Stravinsky: Firebird Finale

The facts: The Firebird is a ballet which tells the story of an evil king who freezes everything in his garden to stone. This section, from the very end, is when the garden comes back to life again after the magical firebird has outwitted the king.

Warm-up: Tell your class the firebird story and then play a game of Hey Ho -- teach your class a series of gestures and their opposite (ie Hey: shout hey and push your hands into the air. Ho: bend from your waist while saying ‘ho’ or Clap versus Click, Flap versus Flick). Add in a sound and gesture for the gallant Prince and a stone Princess, an evil King and a magical Firebird. This way the story is very much ingrained in the children’s minds.

Demonstrate: Ask your class to think about frozen, shimmering sounds and suggest which classroom percussion instruments might make such sounds. If they are learning orchestral instruments, challenge them to make shimmering sounds on those too.

Make a quick ‘frozen’ soundscape using these sounds

The big tune: Stravinsky uses one tune throughout his Finale. Here’s a simplified version of it –

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G  F  E  G  D  C
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"Wake up frozen garden"

Try singing it and playing this tune on whatever instruments you have.

The Task
Split into small working groups. Ask each group to make their own version of this tune. Here is a list of some of the things Stravinsky does –

1. add a shimmer/ rumble or drone (ie long note)
2. add slow upward footsteps
3. take out the rhythm and play all the notes evenly like tolling bells
4. add tolling bells!
5. add an unpredictable bassline -- two notes played back and forth slowly and randomly!
6. try it as a round
7. make it very loud with bangs, swoops, cymbal crashes

Share and Join
Ask each group to perform to the class and discuss how you could join these different versions together to make one piece. Remind your class that the story is about something coming back to life -- can they order their pieces to reflect this?

Finishing off
Stravinsky adds a massive shifting chord to the ending. Try this by moving from a big C note to other pitches and back again, with added LOUD shimmers, C drone, rumbles, and big final bang!

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