat this as many times as you wish.

As well as being useful for exploring the percussion instruments, this activity also helps the children to internalise a sense of pulse.

Activity Make more shakers and scrapers

Make the **shakers and scrapers** suggested above and try these new ideas.

Rainstick- Use the cardboard tubing from a roll of tinfoil/ kitchen roll/ wrapping paper. Pierce hairgrips in through the cardboard all along the length of the tube. Paint and decorate the tube. When dry cover the protruding edges of the hairgrips with coloured/masking tape.

Explore Seamus Heaney's poem The Rainstick with the class

The Rain Stick

by Seamus Heaney, The Spirit Level

Upend the rain stick and what happens next
Is a music that you never would have known
To listen for. In a cactus stalk

Downpour, sluice-rush, spillage and backwash
Come flowing through. You stand there like a pipe
Being played by water, you shake it again lightly

And diminuendo runs through all its scales
Like a gutter stopping trickling. And now here comes
A sprinkle of drops out of the freshened leaves,

Then subtle little wets off grass and daisies;
Then glitter-drizzle, almost-breaths of air.
Upend the stick again. What happens next

Is undiminished for having happened once,
Twice, ten, a thousand times before.
Who cares if all the music that transpires

Is the fall of grit or dry seeds through a cactus?
You are like a rich man entering heaven
Through the ear of a raindrop. Listen now again.

Jingle Sticks - Items such as keys or buttons can be threaded onto piece of fishing gut/string.
Alternatively old metal bottle tops can be threaded onto wire from a wire clothes hanger (this activity requires holes to be pierced in the bottle tops by an adult).

Activity Make a Comb Harmonica or Kazoo

Fold a small piece of tracing or tissue paper in half and place over the teeth of a small comb. Hold the comb and tissue paper against your lips and hum a tune.

Activity Can you play it another way? - extended

Try the **Can you play it another way?** activity above with a wider variety of instruments.

Objective Explore how the tone colours of suitable instruments can suggest various sounds and sound pictures

tin whistle to depict twittering birds

swanee whistle to depict falling or sliding

tuned percussion, such as a glockenspiel, to represent raindrops

Activity

Try the **Sounds with instruments only** activity above with a wider variety of sounds

Activity Sound a Poem The Sound collector – by Roger Mc Gough

A stranger called this morning
Dressed all in black and grey
Put every sound into a bag
And carried them away

The whistling of the kettle
The turning of the lock
The purring of the kitten
The ticking of the clock

The popping of the toaster
The crunching of the flakes
When you spread the marmalade
The scraping noise it makes

The hissing of the frying-pan
The ticking of the grill
The bubbling of the bathtub
As it starts to fill

The drumming of the raindrops
On the window-pane
When you do the washing-up
The gurgle of the drain

The crying of the baby
The squeaking of the chair
The swishing of the curtain
The creaking of the stair

A stranger called this morning

He didn't leave his name

Left us only silence

Life will never be the same.

Roger Mc Gough

Children should read the poem and perform it with sounds using only percussion instruments (manufactured or homemade) at the end of each verse.

Other suitable poems with sound possibilities could be performed. This activity could easily be extended to create a composing lesson with graphic symbols to record different line of the poems.

Other suitable poems might include:

- Kitchen Sounds Richard James
- Metal Fettle John Rice
- Storm Sounds
- Weather is full of the nicest sounds

<http://www.amaranthia.com/modules/news/article.php?storyid=22>

Objective	Explore ways of making sounds using manufactured and home-made instruments <i>manufactured untuned percussion instruments</i> <i>drum, jingle stick, triangle</i> <i>tuned percussion</i> <i>chime bar, xylophone</i> <i>melodic instruments</i> <i>tin whistle, recorder, guitar, keyboard, violin</i> <i>home-made instruments</i> <i>shakers, metal or wooden objects, fibres, beads, pipes, comb-and-paper kazoos</i> <i>wobble boards, drums made with rubber tyre tubing stretched over a tin</i> <i>stringed instruments made with rubber bands stretched over a box shape</i> <i>blowing, plucking, striking or shaking in a variety of ways and with a variety of tools</i> <i>releasing air slowly out of a balloon</i> <i>striking or blowing across the top of a bottle partly filled with water, varying the amount</i> <i>exploring the inside of a piano, guitar, violin, accordion</i>
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Activity Make more shakers and scrapers

Make the **shakers and scrapers** suggested for other class levels.

Activity Make some Strikers

Bottle Boomwhackers Use two or three empty plastic mineral bottles of different size/shape and discover the different pitches they produce when you whack them off something!

Drum - Stretch a piece of material/plastic bag /balloon over a container and attach with tape and/or super glue. Play using hands or dowel.

Bottle Xylophone – Obtain several identical empty bottles. Remove the labels from the bottles. Place the bottles in a line. Fill each bottle with a different amount of water. Tap each bottle with a spoon and listen to the pitch of the note produced. Experiment with different levels of water in each bottle to see if you can arrange a scale of notes going from lowest to highest. Once you're satisfied with the notes, mark off the water level using the tape or marker. This will remind you how far to fill up the bottles later after water evaporates. Food colouring can be added to the water to create a different colour for each note. This will create a **rainbow piano**.



This activity can be expanded to allow children to play well known tunes or compose their own. They could record the notation using colours.

Activity Make some stringed instruments

Harp – Children thread different lengths of fishing gut diagonally across a shoe box. Play by plucking the strings.

Guitar - Place elastic bands (perhaps of different thickness) across the opening of an old tissue box. Play by strumming like a guitar. Children can paint and decorate their instruments when finished.

Activity Make some wind instruments

Tube trombone – Take 2 tubes of cardboard (from wrapping paper/ tin foil etc). One of the tubes should be narrow enough to fit inside the other. Tape a sheet of paper around the end of the bottom of the larger tube to create a “loud speaker”. Paint both tubes. Place the narrow tube inside the large one. Sing / talk through the tube. Notice what happens when you make the trombone longer by pulling narrow tube out a little more.

Straw Panpipes - Lay seven plastic drinking straws on a table, making the ends line up evenly. Space them apart so they are 1 to 2cm apart. Place a strip of coloured tape across the straws. Flip the straws over, and place another strip of tape across the other side, binding it to the first strip of tape. Holding a pair of scissors at an angle, cut across the straws to create a straight, diagonal line. Play them by blowing lightly into the edge of the straw.



Straw Oboe – Flatten about 2cm of the end of a drinking straw with your teeth and use scissors to cut off the flattened corners to make a point. Put about 2cm of the straw end in your mouth with your lips closed but a little loose. Blow hard into the straw. If there is no sound blow less until a sound is made. Notice what happens to the notes if the straw is made shorter by snipping a piece from the end of the straw.

Activity Bash the Trash website

<http://www.bashthetrash.com/> features an environmental Arts group who teach environmental awareness through the arts. They build and perform with instruments made from trash, create artworks from recycled and reused materials, and provide performances, residencies and other events.

Objective Explore how the tone colours of suitable instruments can suggest various sounds and sound pictures

wobble board to represent water or waves

shakers to represent hammering rain

glockenspiel to represent a dancing clown

violin to represent cats wailing

low notes on a piano to represent caves

keyboard or electronic sounds to represent moon walking.

Activity Try some of the **Sound a Poem** activities above

Activity Sound a story

Groups of children can work together to write their own stories with lots of sound possibilities. They can perform their stories for each other using manufactured and homemade instruments. Groups might swap stories to hear a different interpretation of their stories.

This activity can be expanded into a composing activity where the children might devise graphic scores for their stories or record the stories on electronic media.

Activity Stomp Video clips

Children in fifth and sixth class might like to see the following clips which feature rhythmic dance sequences exploring sounds,

http://www.lunchbox-productions.com/show_stomp/promos.shtm the video clips on this site feature the Stomp troupe from the UK making sequences with homemade percussion.

http://www.stomponline.com/pdf/study_guide.pdf is a free study guide with lesson ideas

Linkage

Exploring sounds – body percussion, vocal sounds, environmental sounds,

Composing Improvising and creating - using instruments both tuned and untuned in compositions
Recording compositions on electronic media

Performing Song singing – using instrumental sounds as an accompaniment or an ostinato
Literacy – creating sequences of instrumental sounds with a rhythm pattern
Playing instruments

Integration

English Oral language – developing competence in using oral language.

Poetry

Writing sound stories

Gaeilge Scéalta agus rannta le fuaimeanna

Science Energy and Forces – Sound

Geography Percussion instruments in other countries – African drums, Asian panpipes etc
Recycling and environmental care – making instruments from recycled material.

Spiral Nature of the Curriculum

The Irish Primary school curriculum is spiral in nature. By revisiting knowledge and ideas already acquired as the starting point for new learning, it allows for the coherent expansion of knowledge and the gradual refinement of concepts. Objectives and activities explored at a previous class level can be explored again in a more complex way at the next level.

