

Composing Without an Instrument Toolkit

Soundscapes

Soundscapes are a non-prescriptive way of creating a musical atmosphere. The starting point can be a word, gesture, image or sounds themselves. Here's an example.

1. Get the children to shut their eyes and think of a topic eg machines.
2. Ask them open questions about the topic to get their imaginations running. "What sort of machine are you".
3. Get the children to stand up and imagine being a part of the topic and create a gesture. "Turn yourself into your machine".
4. For 2 minutes let them make the sounds and gestures of the machine.
5. Get the children into 4 groups, and get the groups to work together to create sections of the soundscapes "4 machines".
6. Choose a group leader and get them to structure the piece: Machine A, then B, C, D, then AB, Then CD, then ABCD, end.

Soundscapes can be used at the start or end of drama, or as an intro or outro to a song or can be used as a piece within themselves.

The Numbers Game

The Numbers game can easily be turned into a fun piece.

Step 1: Ask everyone to choose their own two numbers between 1 and 8. (Let's choose 2 and 5)

Step 2: Pick a note for each of your numbers (You can limit the notes to five if you wish -C, D, E, G, A)
– Let's choose C for number 2 and G for number 5

Step 3: The leader starts a steady pulse and repeats the numbers 12345678.

Step 4: Everyone plays one note on their first number and the second note on the second number.
(C for 2 and G for 5).

This is your **Chorus**, where everyone is playing at the same time.
Then you can enjoy making up the **changes**.

Changes can include:

Just your first number
Just your second number
If you have long hair
Clap your second numbers
Just Odd numbers
Just even numbers
First 4 numbers
Last 4 numbers
Left side of the room
Right side of the room

Group Songwriting.

Songwriting always seems more daunting than it is. The main anxieties centre around: the teachers fear that they cannot sing, and the teachers fear that they'll get stuck with 'writers block' and the song not feeling complete without a 'proper accompaniment' (Guitar, piano etc). Fear not. The main piece of advice: delegate as much to the children as possible. They'll have the tune, words and accompaniment.

Step 1: Write the theme on the board, and mind map with the children all the ideas of the theme.

Step 2: Explain a Chorus (Main repeated section of the song) and verse (Narrative driven section that alternates between the choruses i.e. tells the story).

Step 3: Decide as a class exactly what your song is about. (Songs tell a story, one of the most important decisions is whether it is first (I), second (you), or third (he, she) person.

Step 4: Either as a class or in smaller groups write the chorus. I suggest it is either 4 or 8 lines. Don't make lines too long or complicated and **don't feel it needs to rhyme.**

Step 4: Either as a class or groups write a couple of verses.

Step 5: Finding a tune. Get a child to sing the first line of the chorus (one of them will) and then get the rest of the class to immediately sing it back. Repeat the exercise before you move on. Then get another child to sing the next line in the chorus (Call and response style). Get the two children and class to put those elements together. There will be a consensus that the children will get used to.

Do the same for one verse, then make sure you repeat that tune for the second verse.

Step 6: Put everything together with actions made up by the children.

Songwriting Lyrics Ideas generator

The most important thing is to do something that makes you think about the song from a different angle. You have to surprise yourself. Remember to always ask questions of what you've written down: Why? where? when? what? who?

- 1) Mind map words around theme
If stuck...
- 2) Think about the 5 senses: Sound, sight, taste, touch smell and focus theme around those
If stuck...
- 3) Think specifically about adjectives
If stuck...
- 4) Think specifically about Verbs
If stuck...
- 5) Physicalise the concept (Make 3 gestures in response to an idea: what does the air feel like?)
If stuck...
- 6) Personify your topic (Air the Oppressor)
If stuck...

- 7) Draw a doodle and respond to it.
If stuck...
- 8) Start again with a whole new medium.