

# Shoes as musical inspiration

Secondary: (ages 11 – 14)

Music

Music is used to tell us about people, things, and events. This activity challenges students to use an artefact—e.g. shoes—to make, examine, and play with inferences about the owner of that artefact. Students create a poem about the artefact/owner that can be used as song lyrics. These lyrics are then fitted to a pentatonic melody and performed in an ensemble with accompaniment.

*NB:* This lesson plan includes annexes with adaptations for [remote](#) learning and additional [assessment](#) possibilities

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**Time allocation** 4 lesson periods

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**Subject content** Create ostinato  
Create a melody and lyrics in pentatonic  
Work and perform in small groups to develop ensemble skills

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**Creativity and critical thinking** This unit has a **creativity** and **critical thinking** focus:

- Make connections between artefacts and musical expression
- Identify and question assumptions to create novel ideas
- Play with unusual ideas when preparing to perform
- Reflect on chosen way of composing relative to alternatives

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**Other skills** Collaboration and communication

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**Key words** ostinato; pentatonic; lyric composition; ensemble; inspiration

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## Products and processes to assess

Students make inferences about an artefact in order to write lyrics for a musical composition. At the highest levels of achievement, students challenge their own assumptions to come up with interesting, imaginative, and unusual ideas about the owner of the shoes. Their work process demonstrates a willingness to explore a variety of ideas and to make connections between artefacts and the creative use of words and musical ideas. There is clear synchrony between lyrics, ostinato, and melody, a good ability to reflect on the choices they have made, and openness to the feedback of others.

## Teaching and Learning plan

This plan suggests potential steps for implementing the activity. Teachers can introduce as many modifications as they see fit to adapt the activity to their teaching context.

Step	Duration	Teacher and student roles	Subject content	Creativity and critical thinking
1	Lesson period 1	<p>Students are assigned to small groups of about 4. Each group is given a pair of shoes. Shoes should be varied and interesting—work boots, ballet slippers, running shoes, high heels, etc.</p> <p>Students are asked: “What can you imagine about the person who owns these shoes?” They are given 10 minutes to brainstorm a written list of adjectives. As appropriate, the teacher may decide to challenge students to think of unusual owners or scenarios. Teacher can discuss with students what their first assumptions are about what sort of person owns the shoes and how they can question these assumptions to come up with different/novel ideas.</p> <p>Using the information they’ve brainstormed, students should write a poem of couplets about the shoe, the owner of the shoe, or an event the owner and the shoe experienced. The poem should contain at least four couplets but could be longer.</p> <p>Discuss various possibilities for creating the poem/lyrics—it could be from the perspective of the shoe, or the owner, or in the third person.</p> <p>Students are given about 20 minutes to create the poem/lyrics and write them down so they do not forget them.</p>	<p>Observing artefact and brainstorming adjectives</p> <p>Creating lyrics</p>	<p>Playing with unusual and radical ideas to imagine the owner of the shoes</p> <p>Identifying and questioning their own assumptions about a prop used to inspire musical composition</p> <p>Composing lyrics which express a creative or novel idea about the owner of the shoes</p> <p>Considering several perspectives on how to write lyrics for a musical composition</p>
2	Lesson period 2	<p>Students retrieve their poem/lyrics, and are told to create a 4 beat ostinato that can be used underneath the poem/lyrics. A good default is quarter note, quarter note, two eighth notes, quarter note, but students should have familiarity and be supported to create their own four beat pattern. They should practice patting their rhythm repeatedly while reciting the poem.</p>	<p>Understanding and creating a 4 beat ostinato</p> <p>Patting ostinato and reciting poem at same time</p>	<p>Making connections between artefact, lyrics/poem, and beat</p> <p>Creating music with expressive qualities to fit artefact and lyrics/poem</p>

		<p>Once the group can independently and confidently recite and pat the ostinato, students are given pitched percussion instruments (xylophones, glockenspiels, keyboard could also be used) set in C pentatonic (B and F bars are removed.) Only one instrument per group is needed.</p> <p>Students are instructed to practice reciting the poem while using the C and G bars to sound the ostinato simultaneously. Students rotate and practice so everyone in the group gets a turn.</p>	<p>Developing musical co-operation and sensitivity to others, rotating instruments, finding ways to begin together and maintain eye contact</p>	
3	Lesson 3	<p>Students use an instrument set in C pentatonic to create a melody for the lyrics/poem. Students refine and practice until they can independently sing the melody.</p> <p>One student plays the ostinato, one student plays the melody, and the other students sing the lyrics. Students practice, with instruction to pay attention to ensemble performing skills—Who will count off? Who is the leader if they get off? What will they do when they are finished? Is everyone regularly making eye contact?</p> <p>If appropriate, the two singing students may also add simple unpitched percussion parts to the composition.</p> <p>Students write down anything they need to remember for the next class that they may forget.</p>	<p>Melody composition (to show appropriate mix of stepwise and skipwise motion?)</p> <p>Developing ensemble skills (Can each student both lead and follow when appropriate? Are they prepared for starting together?)</p>	<p>Exploring choices in preparation for performing music with expressive qualities</p> <p>Reflecting on and improving methods of playing together</p>
4	Lesson 4	<p>Students retrieve their instruments and notes from previous class, and review and rehearse to share with the group.</p> <p>Teacher circulates to make sure students are prepared for starting themselves off, and staying together independently.</p> <p>Small groups share with the rest of the class. After each performance, audience members volunteer to share aspects of the piece that they liked, and things that they think the performers might consider doing differently.</p>	<p>Developing performance skills and displaying appropriate audience etiquette</p>	<p>Performing music with expressive qualities</p> <p>Reflecting on strengths and limitations of composition choices made relative to alternatives</p>

## Resources and examples for inspiration

### Web and print

- N/a

### Other

- Pitched percussion Instruments and mallets (keyboards could also be used)  
Note: If pitched percussion instruments are unavailable, the lesson could be done with the ostinato as a beat boxed mouth percussion part, and the lyrics to the song said in a rap.
- Varied pairs of shoes, or other artefacts (one pair per small group of about 4 students)

### Opportunities to adapt, extend, and enrich

- Other artefacts, ideas or people could be used as inspiration (e.g. paintings, other everyday objects, scientific concepts, literature, planets, historical figures, colours etc.)
- Groups could be assigned (or suggest) their own different artefacts and the class can be asked to discuss the differences between the resulting compositions and/or guess what artefact inspired the composition
- Classroom discussion could be facilitated about the inspiration and working process of famous composers or students can conduct an inquiry into what inspired particular pieces of music

**Creativity and critical thinking rubric for music**

• Mapping of the different steps of the lesson plan against the OECD rubric to identify the creative and/or critical thinking skills the different parts of the lesson aim to develop

	<b>CREATIVITY</b> Coming up with new ideas and solutions	<b>Steps</b>	<b>CRITICAL THINKING</b> Questioning and evaluating ideas and solutions	<b>Steps</b>
<b>INQUIRING</b>	Make connections to other musical styles concepts or conceptual ideas in other disciplines	1,2	Identify and question assumptions and conventional rules in a musical performance, composition or analysis	1,2
<b>IMAGINING</b>	Play with unusual and radical ideas when preparing to perform, compose, orchestrate, or analyse a music piece	1	Consider several perspectives on a musical performance, composition, interpretation or analysis	1-4
<b>DOING</b>	Perform, compose, or analyse music with expressive qualities or relating to personally meaningful subject matter	2-4	Explain both strengths and limitations of a performance, a composition or an analysis of a music piece	4
<b>REFLECTING</b>	Reflect on steps taken to create performances, compositions or analyses of a music piece		Reflect on the chosen way of performing, composing or analysing a music piece relative to possible alternatives	1-4

## Annex 1: Remote learning adaptations

This plan suggests potential steps for implementing the activity in online modes of delivery. Teachers can introduce modifications as they see fit to adapt the activity to their teaching context.

Step	Duration	Teacher and student roles	Subject content	Creativity and critical thinking	Adaptations and considerations for online modes of delivery
1	Lesson period 1	<p>Students are assigned to small groups of about 4. Each group is given a pair of shoes. Shoes should be varied and interesting—work boots, ballet slippers, running shoes, high heels, etc.</p> <p>Students are asked: “What can you imagine about the person who owns these shoes?” They are given 10 minutes to brainstorm a written list of adjectives. As appropriate, the teacher may decide to challenge students to think of unusual owners or scenarios. Teacher can discuss with students what their first assumptions are about what sort of person owns the shoes and how they can question these assumptions to come up with different/novel ideas.</p> <p>Using the information they’ve brainstormed, students should write a poem of couplets about the shoe, the owner of the shoe, or an event the owner and the shoe experienced. The poem should contain at least four couplets but could be longer.</p> <p>Discuss various possibilities for creating the poem/lyrics—it could be from the perspective of the shoe, or the owner, or in the third person.</p>	<p>Observing artefact and brainstorming adjectives</p> <p>Creating lyrics</p>	<p>Playing with unusual and radical ideas to imagine the owner of the shoes</p> <p>Identifying and questioning their own assumptions about a prop used to inspire musical composition</p> <p>Composing lyrics which express a creative or novel idea about the owner of the shoes</p> <p>Considering several perspectives on how to write lyrics for a musical composition</p>	<p>NB: Many of these adaptations rely on students having access to internet-connected devices. In contexts where this is not the case, more substantial adaptations may be needed.</p> <p>This could take place in break-out rooms during a whole-class live video conferencing session. The teacher can post a photo of the shoes to the chat or share their screen.</p> <p>Teacher can visit each break-out room to discuss the group’s first assumptions about the owner of the shoes and encourage them to question them OR all students can be brought back to plenary for a whole-class discussion encouraging students to go beyond their first ideas.</p> <p>The students can do this independently and asynchronously or during the breakout rooms (or in independently scheduled live small group calls). The teacher can join</p>

		Students are given about 20 minutes to create the poem/lyrics and write them down so they do not forget them.			calls/rooms regularly to give feedback and ensure progress.
<b>2</b>	Lesson period 2	<p>Students retrieve their poem/lyrics, and are told to create a 4 beat ostinato that can be used underneath the poem/lyrics. A good default is quarter note, quarter note, two eighth notes, quarter note, but students should have familiarity and be supported to create their own four beat pattern. They should practice patting their rhythm repeatedly while reciting the poem.</p> <p>Once the group can independently and confidently recite and pat the ostinato, students are given pitched percussion instruments (xylophones, glockenspiels, keyboard could also be used) set in C pentatonic (B and F bars are removed.) Only one instrument per group is needed.</p> <p>Students are instructed to practice reciting the poem while using the C and G bars to sound the ostinato simultaneously. Students rotate and practice so everyone in the group gets a turn.</p>	<p>Understanding and creating a 4 beat ostinato</p> <p>Patting ostinato and reciting poem at same time</p> <p>Developing musical co-operation and sensitivity to others, rotating instruments, finding ways to begin together and maintain eye contact</p>	<p>Making connections between artefact, lyrics/poem, and beat</p> <p>Creating music with expressive qualities to fit artefact and lyrics/poem</p>	<p>The work for this session could be introduced in a recorded video from the teacher or during a live video conferencing session.</p> <p>Student groups meet either in break-out rooms or in independently scheduled calls to create and practice their rhythm. Teacher can join groups regularly to assess progress and give feedback.</p> <p>If students have instruments at home, these can be used. Otherwise online xylophones can be used. This can be an opportunity to discuss the challenges and benefits of using digital instruments and of musicians being dispersed physically.</p>
<b>3</b>	Lesson 3	<p>Students use an instrument set in C pentatonic to create a melody for the lyrics/poem. Students refine and practice until they can independently sing the melody.</p> <p>One student plays the ostinato, one student plays the melody, and the other students sing the lyrics. Students practice, with instruction to pay attention to ensemble performing skills—Who will count off? Who is the leader</p>	<p>Melody composition (to show appropriate mix of stepwise and skipwise motion?)</p> <p>Developing ensemble skills</p>	<p>Exploring choices in preparation for performing music with expressive qualities</p>	<p>If students have access to appropriate instruments or online equivalents can be found, practices can take place in small group calls/breakout rooms.</p> <p>Alternatively, students can produce a multi-screen video (on imovie for example) – or they could record their part with the</p>

	<p>if they get off? What will they do when they are finished? Is everyone regularly making eye contact?</p> <p>If appropriate, the two singing students may also add simple unpitched percussion parts to the composition.</p> <p>Students write down anything they need to remember for the next class that they may forget.</p>	<p>(Can each student both lead and follow when appropriate? Are they prepared for starting together?)</p>	<p>Reflecting on and improving methods of playing together</p>	<p>teacher putting the multiscreen video together (this can be time consuming – tutorials available on Youtube).</p> <p>Alternatively, students could record their ostinato individually and independently in asynchronous work.</p>
<p><b>4</b> Lesson 4</p>	<p>Students retrieve their instruments and notes from previous class, and review and rehearse to share with the group.</p> <p>Teacher circulates to make sure students are prepared for starting themselves off, and staying together independently.</p> <p>Small groups share with the rest of the class. After each performance, audience members volunteer to share aspects of the piece that they liked, and things that they think the performers might consider doing differently.</p>	<p>Developing performance skills and displaying appropriate audience etiquette</p>	<p>Performing music with expressive qualities</p> <p>Reflecting on strengths and limitations of composition choices made relative to alternatives</p>	<p>In a live video conferencing call. Or, if videos have been made, these can be sent to the class and students can answer questions about the different videos independently and asynchronously and submit to teacher through an agreed format.</p> <p>It can be useful to end with a whole-class video conferencing call to reflect on the exercise and discuss the learning that has taken place.</p>

## Additional assessment activities

There are many ways this activity can be assessed in addition to attention to the processes and products already outlined. Here are just some possible activities, many of which can be used for either formative or summative assessment and which aim to assess both subject knowledge and creative and/or critical thought.

	DETAILS	POSSIBLE CRITERIA	POSSIBLE ONLINE MODES OF DELIVERY
<b>HOMEWORK/ CLASSWORK</b>	<p>Students can be asked to find as many songs as they can that feature shoes in the title or lyrics and write a piece on what sort of music shoes have inspired and why shoes have featured in music, despite being seemingly mundane objects.</p> <p>As an extension, students could be asked to analyse the use of music in advertisements for footwear and possibly to compose their own piece for a footwear advert. What are the musical features of the piece that has been chosen? Why has that music been chosen? What is it saying about the shoes? What is it saying about the people who buy the shoes? How could you challenge any conventions/patterns by making your own work more unusual to create stand-out for your advert?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of musical vocabulary and knowledge</li> <li>• Number and quality of examples given</li> <li>• The extent to which the student identifies assumptions and/or convention</li> <li>• The extent to which the student challenges assumptions and/or convention</li> <li>• Quality of reasoning and explanations given</li> <li>• Extent to which the student has a personal perspective on formulation, content, technique, or composition (rather than simply reproducing existing examples or arguments)</li> </ul>	<p>Independent, off-line, asynchronous work with check-ins from teacher to provide formative feedback as appropriate</p>
<b>PORTFOLIO/ PROJECT</b>	<p>Students can be tasked with producing a 'these shoes are made for... music project'. They can be asked to include any number of sections (or they could design their own structure), such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lyrics written</li> <li>• Notation/description/video recording of my/our piece/s inspired by shoes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effort put in to creating a high quality output</li> <li>• Use of musical vocabulary</li> </ul>	<p>Digital portfolios can be used for this. There are many sites available online that provide this service.</p> <p>A low-tech option is to have the student create and submit a PowerPoint presentation documenting their project</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notation/description/video recording of my/our piece/s using shoes as musical instruments</li> <li>• Some of the musical choices I/we made and why I/we made them</li> <li>• What was the best and worst bits of our/my composition/s?</li> <li>• Other examples of music that feature shoes</li> <li>• Some of the musical choices made in these other examples and why I think they made them</li> <li>• Some of the ways that I/we/they could have made the piece of music more unusual/interesting/exciting. What would have been some really radical choices?</li> <li>• What I think another composer (the specific composer/musician can be chosen or assigned) would have done differently and why</li> <li>• Why it is/isn't a good idea to use shoes as inspiration for music</li> <li>• Self-assessment according to rubrics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to take a position and justify it with quality reasoning</li> <li>• Ability to imagine how the same task might be approached by another composer</li> <li>• Ability to generate ideas for unusual or unconventional choices that they or others could have made in their compositions</li> <li>• Ability to acknowledge strengths and limitations of their own work and the work of others</li> <li>• Extent to which student attempts to explore ideas other than the most commonly accepted and safest options</li> </ul>	<p>Alternatively, this can be done on paper and photographed or scanned, and submitted to the teacher by mail or through the learning platform</p> <p>It is useful to provide teacher feedback during the process of development</p>
EXAM/QUIZ	<p>Students could be asked to provide a written explanation under timed conditions that discusses each choice that was made in writing the lyrics and creating the musical piece in the original activity. What musical qualities did the final piece feature and why? What was the most unusual choice and why? What could have been done to make the work more unusual and/or powerful?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Correct use of musical vocabulary</li> <li>• Ability to make connections between the piece's inspiration and its musical qualities</li> <li>• Ability to identify and generate more unusual choices</li> <li>• Ability to justify their position with high-quality reasoning</li> </ul>	<p>In a live session or as a take-home exam</p>
CREATIVE OUTPUT	<p>Students could be asked to write additional lyrics from different perspectives (the perspective of the right versus left shoe, the perspective of the owner, the perspective of the owner's family/friends) or using different kinds of shoes as inspiration. They could then compose an accompanying musical piece and write an analysis that compares, contrasts, and explains the musical qualities of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingness to explore unusual or unconventional ideas and to go beyond one's initial way of considering the task</li> <li>• Ability to imagine and write from different perspectives and from more than one perspective</li> </ul>	<p>Independently, offline with regular check-ins from the teacher to provide formative feedback as appropriate. Submitted to the teacher through an agreed format</p>

	<p>each piece and evaluates how conventional/unusual the pieces are and why.</p> <p>Students could be asked to listen to a musical piece and imagine how different shoes would respond to it – this may be one of the pieces written by the students or could be another piece that the teacher would like to work on. They then write a play with various shoes disagreeing about the strengths and limitations of a particular musical piece. This could be extended to become an entire musical with shoes as characters, disagreeing for example about the qualities of their owners and/or the music that has been written about them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to identify and challenge conventional and unusual musical choices</li> <li>• Ability to justify their position with high-quality reasoning</li> <li>• Ability to produce an imaginative product</li> <li>• Awareness of areas of personal novelty or risk</li> <li>• Use of musical vocabulary and knowledge</li> </ul>	
<p><b>PERFORMANCE/ PRESENTATION</b></p>	<p>The students can be asked to put on a performance of the piece/s they created in the original activity or one they created as part of the above assessment activities, along with a presentation that explains their use of critical and creative thinking during the process of composition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance etiquette, style, and quality</li> <li>• Ability to identify and explain creative musical and lyrical choices</li> <li>• Quality of reasoning</li> <li>• Ability to identify and explain creative and critical thinking in a music context</li> </ul>	<p>This can take place in a live video conference session or the student can pre-record video or audio, embed into slides and submit slides through the agreed format (e.g. through the learning platform or via email etc.). Note that video clips can be too heavy for some email systems. If the student emails a link to the presentation, they may need to ensure permissions are shared for each embedded video or audio clip individually in addition to presentation itself.</p>

