

'Ride of the Valkyries' from 'Die Walküre' **by Richard Wagner**

SECONDARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN EXPLORING AND CREATING MUSICAL CHARACTERS USING LEITMOTIFS

For:

- Key Stage 3 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Third and Fourth Level, S1-S3 in Scotland

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Learning outcomes

Students should be able to:

- Understand the concept of a leitmotif
- Compose and perform contrasting (good vs evil) leitmotifs
- Arrange leitmotifs to vary emotional effect
- Perform their compositions

Curriculum checklist

The following aspects of the KS3 and 3rd Level music curriculum (for England, Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland) are encountered in this project:

- Listen and evaluate/appraise
- Performing/playing/rehearsing and reviewing
- Composing/improvising
- Singing
- Technology (optional)
- How music is created (i.e. pitch, tempo, timbre etc.)
- Notation (staff or other relevant notations)
- Identifying musical devices and concepts
- Aural skills (imitating, understanding pitch)

Required kit/space

This project can work with or without music technology resources. However, if available, digital audio workstations (DAW) would be of great use for recording and editing work.

Kit required if using technology:

- DAW (with headphones and splitters for paired working)
- Microphones to record voices
- Kit required if non-technology based:
- Melodic instruments

In both instances, playback and speakers are required to play audio examples plus a recording of John Williams' Star Wars sound track.

Time needed

This project can be developed over a few lessons, although elements of it can be separated and completed within one lesson.

- Melody - does it move by leaps or steps?
- Rhythm – long and strong or short and nervous?
- Instrumentation – bold brass, light woodwind?

4. Compose and perform two contrasting leitmotifs

Using only the notes of 2 or 3 chosen triads encourage students to compose two melodies; one to represent 'good' and one to represent 'evil'. Suggest major triads for 'good' characters and minor triads for 'evil'.

As an alternative, students could create one of their motifs using a conjunct melodic line rather than triads.

Once students have two contrasting leitmotifs, they should perform them to the class, possibly asking the class to guess which of their motifs represents good and which represents evils.

5. Compose and perform a new setting for both 'good' and 'evil' leitmotifs

Using the following musical devices, ask students to arrange their leitmotifs for an alternative emotional setting:

MUSICAL DEVICE	POSSIBLE CHANGES
Tempo	Speed up/slow down from the original
Instrumentation	Choose a different instrument/sound for the melody
Dynamics	Louder/softer/crescendo/diminuendo
Articulation	Make the melody more staccato or more legato
Harmony	Find other triads that fit with the melody

6. Combine leitmotifs into a 'suite'

Students should now have 4 different leitmotifs which can be structured into a more extended 'suite' (probably around 16 bars long). Ask students to combine their motifs into a piece without breaks. A possible structure could be:

good – evil – alternative good – alternative evil

Once students have had the chance to rehearse their 'suites' there should be the opportunity for them to perform either solo or in groups, to the rest of the groups.

7. Key vocabulary

Leitmotif	A recurring musical theme used to represent a person, a place or an idea.
Triad	A 3-note chord with a 'root' and the 3rd and 5th note above it.
Instrumentation	The combination of instruments used in a composition.
Articulation	How notes should be played for example; smoothly (legato), short and sharp (staccato)

8. Applying the approach to other pieces

In this approach students have created music to represent good and evil but by using different music as inspiration, students could be encouraged to create music to represent other objects and ideas.

Here are a few suggestions:

Trains – Arthur Honegger Pacific 231

Weather – Britten Storm Interlude

Seasons - Gershwin Summertime, Vivaldi The Four Seasons

Animals – Aaron Copland The Cat and The Mouse