

## MUSIC COMPOSITION

***Music Composition can help you explore source material by asking these KEY QUESTIONS...***

**Setting:** What genre of music is appropriate for this setting? What kinds of found sounds might you hear in this setting? Is this a homogenous or eclectic environment?

**Characters:** What is the energy of each your characters? Are they a homogenous or eclectic community? What voice type might each character have? How does each character speak (fast or slow, bumpy or smooth, monotone or sing-songy, loud or soft)?

**Musical Structure:** Which sections of libretto could be set as recitative? Which sections of libretto could be set as an aria? Where can musical phrases or even whole sections repeat? What is the structure of your aria; does it resemble a common form such as ternary, verse-chorus or strophic? When might characters sing solo? When might characters sing together in a duet, small ensemble or chorus?

**View and Respond:** What existing pieces of music might your composition sound like? How does the composer use rhythm, melody and accompaniment to express a mood? How does s/he bring attention to certain words? How much repetition is used?

**You may compose music for...**

Recitative  
Aria  
Duet/Trio/Quartet  
Chorus

**Your composition may have the musical structure of...**

Through-composed  
Verse-chorus  
Binary  
Ternary  
Strophic  
Theme and variations  
Rondo

**Accompaniment**

What sounds or rhythms might create the mood, tone, or setting?  
What instruments might contribute to the composition?

## The Music Composition TOOLBOX:

TOOL	ELEMENTS	KEY QUESTIONS
Rhythm	Pattern Rests Fermatas Syncopation Swing Long Short Compressed Stretched	What is the rhythm that emerges from the libretto as you speak it? In what rhythm do the characters sing?  On which syllables do the emphases fall?  Can this rhythm be broken up?  Can this rhythm be repeated in full or can a smaller part be extracted and repeated?  What rhythm does the setting evoke? Does the setting change? How would you show that through rhythm?  Do the characters change? How would you show that through rhythm?
Melody	Call and response Stepwise and leaping pitch contours Melisma Sequences	Is your melody fast or slow, bumpy or smooth, monotone or sing-songy, loud or soft?  Is there a device you can employ to enhance your melody, such as call and response, melisma, or canon?  Can your melody be repeated or can a smaller part be used in a sequence?  Does your melody evoke a certain tone, mood, location, or time?  Does your melody resemble or contrast the way your characters speak?
Pitch	High or Low Voice Types (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass)	Does your character sing high or low? Does this change throughout?  Do the emotions of the piece call for high or low pitch?
Tempo	Fast or Slow Accelerando Ritardando	Do your characters sing fast or slow? Does this change throughout?  Is the setting busy and frantic or slow and calm? Would the tempo be fast or slow?  What is the emotion? Does that emotion call for a slow or fast tempo?
Dynamics	Loud (forte) or Soft (piano) Crescendo Decrescendo	When should the piece be loud and when should the piece be soft? When should changes occur?  Does the emotion of the piece call for loud or soft music? Where do the changes occur?
Articulation	Bumpy or Smooth Legato Staccato	Is there a lot of movement in the piece? Or is the piece steady?  Does the character sing with lots of changes? Are the notes smooth and connected or bumpy and disconnected?

## Approaches to composing music...

**Soundscape** is a music composition tool that involves the layering of sounds to evoke a particular setting. It is often used as an introduction to composition, as it allows its creators to explore the sonic qualities of a particular environment without the traditional restrictions of western music.

Visualize a setting, perhaps the setting for a moment you are planning to dramatize through words and music. What things exist? What sort of sounds do these things make?

Try experimenting with these sounds. What happens when you:

- Repeat them?
- Incorporate more of your singing voice?
- Make them more percussive?
- Make them louder or softer?
- Make them higher or lower?
- Make them faster or slower?
- Make them staccato or legato?

What if you repeat and then layer the sounds? Do some sounds sound better together than others? How can you refine your sound pallet? Do you want a homogenous or contrasting set of sounds?

Which sounds happen when? Does a conductor or the group decide? Do you need a map to help remember the sequence and combinations of sounds?

When do the sounds get louder/softer or faster/slower? Does a conductor or the group decide? Do you need a map to help remember when and how these events take place?

Can you add physical gesture to your pallet of sounds? Can you use different groupings of performers? Are there opportunities for solos, duets, etc?

If you are creating a music drama, is there a place where you could incorporate soundscape? Could it function as:

- Underscore for a scene?
- An overture or musical transition?
- Accompaniment for a dance or physical sequence?

**Represent Music Visually:** Represent the contour of the melody visually by drawing the melody (a "melody mountain") or by shaping pipe cleaners. Or create a visual score using lines, dashes, arrows, accent cues and other symbols. These symbols can be mapped to the libretto. Colors can also represent different notes and rests that can be arranged to create a composition (colored cups can be used).

**Using Numbers:** Assign numbers to the notes on a scale. Use the numbers to communicate the different pitches in the melody.

**Stairs:** Visually represent notes as a set of stairs (you can also number the stairs). A person going up and down the stairs represents the ups and downs of the notes.

**Word Painting:** Say the word to understand the shape of the word. Match sound to the way the word is said.

**The Recording Studio:** Individually create a melody by finding a private place in the room or cupping your hands over your mouth as if you are entering a private recording studio. Try out melodies and rhythms. These melodies and rhythms are then shared with the group. Students can also work in pairs and go into the recording studio together.

**Movement:** Use movement or gesture as a starting place. Create sounds and vocal choices to go with the created movements. Is your body moving fast or slow? High or low? Bumpy or smooth?

## **ASSESSING Music Composition...**

**Students can assess their choices by documenting...**

Record your composition; do you like what you hear and does it capture your original dramatic intentions?

Graphically notate your composition; do you see shape and patterns that can be augmented or varied?

Transcribe your composition; are there any musical choices that are yet to be made concrete?

**Students can assess their choices by performing...**

Do certain melodies suit certain voice types?

Have you given enough information about articulation and dynamics?

Is the libretto easy to understand?

Would you like to keep any embellishments or “fortuitous mistakes” made by the performer(s)?

**In order to *REVISE* you can make changes to the elements in your toolbox to adjust...**

Pitch, Tempo, Dynamics, Articulation