

The Lark Ascending by Ralph Vaughan Williams

Written by Lucy Drever

For:

- EYFS and Key Stage 1 in England and Wales
- Early years and P1-P4 in Scotland
- EYFS and Key Stage 1 in Northern Ireland

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Introduction

This BBC Ten Pieces resource is for KS1 teachers and support staff; it is a collection of ideas for you to adapt, explore and have fun with. Not only will it tick many of the learning requirements and goals, but the resource will give you and your children a fun insight into the world of classical music.

Give yourself the permission to be creative, to be musical (regardless of what you've been told, you are musical, it's not just about singing in tune!) and to have fun; whatever response you get from the children is brilliant. And the more confident the children see you in your exploration of this BBC Ten Piece, chances are they'll be more confident too!

The plan will look vastly different depending on the group of children you are working with, as well as the learning environment. The plans are suitable for free flow, small groups or whole classes. If you are working with a whole class, I'd suggest being in a circle. The plans will also work well if you're working with non-verbal children; music is a really safe place for all children to be creative in.

Whilst writing this resource I decided to stay away from weekly lessons that are built upon, as many KS1 settings I work in don't work in this way. I've therefore written six sessions, that can be done in any order, and should be repeated again and again...and again.

The last session is a documenting one- collect all the musical things you've explored, revisit activities, and listen to the piece again. This can be done alongside the other sessions, or at the end of your learning.

Have fun exploring these amazing pieces, and remember, when creating, there are no wrong answers!

Lucy Drever

Learning Outcomes

Learners will:

- Listen to a new piece of music and learn what a composer is
- Explore the difference between high pitch and low pitch
- Lead a musical activity
- Listen and identify sounds outside
- Mirror sounds they hear
- Link an instrument to a character
- Sing (whilst learning a new song)
- Suggest new lyrics
- Compose short pieces of music

In this plan there will be various activities that will help with:

- Listening
- Communication and language
- Personal, social and emotional development
- How and why questions
- Creating own stories and developing own narratives
- Singing

About the Lark Ascending

- Lark Ascending was written by the English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams
- He wrote it in 1914, but revised it to the version we know today in 1920
- It depicts a lark, flying up high above a field
- It was inspired by a poem with the same name by George Meredith

Adventure 1- High and Low Pitch

Goal- You will explore the difference between high pitch and low pitch.

Resources

- A cut out picture of a lark, or a bird soft toy that you have in your class.

Warm-up

Sing a song with actions that your class love to sing.

Can you sing it as if you're a grumpy giant?

Can you sing it as if you were a happy monkey?

"I wonder how else we can sing it?" Encourage your students to suggest how to sing it now!

Activity 1

Explain to your class that you are going **to listen to some of the Lark Ascending** by the English composer, Vaughan Williams. A composer is someone who writes music, and the music often tells a story.

Vaughan Williams was writing about a lark...does anyone know what a lark is? **Have a picture to show the children and discuss how the lark looks.**

Listen to the piece. If you're listening with older children you might want to listen to the full recording. **If you listen to a smaller section, I'd recommend 0-3.02.**

Stop the music occasionally and ask questions such as:

"What is the lark doing?"

"Is the lark happy or sad?"

"Is the lark flying high in the sky, or close to the ground?"

"Can you hear any other animals?"

Activity 2

Play a shorter section of music (0-1min) and encourage the children to **move around the space as if they are the lark flying high up in the sky.**

Stop the music and get everybody to freeze as a lark.

Start the music and get all your larks flying again!

Repeat.

Activity 3

Show the class your cut out of a lark, or the cuddly toy.

Explain that the lark can fly high in the sky (hold the bird up) and low (hold the bird by your feet).

Ask the children, **“I wonder how the bird would sound if it was flying high.”** Reflect the pitch of the question in your voice, i.e. this should be asked at the top of your register.

Encourage everyone to tweet (or whatever they suggest) very high in their voices.

Ask the children, **“I wonder how the bird would sound if it was flying low.”** Again, reflect the pitch of the question in your voice, i.e. this should be at the bottom of your register (like when you’ve just woken up on the morning!).

Encourage everyone to tweet very low in their voices.

Explain that pitch is the high and low of music, or the high and low in our voice.

Then, depending on what level you’re holding the bird, **encourage the children to follow with their voices.**

Once you feel they’ve got the hang, encourage them to still follow the level of the bird whilst you all fly about the space.

Pick a child to lead!

Warm-down

Sing the same song that you sang at the start. How else can you sing it?

Extension Activity

As well as exploring high and low pitch with Activity 3, you could also explore Loud and Quiet, Fast and Slow. Be really clear as to which one you are exploring!

Loud- hold the bird up high. Or have two birds- one big one and one small one. Hold the big one up!

Quiet- hold the bird low, or have two birds (as above) and hold the smaller one up

Fast- move quickly with the bird about the space

Slow- move slowly with the bird about the space

Adventure 2- What's outside?

Goal- Your class will listen to sounds from outside, make the sounds themselves and do some drawing depending on what they hear.

Warm-up

Sing a song you love to sing with your class.

How slowly can you all sing it?

How quickly can you all sing it?

Move around the space singing it slowly and quickly.

Activity 1

Listen to some of Lark Ascending. I'd recommend this section, 5.15- 6.24 (end).

Explain that Vaughan Williams is the composer, can anyone remember what a composer is? Can anybody remember what he was writing about? **Have your lark prop to hand!**

Activity 2

Explain that the composer was so inspired by the lark and the beautiful countryside around him that he wrote some music. Ask the children, **"I wonder what we can hear around us?"**.

Go to an outside space with your children; the playground, the garden, the park, your outdoor classroom space, whatever you have is great! If this isn't possible, encourage the children to think about what they heard on their way to your setting, or use props around your setting to make them think of outdoor noises e.g toy car, cuddly toys, toy trains, people figures.

Ask the children to listen really, really carefully. Take the lark with you and explain that she is listening too! What can they hear/ what do they think the lark can hear?

Depending on where you are, and what age of children you are working with, this is going to vary greatly- and that's brilliant.

Maybe you can hear another teacher teaching?

Maybe you can hear a school bell?

Or some cars?

I wonder if anyone else can hear some wind through the trees?

Or somebody yawning!

This exercise is about getting the children to really listen to what is going on around them!

Encourage the children to make the sound of the things they hear! For example;

- *Mimic the teacher teaching*
- *A loud DING or brrrrr (rolling tongue) for the bell*
- *A vrrrrroooooom for some cars etc.*

Find four sounds.

Activity 3

Explain to the children that you are going **to record your outdoor sounds on a tablet or smartphone**- you can record both the real sound and you all making the sound!

Record the sounds on your tablet and show the children them!

Warm down

Stay outside and sing a song that you all love singing together.

Extension Activity

Draw pictures of the things that were making the sounds or use playdough to make the things that were making the sounds.

Adventure 3- What other animals can we find?

Goal- *To use different instruments in relation to different animals. To recognise the different sounds of instruments.*

Resources

- A selection of instruments that you have around your setting.
- A piece of material (or a larger item of clothing).

If you don't have instruments, go looking around other classrooms if you're in a school, or get creative!

Some options include rice in empty plastic bottles, crumpled cellophane, saucepans and wooden spoons, plastic buckets and a stick to hit them with!

Warm-up

Sing any song with the children. Ask them, "I wonder if we can sing it as we fly about the room like a lark?".

Then sing it again asking things such as, "I wonder how it would sound if the lark were flying very slowly/ quickly?"

Activity 1

Listen to a small section of Lark Ascending (e.g. 0-1min). Can anyone remember what someone who writes music is called?

The solo instrument that is representing the lark is called the violin- Vaughan Williams is using this instrument to tell the story of the lark.

What do we think the lark is doing? Where could the lark be flying to?

Activity 2

Put a selection of four or five instruments underneath a piece of material. This could include a drum, a shaker, a tambourine, a triangle, a chime bar, a wooden block etc.

Ask one child to come and pick one instrument from underneath the material. Ask them to play the instrument. **Ask them what animal they think this sounds like,** or ask another child what they think. For example, if it's a shaker, maybe they think it's snake.

Encourage everyone to listen to how the child is playing the instrument, and get everyone moving as snakes around the space.

Repeat with another child picking another instrument. Maybe someone picks a drum and they think it sounds like an elephant...

Don't worry too much about the instrument actually sounding like the animal!

Recap each instrument and each animal.

Activity 3

Put all the instruments underneath the piece of material again.

Making sure the children can't see what instrument you are playing, **ask them to listen and then move around the space in the animal they think it is.** For example, if they hear the shaker, they are snakes, or if they hear a drum, they are an elephant (according to previous examples)!

Repeat as many times as you like. And then get some of your students to come up and play the instruments without the other children seeing.

Warm down

Can you sing the same song that you sang at the beginning, but this time like the animals you thought of? For example:

- *The snake could be slithering, so sing it really smoothly.*
- *The elephant could be slow and big, so sing it slowly in big voices.*

It'll really help if you move around the space like the animal!

Extension activity

Draw the animals.

Working individually, or in small groups, encourage the children to play you a snake song, or an elephant song using the instruments. There are no wrong answers, just see what the children come up with!

Adventure 4 - Lets do some singing

Goal- *To do some singing, and think of new words for a song.*

Warm-up

Play musical statues with The Lark Ascending. Encourage the children to move to how the music sounds i.e how the Lark is moving?

Activity 1

Sing this song (to the tune of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star);

*Larks are happy flying high,
Gliding through the bright blue sky
Singing sweetly lots of songs,
Singing sweetly all day long,
Larks are happy flying high,
Gliding through the bright blue sky!*

You can listen to an example of this on [The Lark Ascending page on the Ten Pieces website](#)

(Larks Are Happy...)

Sing the first line, and encourage your class to sing it back to you. Ask them to give you an action for this line!

Repeat for the rest of the lines, and then sing the whole song through a couple of times.

Don't worry about everyone singing the words exactly right! Actions will help and the more you go over it, the easier it will become.

If you're working with really young children, have some actions up your sleeve and don't worry about singing one line at a time, just sing the song a few times before the next step.

Activity 2

Ask the children, “I wonder how you would like to sing this song now?”

Here are some options:

- Loud
- Quiet
- Spikey
- Smooth
- Fast (Go as fast as you can!)
- Slow
- Like a giant
- Like a robot
- Like an animal
- Something linked to a topic you’ve been looking at

This will really help with the children getting comfortable with the words!

Activity 3

Play about with the words!

Use the words you’ve been singing as an outline, but now try changing them! For example, change the middle two lines...

How does the bird sound?

*Larks are happy flying high,
Gliding through the bright blue sky
Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet,
Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet,
Larks are happy flying high,
Gliding through the bright blue sky!*

Or, what are they eating?

*Larks are happy flying high,
Gliding through the bright blue sky
**Eating all the bugs around
From the trees and from the ground**
Larks are happy flying high,
Gliding through the bright blue sky!*

But remember, it doesn't need to rhyme and it doesn't even fit the exact tune, just add a couple more notes. For example, for what are they eating?

*Larks are happy flying high,
Gliding through the bright blue sky
Eating everything that they see
Drinking lots of water from the bird bath
Larks are happy flying high,
Gliding through the bright blue sky!*

[You can listen to an example of this on The Lark Ascending page on the Ten Pieces website \(Larks Are Happy \(own words\)\)](#)

Warm-down

Sing another song that you all like singing together- one with actions!

Extension activity

- *Use a different tune- why not try another nursery rhyme tune?*
- *Maybe you have some children who want to make up their own song about the lark? This often happens in free-flow, if possible make sure the lark prop is always out, and allow children to play with it...you never know what they'll start singing!*

Adventure 5- Create your own bird, and it's call!

Goal- To use our imaginations and draw pictures of new birds then use musical instruments to create what they sound like.

This activity is an art activity inspired by The Lark Ascending. Activity 2 and 3 can be done in a whole class circle time, but leave the instruments out after the circle time is finished so children can have the opportunity to explore the instruments.

Resources

- Drawing materials
- A selection of musical instruments

Activity 1

Encourage each child to draw, colour in, paint, decorate or make their own bird.

Activity 2

Ask each child how their bird might move. Can they show you?

Activity 3

Listen to a short extract of Lark Ascending. (e.g. 0-45 secs) Explain that the bird (which is being played by the solo violinist) is singing!

Lay a selection of instruments out. This activity works well with a set of chime bars, bells or glockenspiel/ xylophone. But whatever you have is great!

Ask the children to play you a song that their bird may sing. Record this on your tablet, and play it back to the child – they have created their own bird call!

Adventure 6 - Make your own sky filled with lots of birds!

This session is about documenting everything you've talked about and learned during your exploration of this BBC Ten Piece. Fill up a display board, hang birds from the ceiling, make a bird collage.

Here are some ideas for whatever way you decide to document this learning experience:

- Hang up all the birds that your children have created!
- On the bird and with the child, write how the bird moves; fast, slow, spikey, smooth, like an aeroplane etc.
- Draw the instruments that you have all played
- Explain what pitch; it's how high or low the note in the music is
- Record your class singing their version of *Larks fly high up in the sky*
- Write out the new lyrics your class wrote for *Larks fly high up in the sky*
- Stick in pictures of the animals you've talked about and pictures of the things that made sounds outside
- Print out a picture of Vaughan Williams, and write what a composer is
- Write a class story about why the Lark is flying and what happens to it