

Friday Afternoons:

Language

Composer Resources

**Written by Ally Daubney
by Russell Hepplewhite and Michael Rosen**

Language

“ It’s what we hear, day and night. It’s what we say, day and night. It’s what we read and what we write. It’s how we think, day and night. It’s how we feel, day and night. It’s how we love and how we fight.”

This piece is about the power of language. The following activities, exercises and games are all designed to explore language and music and their relationship to each other. They could be used in a music lesson, or more broadly in class as a way of exploring literacy and the power of language through song .

How the song 'Language' came to be – words into music



Michael Rosen is a wonderful and very famous poet and author. Perhaps you know some of his stories or poems, like “We’re Going on a Bear Hunt” or “Chocolate Cake”. Russell Heppelwhite is an award-winning music composer who is best known for writing operas and songs. Michael and Russell have collaborated to create the 12 brilliant songs in this “Everything” collection .

<https://www.fridayafternoonmusic.co.uk/blog/interview-russell-heppelwhite>

In these songs, the words came first. Michael Rosen wrote the words, knowing they were going to be made into songs. But sometimes composers ‘set’ words to music that were written for another purpose. Benjamin Britten wrote his famous War Requiem using the words of the Latin Mass. And he also set the words of many poems to music, including many of the original Friday Afternoon songs.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvq8V_bQVqI

Sometimes though, the melody is written first and the words come afterwards. The Beatles song “Yesterday” originally had lyrics about scrambled eggs until Paul McCartney came up with the words we now know and love.

So, there's no one right way, but instead a range of different ways for us to explore

Using the piece as the basis for composing activities

We are going to think about the power of language.
It doesn't even need to be spoken.

Let's play a game so that you can share your actions
without using words.

Silent Call, Noisy Echo!

Appoint a leader to silently mime a sound and the rest of the class can copy but make the sound (silent call and a noisy echo!).

For example, a sneeze, an angry face, a sigh at a sweet baby, calling a cat, whistling, laughing, crying. Be as creative as you like!

Then try to identify all of the sounds you make.

You see, your inner voice thought of the language when you copied the miming – ('Oh, it's a cough. I need to cough') and then at the end you put it into words.

Language is everywhere and travels throughout our lives, which is what this song is about!

Changing the emphasis of the language



In a group of 4-6 pupils, write one sentence about anything you like on a piece of paper.

Example: Soggy baked beans are so horrible and disgusting!

Say the sentence out loud, exploring different voices and moods.

Say it cheerfully. Say it like your favourite pet spider has just died. Say it like the queen. Say it like a toddler. Say it like your favourite cartoon character. Say it like you really don't care. Say it like it's the most important message you have ever delivered. Say it like you are telling an alien who doesn't understand English.

Act it out – use your facial expression and body to emphasise your message.

Here's an example, using the statement

“my flipflops are stuck in the sand”.

Now take it in turns to say the sentence once, placing emphasis on the next word along on each reading. Think about the difference this makes in communicating the sentence.

My flipflops are stuck in the sand.

My **flipflops** are stuck in the sand.

My flipflops **are** stuck in the sand.

My flipflops are **stuck** in the sand.

My flipflops are stuck **in** the sand.

My flipflops are stuck in **the** sand.

My flipflops are stuck in the **sand**.

Speech into music



Now do the same thing again but sing the emphasised word in any way you like, to theatrically and musically get your message across!

One person can “compose” the sentence, just emphasising the next word along each time (the bold word) and the rest of the group can echo it back, and then move into the next person directly, just like you are reading a musical ‘score’!

Remember you can play with lots of different musical elements to explore them thoroughly before settling on your final ideas (e.g. pitch (how high or low it is), dynamics (the volume), tempo (the speed)).

Find a way to capture your sentences with the sung words – perhaps by audio or video recording or even finding a way to ‘notate’ your word (by inventing your own notation) so that it helps you remember it and for the rest of the world to understand how to ‘sing’ it from your ‘notation’.

Now **just** practice the sung emphasised word a few times.

Finally, try to put all of the emphasised words into one musical phrase, so that you have a completely new and original piece of music based on your own sentence!

Record this, and then each group can teach your new ‘musical sentences’ to another groups.

How about then adding each group’s musical sentence together, singing them one after another and coming up with one very silly longer piece of music?

Words and music go together like fish fingers and chips!



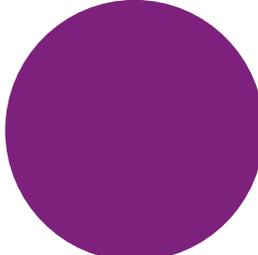
Sometimes you just want the chips, right? And sometimes you just want a fish finger. Well it's the same with words and music.

Can you think of a piece of music that you like that doesn't have any singing?

Can you think of 'words' you like that don't have any music, perhaps a favourite poem or story?

In small groups share these thoughts and ideas - this could be the basis of a words and music 'show and tell' starting each day with a different person's chosen music or words.

Now put a song into your head. What song have you got running around your head? There's likely to be loads of different songs in your class, since our heads are filled with thousands of songs that we 'catch' as we wander through our daily lives, and often we 'catch' them by accident (hearing them in the car, on the TV, radio etc.) whereas at other times we learn them purposefully, like this brilliant song 'Language'.



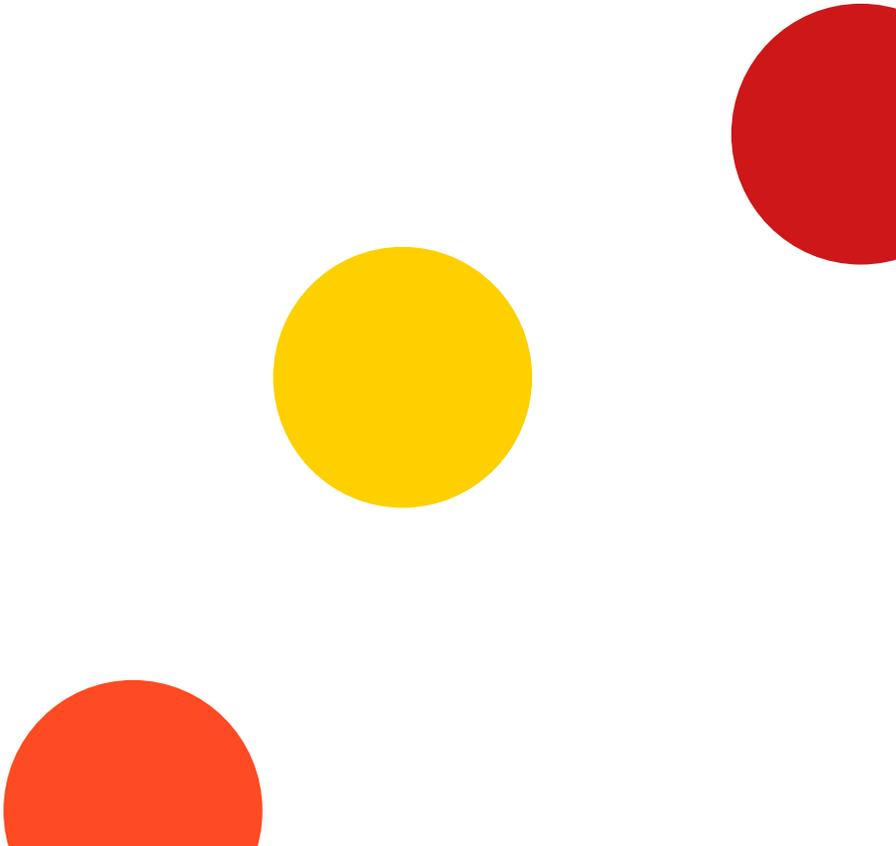
Each of these songs in your heads tells a story

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What is the story? Have you ever really listened to and thought about the lyrics in the songs we like?

Consider taking a song and reimagining its lyrics as a short story (max 100 words)

Play a game where someone reads out the synopsis of the song story and see if people can guess the song...



Words to advertise or promote something

Just like language, music and sound are all around us.

They can be used together in very powerful and memorable ways.

Can you think of any adverts on the television or radio that advertise things that have catchy music?

Sing them to each other. What makes these catchy? Try and find some attributes common to these jingles. Are they all fast? Do they all rhyme? Do they all have a big jump in the melody?

Think of a message that you want to give in just a few words (maximum 15 words, hopefully fewer – make it really concise). Who is the message for? Your friends? Teachers? Dog owners? Politicians? This could be a call for change, or an advert for a product, or a thing you need to remember.

Decide on your important message between you. Share it with another group.

Do they understand your important point? Can they suggest ways to make it even more powerful?

Think about the feedback they give you and decide whether to implement it.

Now find different ways of “setting” your important message to a melody.

Just like the flip flops example, experiment with emphasising different words and saying it in different ways, then singing it different ways. Using your earlier research and inquiry into what makes jingles hooky and catchy, try and make your important message as memorable and ‘instant’ as possible.

Make an audio recording so that you don’t forget them.

You could extend this to write a whole speech or advert where this music is the central message.

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