

Rodeo - Hoedown by Aaron Copland

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

Written by Rachel Leach

Background

The composer: Aaron COPLAND (1900 - 1990)

- American composer
- Famous for writing music that ‘sounds like America’

Pronunciation: **AIR-uhn KOHP-luhnd**

-air as in hair
-oh as in no

The music: ‘Rodeo - Hoedown’

- Written in 1942
- ‘Rodeo’ is a ballet featuring a story about a cowgirl trying to fit in amongst the men
- ‘Hoedown’ is the most famous section of music from the ballet and features American folk tunes
- A hoedown is traditionally a dance in 2 time and often played by fiddle (violin)

Pronunciation:

Rodeo

roh-DAY-oh

-oh as in no
-ay as in day
-this reflects the composer’s pronunciation

Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- Listen and reflect on a piece of orchestral music
- create their own piece of music using instruments and voice
- perform as an ensemble
- learn musical language appropriate to the task

Curriculum checklist

- play and perform in ensemble contexts, using their 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

Call and response	a musical conversation. An idea is heard and then repeated by a different section of the orchestra or at a different volume
Melody	another word for 'tune'. A linear line of notes, like a musical sentence
Ostinato	a repeating (often rhythmic) pattern
Pitched percussion	percussion instruments that can play different pitches ('notes') – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars etc.
Unpitched percussion	percussion instruments that make sounds that don't have a specific pitch (or 'note') – drums, shakers, woodblocks, tambourine etc.
Syncopation	The 'weaker' or less obvious notes are emphasised. The result is unexpected, often 'jazzy' rhythms

Resources required

- A large, open space
- Classroom percussion instruments and any other instruments 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: Watch the film and discuss
Learn to count bars
Create a dance in response to 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: Copy, invent and play back rhythmic patterns

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 3:

Activities: Copy, invent and play back melodies

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
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 4:

Activities: Learn an ostinato
Choose instruments to play it

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
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 5:

Activities: Learn an ostinato
Choose instruments to play it

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
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 6:

Activities: Structure all ideas into a piece
Perform the piece to an audience
Use technical terminology where appropriate

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 I

Watching and listening

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 an American composer called Aaron Copland

Explain further that Copland was famous for writing music that sounded like America, and this piece is all about cowboys and cowgirls partying

2. Watch the film & discuss

Watch the [Copland Ten Pieces film](#) and afterwards have a class discussion about what you have just seen. Ask the following questions –

- Did you like the film?
- What was your favourite part?
- Would you like to go to a cowboy/ cowgirl party?

3. Dance the Hoedown/ Listening task

This task will take a lot of space. Either clear your classroom of furniture or move into the hall to allow your children to move around without bumping into one another

Listen to the very opening of ‘Hoedown’ – just the first 20 seconds or so. You can either watch the [video clip of the full performance](#) of the piece or listen to the [audio by downloading the mp3](#). Ask your class what they think is going here. This is the beginning of a dance and features two types of music. Here’s what’s happening:

0’00 – 0’05	0’05-0’15	0’15-0’20
Swirling music	Spiky rhythms	Swirling music

Quickly write their suggestions on the board and decide as a class on two gestures, one for ‘swirling’ and another for the ‘spiky rhythms’

Perhaps they will say something like –

0’00 – 0’05	0’05-0’15	0’15-0’20
Swirling music <i>Spin around</i>	Spiky rhythms <i>Shake hands, Nod ‘hello’</i>	Swirling music <i>Spin around</i>

Play the music again and ask them to perform these gestures along with it.

- Explain** that the Hoedown was often a competitive dance. Cowboys would show off their skills by challenging rivals to copy their moves.

The next bit of music (0'20 – 0'40) is perhaps the cowboys getting ready

From then on (0'40 – 1'40) the music divides into 8 beat sections.

- Play this bit of the recording and challenge your class to count in 8 over the top.
I.e.: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 etc.
- Split** your class into four groups. Ask each group to come up with a short dance (just four strong gestures will do) to fit 8 beats. As they work on this, keep the recording playing in the background and encourage them to keep counting aloud until they are confident with their moves.
- Watch each group** individually, without the recording, but with everyone else counting and check that their moves fit the count of 8.
- Have a dance competition.** Decide on an order for the groups that includes a chance for the others to copy what they've seen. Something like this:

Intro	Woodblock	8bts	8bts	8bts	8bts	8bts	8bts	8bts	8bts
Swirling Spike Swirling	'Getting ready'	Group 1	All copy	Group 2	All copy	Group 3	All copy	Group 4	All copy

- FINALLY - Who's the winner?** Decide which group is the best and award them the winner! Or, if you have time, challenge the class to do it again and perhaps add in some solo sections (the middle section of the music would be good from this: 1'40 – 2.30) or freestyle moments.

The music slows down and stops around 2'50 – that's a great opportunity for a rest! And then the opening music returns so you could recap the competition once more. Or if this is too daunting, simply stop the track at 2'30

LESSON 2

Call and response

1. **Warm-up** - clear the classroom and ask your children to stand in a circle. To wake them up, pass a quick clap around the circle.
2. **Remind** them about Copland's piece and their dance competition from last lesson. **Explain** that many of musical ideas are copied back immediately, just like in their dancing. So, you are going to play a game of '**copy me**'.
 - **Explain** that the game starts when you say: 'copy me' and finishes when you say: 'stop'
 - Say 'copy me' and clap a pattern or make a gesture. The children must copy what you do.
 - When you have done enough, simply say 'stop'
3. **Play the game again** with one (or more) of the children as leader

This is an excellent game to create the exact energy level you need from the children for the rest of the session. I.e. if they are sleepy ask them to copy energetic things such as running on the spot – this will really get their energy level up! If they are over-enthusiastic, lead a very slow, quiet series of gestures to calm them down.

You can also use this warm-up to teach rhythmic patterns and tunes that you might want to use later on

4. **Play the game** for a third time, this time using instruments. Simply ask your children to choose an **unpitched percussion** instrument – anything will work. If you don't have enough for everyone, some children can use body percussion, but do keep switching the instruments around so that everyone gets a go at some point.

Play a rhythmic pattern on your instrument and ask them to copy it back.

5. **Split** into small working groups and ask them to play the game again, making sure everyone has a go at leading.

With everyone on instruments playing at the same time this will be a loud task! Put in place a visual signal for silence such as a hand in the air, and keep stopping and encouraging quiet, neat playing rather than aggressive banging

6. **After a short time**, hear some of the groups. Ask each group to decide on their favourite rhythm or sound from their games and practise it so that they can play it together for the class.

Each team needs to appoint a leader who will signal the start of the pattern. Discourage them from counting in, simply ask them to make sure everyone is watching and begin confidently. If everyone is focused they should come in perfectly after a few tries.

7. **FINALLY** – end your session with another class version of the game with each group taking a turn to lead the others using their favourite rhythm. Tell your class that the technical term for ‘copy me’ is **call and response** and Copland uses this technique throughout his Hoedown

LESSON 3

Call and response melodies

1. **Warm-up** – begin your session in a circle again and perhaps play a short version of the ‘copy me’ game.

Sit your children down and explain that you are going to work on the ‘copy me’ game again but this time making **melodies** or **tunes**. You are going to work on **pitched** percussion instruments such as xylophones and glocks plus any orchestral instruments that your children might be learning.

2. **Remind** your class about Aaron Copland. One of his tricks was to only use a handful of notes in his tunes - that’s one of the reasons his music is so effective. Explain that the children will only be using four or five notes in their pieces too – D, E, A, B:



These are good notes for beginner players, if your children are struggling however, feel free to adapt the notes using fewer or concentrating on pitches that they are more confident with

3. **Split** your class into about four groups with a range of instruments in each. If you don’t have enough pitched instruments to go around, use unpitched too or body percussion/ voice.

Ask each group to play the ‘copy me’ game again using these pitches. Give them at least 5-10 minutes* to do this so that everyone can get a go at leading.

**Working with specific pitches can be difficult so give your children a lot of time for this task and keep checking in on how it’s going. There is no need to play fast, it’s really about getting used to the instruments. If they are encountering problems, encourage them to work with just one pitch and only add the next one when their confidence grows.*

4. **FINALLY** – bring the class back together and end the session by hearing some of their pieces. You might even like to try one child leading the entire class! (Keep a secret note of anyone who is particularly good at this for later on)

LESSON 4

'Horse riding' ostinato

1. **Warm-up.** Sit your children in a circle and lead a quick focusing warm-up such as pass the clap or a gentle version of 'copy me'.
2. **Explain** to the class that you are going to start making your own version of Copland's Hoedown and you're going to begin by learning a repeating rhythm that is going to go throughout your music. The technical term for a repeating rhythmic pattern is an **ostinato**
3. Clap the following pattern and ask your children to 'copy me'.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Ri - ding on my horse

This is a tricky rhythm. It is **syncopated** i.e. the less important (and unexpected) bits of the bar are made important. Here's a method for learning and teaching it –

- i. Count to 8 out loud trying to keep a steady pace
 - ii. Shout out the numbers in **BOLD** and whisper the other numbers
 - iii. Count in your head, clapping on the **BOLD** numbers
 - iv. Replace the numbers with the words, one word on each clap
4. **Ask** your children to suggest which instruments, from your collection, should play this. Explain that it is going to be the foundation of your piece. It's very important but doesn't need to be too loud and take over, so cymbals and big drums may not be the right answer.

If they suggest **pitched** instruments, use the following pitches, D and A

A
D

Ri - ding on my horse

5. **Split** your class into small teams and ask them to choose appropriate instruments and practise this rhythm. Challenge them to start and stop neatly and play confidently but not loudly

6. **Bring the class back together**, hear each team and give feedback. Try layering up the pieces so that eventually everyone is playing together.

7. **FINALLY** - choose two soloists to perform a call and response (copy me) on top. The 'caller' must play something lasting for just one pattern, the response is obviously the same length. Like this:

The musical notation shows a call and response exercise. The top staff, labeled 'call:', features a single note on a treble clef staff. The bottom staff, labeled 'response:', features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes on a treble clef staff. The lyrics 'Ri-ding on my horse' are written below the bottom staff.

A fun, and dramatic way to do this is to place two xylophones (with only the correct pitches on them – D, E, A, B) face to face in the centre of the circle. Once the ostinato is going, choose two children to come out and 'duel'.

Don't worry too much if this isn't neat, you still have time for it to improve. The important thing is to end the session with a performance.

LESSON 5

'Giddy-up' rhythmic chorus

1. **Warm-up** - in a large circle, ask your children to remind you of the copy me (call and response) game and the horse rhythm from last lesson (using the words will really help with memory here)
2. **Explain** that you are going to learn a new rhythmic pattern today that will act as a 'chorus' for your piece.
Teach this by playing 'copy me' again. Here is the full rhythm:

2/4

this means repeat

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Gid-dy up Gid-dy up get-ting near-er Gid-dy up Gid-dy up I can't wait to dance the hoe-down

Break this down into chunks and ask your children to copy each chunk back after you've clapped or spoken it (again, use the words to help you). When they are good at the small sections, put them together to make the full line

3. **Get the instruments out** making sure everyone has the same instrument as last session. As a full class work out how to play this rhythmic line on the instruments. Here are some tips to help:
 - Split the line up again so no one player has to remember the whole thing
 - Some instruments are better at quick sounds than others. (i.e. a woodblock will sound great on 'giddy up', a cymbal will sound awful)
 - A steady pulse throughout will really help to keep everyone together
 - Use the words and practise just saying it, in teams, without playing it
4. **When this is achieved** decide how many times, back to back, you want to play it and practise this. Also, think about who's leading the beginning and ending. Try it at different speeds and volumes too
5. **FINALLY** – finish this lesson with a performance of your finished 'chorus' and write down on the board what you've done and who's playing when and what.

LESSON 6

Put it all together

1. **Warm-up.** As usual, begin with a quick focusing warm-up. Sit the children in a circle and quickly remind them of all the elements you have worked with so far:
 - The call and response solos – practise clapping some ideas back and forth
 - The ‘horse riding’ ostinato – practise clapping this and remind them of the notes (D & A)
 - The ‘giddy up chorus’ – again, practise clapping this with children only clapping the bits that they play
2. **Recap** – get out the instruments and give the children 2 minutes to remember and practise each element that they play. This will sound chaotic but don’t worry, just make sure you have a signal in place the end of the timeslot!
3. **Bring everyone back together** and practise the elements as a full class –
 - The **horse** (horse riding ostinato with call and response solos)
 - The **chorus** (giddy up rhythm)
4. **Structure.** Ask your children to come up with a structure for their music. The chorus should alternate with the horse but how many times? And how will they know when to switch? Write your structure up on the board and make sure that everyone understands it. It might help to appoint a conductor to signal, (maybe with a prominent instrument such as a cymbal) the different sections.

Your ‘score’ might look something like this –

- ‘Giddy up’ x2
 - Horse with two soloists. A cymbal signals the end
 - ‘Giddy up’ x2.
 - Horse with four soloists. Cymbal
 - ‘Giddy up’ x2
5. **FINALLY** – practise your finished piece until it is good and strong and then invite another class to come in to listen.

TAKING IT FURTHER

Cross-curricular activities

- **DANCE:** Choreograph a dance to fit with your piece
- **LITERACY:** Create stories about cowboys and cowgirls. The story behind Rodeo features a girl disguising herself as a cowboy – can you re-tell this story?
- **ART:** Design costumes and stage set for a production of the ballet
- **HISTORY:** Several of Copland's other pieces feature stories from early America. Listen to these pieces (Billy the Kid, Appalachian Spring) and research the true stories behind them

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