Britten: Storm from Four Sea Interludes

The facts: Britten wrote four 'Sea Interludes' (musical depictions of the sea at different times of the day) to fill the scene changes of his 1945 opera Peter Grimes.

Warm-up: Talk about the sea and waves. Teach your class the following patterns, using the words to help with the rhythm and shape

Encourage your class to suggest which instruments might play which parts using the suggestions above (ie next-door notes, bangs, high notes)

Create a quick class version of this pattern, Britten uses it a lot so you might like to take some time with this and split into groups to create several versions.

Demonstrate: the following three ideas, these all occur in Britten’s piece.

1. A sea monster: next-door notes climbing slowly upwards and getting higher in pitch each time

2. Pirates:

3. A sense of calm: an upwards swoop followed by soft

shimmers

The Task
Discuss which instruments from your class collection (both percussion and otherwise) would best play these three sections and split into groups accordingly - three groups, one on each new section

Share and Join
Ask each group to perform to the class and encourage the class to feedback on each other’s performances. Ask them to structure their three sections AND the ‘wave’ piece you created during the warm-up into one big piece. You might like to listen to Britten’s piece to get some inspiration for this. He uses a loose ‘rondo’ structure with the ‘wave’ piece returning in between the other sections.

Finishing off
At the end of Britten’s piece something bad happens. You hear a long jagged downward scale and a series of big bangs. Is this a ship sinking? Can you add something similar onto your piece?