

Storm Interlude by Benjamin Britten

PRIMARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN

For:

- Key Stage 2 in England and Wales
- Second Level, P5-P7 in Scotland
- Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2 in Northern Ireland

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Background

The composer: Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976)

- English composer
- Born in Lowestoft, studied at Royal College of Music and then made his home in the seaside town of Aldeburgh
- Was made a Baron – the highest honour a British composer has ever been given

The music: Storm Interlude

- Written in 1945 as part of an opera called Peter Grimes that tells the story of a lonely fisherman
- One of four interludes that were used between scenes in the opera to cover stage moves
- The interludes are now perhaps even more famous than the opera. This one describes a storm at sea

Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- listen and reflect on a piece of orchestral music
- invent their own musical motifs and structure them into a piece
- perform as an ensemble
- learn musical language appropriate to the task

Curriculum checklist

- play and perform in ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
- listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory

Glossary of music terms used

Chorus	one part of the music performed by everyone and then repeated several times throughout the structure
Coda	another word for 'ending'
Next-door notes	moving stepwise up and down without leaps or gaps between the pitches
Orchestrate	choose which instruments perform which parts of the music
Pitched percussion	percussion instruments that can play different pitches – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars etc.
Rondo	a musical structure with one section that keeps returning (A-B-A-C-A etc)
Unpitched percussion	percussion instruments that can only make a limited number of sounds – drums, shakers woodblocks, tambourine etc.

Resources required

- A large space, large paper and art materials
- Classroom percussion instruments and any other instruments that your children might be learning

This scheme of work is plotted out over six lessons. Feel free to adapt it to suit your children and the resources you have available.

The six lessons at a glance

Lesson 1:

- Activities: Listen and describe a piece of music
Watch the orchestral performance and discuss
Create artwork inspired by the music
- Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians

Lesson 2:

- Activities: Learn Britten's 'chorus' and orchestrate it
- Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 3:

- Activities: Listen, analyse and interpret a piece of music
Create artwork inspired by the music
- Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians

Lesson 4:

- Activities: Create a short musical pieces inspired by Britten's music and story
- Curriculum link: Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 5:

Activities: Structure musical ideas to tell a narrative
Use technical terminology

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 6:

Activities: Create a coda
Perform in front of an audience

Curriculum link: Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music

LESSON 1

Watching and listening

This activity needs a lot of space. Clear your classroom tables to the side of the room and work on the floor or use a large space like the hall.

1. Prepare your class

Explain to your class that you are going to begin a 6-week music project focusing on a fantastic piece of music by a composer called Benjamin Britten watch the introductory film with Leanne Dunstan and Sarah Rayson

2. Listening task

Give out paper and art materials to your class - the bigger, the better! This activity will work really well with huge sheets of paper and paint. You could even have just one giant sheet of paper and encourage your class to work together. Explain to your children that they are going to listen to Britten's full piece and create a stormy seascape on their page. They can express this however they like i.e. as ships bobbing on the water, lightning flashes in the sky or just a swirling mass of dark sea water.

3. **Watch the full orchestral performance** and afterwards discuss what you have seen and heard. Brainstorm ideas for how to make your artwork.

4. **Play the orchestral performance again**, several times, as your class to create a storm scene at sea on the page.

5. **When this is achieved** spend a bit of time looking at the art. If you have worked on separate sheets of paper join them together, with the children's help, to make one huge piece of art.

6. **End the lesson** by listening to Britten's piece one more time. Keep the picture/s safe, you will need them later in the project.

LESSON 2

'Here comes a wave!'

- Warm-up.** Begin with your class sitting in a large circle. Start by passing a clap around the circle to get some focus and then quickly remind them of Britten's piece. Explain that you are now going to begin creating your own version of it on instruments.
- Teach the following patterns to your class;** begin by encouraging them to copy each phrase after you and then try the whole thing together as one 'chorus' - adding gestures to help with memory.

clap 'Here comes a wave' clap 'Here comes a big one!'

clap 'Here comes the biggest of the biggest of them' clap 'Here comes the biggest of them'

If you don't read music, don't worry, just listen again to the beginning of Britten's piece and say the words along. They should fit exactly.

This is the '**chorus**' - it will be performed by everyone in unison and will keep returning throughout your bigger piece, just as it does in Britten's piece.

- Now ask your class to 'orchestrate' this** – i.e. choose which instruments play which parts. Here are some tips –
 - The clap could be on a loud, unpitched instrument
 - The words ('here comes a wave' etc.) could be on a pitched instrument using next-door notes
 - 'Wave' can be on something loud and 'splashy' like a cymbal
 - Some children can continue on body percussion/ words and even add in orchestral instruments if you have children learning them
 - Add a couple of 'waves' to the end if you want to make it longer

For example –

drum 'Here comes a wave' drum 'Here comes a big one!'

drum 'Here comes the biggest of the biggest of them' drum 'Here comes the biggest of them'

4. **Create a class version of this 'chorus'**. Decide how many times it repeats and practise until it is as neat as possible. Maybe you need to appoint a conductor. If you have more time left in your lesson, try performing it several different ways – i.e. loud, soft, slow, fast – and keep a list of your different versions.

5. **Finally**, end the lesson with a performance of what you have made. Make sure your children know that this section is called the 'chorus' and that they need to remember it for the next lesson so write down carefully what you have done and who played which part.

LESSON 3

Here comes a monster, pirates and calm 1

1. **Warm up.** Begin in a circle again and recap the chorus from last lesson without instruments.
2. **Watch** the full orchestral performance between 0'48 – 1'03. Explain that this is describing a sea monster.

Watch the full orchestral performance between 1'30 – 1'57. Explain that this is describing pirates.

Watch the full orchestral performance between 2'20 – 3'47. This is a moment of calm, perhaps a desert island.

Discuss what you have heard.
3. **Split the class into three teams.** As you listen again, encourage each team to create artwork for one of these elements (so you have a 'pirate' team, a 'monster' team and a 'calm' team).
4. **When this is achieved,** add the new artwork onto your large class seascape picture thus creating a huge 'map' of Britten's storm.

LESSON 4

Here comes a monster, pirates and calm 2

1. **Warm up.** Begin once again in a circle with a quick focussing activity. Practise your 'here comes a wave' chorus using just body percussion and voices. Get out the instruments and put the chorus back together on instruments
2. **Remind** the class of the new elements they encountered last week and split back into your three teams (pirate, monster and calm). Children should keep the same instrument throughout this task so whatever they play during the 'chorus' they stick with (this will save a lot of headaches later!)
3. **Challenge each group** to make a short section of music to describe the element they drew last week. Here are some rules borrowed from Benjamin Britten –

Sea monster group

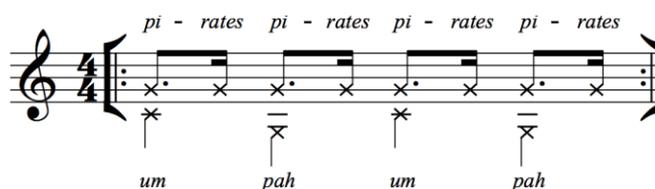
- Short phrases that climb upwards using next door notes like this –



- Phrases get longer, louder and scarier towards the end of the section

Pirate group

- Pirates rhythm as follows –



- Occasional 'swashbuckling' sounds like cymbal smashes and loud unexpected drumbeats

Moment of calm group

- A gentle upward swoop
- Soft, shimmering sounds

4. **Bring the class back together** and hear their efforts. Encourage the rest of the class to give feedback and tweak the music until each piece perfectly describes the stimulus.
5. **Finally** write down carefully on the board what you have done and the role everyone plays. Perhaps play through the 'chorus' once again to end the session with some music.

LESSON 5

Structure

- 1. Warm-up.** Sitting in a circle again, remind your children of everything they have worked on so far and make a list on the board. It should look like this –
 - 'Here comes a wave' chorus (everyone)
 - Sea Monster (group piece)
 - Pirates (group piece)
 - Calm (group piece)
- 2. Get the instruments out,** split into groups and ask each group to put their piece back together. Then, put the 'chorus' back together with everyone
- 3. Structure.** Ask your class to come up with an order for these sections. You could remind them of Britten's order by playing his piece one more time, or just let the children create their own version so that instead of copying Britten they are creating their own unique version.

Britten uses a structure called rondo which has one idea that keeps returning.

His piece is structured like this –

Chorus – Monster – Chorus – Pirates – Chorus – Calm – Chorus – ending

....but your piece could be completely different!

- 4. Try out a few suggestions** until you have a structure that everyone is happy with and can play. Practise this structure until it is neat and end the session with a performance of your almost finished piece!

LESSON 6

The Shipwreck Coda (ending)

1. **Warm up.** Begin the lesson with a quick focusing warm-up like pass the clap and then talk through the piece you made last lesson.
2. **Get the instruments out** and put your piece back together. Work slowly and carefully and make sure that everyone understands what they are doing in each section.
3. **Listen to the end of Britten's piece** (from about 4'00 onwards). Ask your class to listen carefully and figure out what is happening. What is the music describing and what is the music doing?

The music here swirls around and then moves rapidly downwards in pitch before landing with a few big bangs. Perhaps it is describing a shipwreck.

4. **Split quickly into two teams.**
 - **Team 1** (perhaps made up of children who have done a lot of the music making) must quickly add this new event onto the big picture you have been making.
 - **Team 2** (perhaps made up from children with less to do in the music so far) must recreate Britten's ending (or coda) using their instruments. They need to make a swirling sound, a descent and then a series of bangs.
5. **Practise your full piece with its new ending** and then arrange your new 'orchestra' in a large semi-circle so that they can be seen by an audience. Place your seascape artwork either behind the orchestra on the wall or on the floor in front and **end this lesson** with a performance of your finished piece to an invited audience

TAKING IT FURTHER

Cross-curricular activities

- **LISTENING:** Britten's other three 'Sea Interludes' are equally fantastic.
 - **Dawn** – is a depiction of a lonely beach with gentle waves lapping at the shore and something dark lurking in the water.
 - **Sunday Morning** describes the hustle and bustle of townspeople heading out to church
 - **Moonlight** is the sound of stars twinkling during a still night at sea.

These three short pieces provide a lot of opportunities for artwork, composition and literacy tasks.

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