

Conducting the Class

What is a musical conductor and what do students know about this role?
Explain that in this activity some students will have a chance to 'conduct' how the rest of the class play instruments or sings.

Exploring
Dynamics

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Year F-2

Brainstorm different ways the conductor could move their hands/body to indicate changes in dynamics. For example, the conductor could move their hands up to command a greater volume and down to command a quieter volume. Fast movement between low and high could indicate a fast change in dynamics.

As a class, decide on the exact signals the conductor will use. Choose a student to play the role of the conductor and ask them to stand where everyone in the class can see them. If you are using instruments, choose un-tuned percussion instruments that can be played simply by shaking or striking. This makes it easier for students to focus on playing louder or softer. Students can create quieter or louder sounds by varying how gently or powerfully they shake or strike their instruments.

The teacher should model appropriate ways to play louder and quieter sounds on instruments. If you are singing, choose a song that the whole class already knows. Again, this allows students to only focus on the changes in dynamics. A very simple approach to this activity is to have the class drone one long sound (e.g. a vowel sound [ooo, iii, uuu]).

Students must pay close attention to the conductor, watching and listening for dynamic changes and adjusting their playing/singing accordingly.

Allow for five or so students to have a go and if it's popular with the students, this can be an activity to come back to at any time to enjoy and consolidate the idea of dynamics. There are extensions on the other side of the page.

Conducting the Class

Once students are familiar with working with a conductor, it can be incorporated into other musical activities and be used to explore other elements.

Exploring
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Year 3-4:

Explore the approaches described in the F-2 section (on the other side of the page) and then try these extensions once students are confidently following the conductor:

- Create more signals for the activity. For example, the conductor can give commands to smaller groups of students by pointing at them first or the conductor can make a signal like a fist to indicate that a command is for the whole class
- Allow for five or so students to have a go and if it's popular with the students, this can be an activity to come back to at any time to enjoy and consolidate the idea of dynamics; and
- Split the class into two groups, with the conductor to indicate dynamics for each group at the same time. The left hand is the direction for one group, the right hand is the direction for the other group. They can indicate the same dynamics, or opposite dynamics, or hold one group at soft whilst manipulating the other group.

Year 5-6:

Explore the approaches described in the F-2 and 3-4 sections and then try the following extension:

- Divide the class into small groups (4-5 students in each group) and ask them to choose a short song (nursery rhyme length) and have one conductor, and the rest of the group as performers, and decide on dynamic variations for their song/group, and rehearse and perform for the class.

Making a Rainstorm

In this activity students use body percussion to make a whole class rainstorm soundscape. This activity weaves in musical vocabulary which supports students to understand the concept of dynamics.



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Year F-2:

Ask students to make a circle and explain that the goal is to create the sound of a storm building using only their hands. Movements will be passed around the circle. This means the teacher starts a movement and the person to their right will join in, and then the next student to their right will join in and so on around the circle, creating a wave of sound.

Once the movement returns to the leader they introduce the next movement and start a second wave. Encourage students to focus on the person to their left rather than the leader.

Rainstorm steps:

- rub hands together (pianissimo; this is the wind)
- tap one finger on the palm of your hand (pianissimo; these are the first raindrops)
- tap all four fingers on the palm (piano; many more rain drops)
- vigorous clapping (forte; it's getting more intense)
- slap on the floor, or your thighs or stamp (fortissimo; thunder enters)

Once students are familiar with this activity, Invite students to volunteer to lead the group.

Year 3-4

Explore the approaches described in the F-2 section (above) and then try these extensions:

- Try the activity forward and backwards (crescendo and decrescendo) by repeating all the movements in the reverse order to show the storm dying down, this continues until the group is back to step one - rubbing hands together and gradually stop ending with absolute silence.
- Invite students to volunteer to lead the group in this activity.

Year 5-6

Explore the approaches described in the F-2 and 3-4 sections (above) and then try the following extensions:

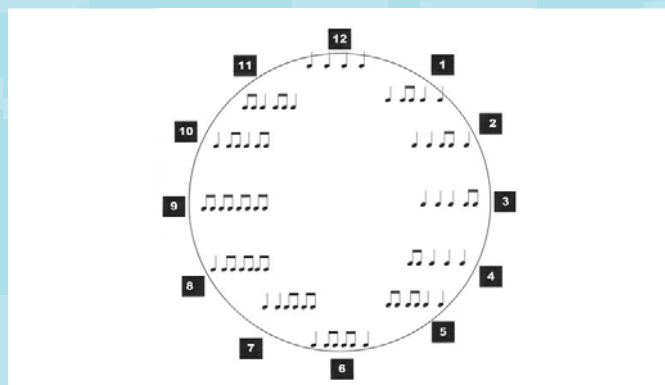
- Divide students into two or three smaller groups, and have them create their own dynamic rainstorm. Encourage them to include some new actions to build and diminish the dynamics throughout. Rehearse, and perform for the class.

Dynamic Call and Response

Most students are familiar with clapping back a rhythm but this concept can be extended in many ways including: using a larger variety of rhythmic patterns; incorporating percussion instruments; and by changing and playing with the dynamics of patterns.



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Year F-2

Prepare for this activity by writing a few different simple bars of 4/4 rhythms on the board where students can see them. These can be taken directly from the Rhythm Clock (see image above and a larger version in the 'Exploring Rhythm' section). Ideally there is a percussion instrument for each student (although body percussion can be a substitute).

Organise the class into a circle and explain that they will be completing a call and response activity. Go through each of the prepared rhythms using call and response. The teacher plays a rhythm and the group immediately follow. Cycle through several patterns in order and play with different dynamics, sequences and tempos. Once students are comfortable with this, they can choose one of these rhythms and prepare to play it for the group.

Year 3-4

Explore the approaches described in the F-2 section (above) and then try these extensions:

- Each student will play their pattern and the class will repeat it back as a group. Ideally, the class can do this without missing a beat. It can be helpful to have someone to keep the 4/4 beat going in the background using a tone block, a metronome app, or by clapping
- Once the group is comfortable with this activity, encourage each student to consider the dynamic they are choosing. Are they playing softly or loudly? Encourage students to make an intentional choice about the dynamic they are using and have the group imitate the volume and rhythm precisely; and
- Instead of using the rhythm patterns on the board, invite students to make up their own rhythms.

Year 5-6

Explore the approaches described in the F-2 and 3-4 sections and then explore the following extension:

- Divide students into smaller groups, and ask them to create a rhythmic piece (4-8 bars in length; depending on confidence); that includes dynamic contrast. Rehearse and present to the class.

Dynamic Canons

One of the most effective ways of reinforcing student understandings of dynamics is through the use of a basic canon (or round). This activity helps reinforce dynamics, in context, through ensemble work. There are larger versions of the musical scores in the 'Exploring Pitch' Canon activity.

Exploring
Dynamics

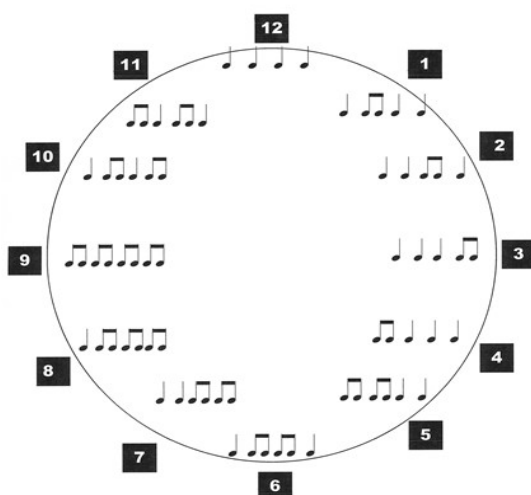
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Year F-6

These canon/rounds songs can be used from F-6. There are four example songs included and they get progressively more difficult. The trickier songs can be introduced as students gain more confidence using their voice, pitching, and singing as a group.

As the students become more familiar with the notes and structure of each song a dynamic inquiry process can be introduced. Invite students to discuss and provide suggestions about how the dynamics of the song could be developed. Which part should be quiet? Which part should be loud? This could also relate to the format/structure of the canon/round. For example, the first time the canon is sung quietly and as the round is repeated, the group gets increasingly louder. Encourage students to consider how the dynamics changes the feel of the song. This process can lead to a performance of one of the canons.

A dynamic inquiry process can also be applied to a rhythmic ensemble activity (instead of a canon song). For example - the Rhythm Clock (below) can be used to lead an ensemble percussion activity (involving body percussion or untuned percussion instruments) and the group can consider: Which part should be quiet? Which part should be loud? Develop musical compositions and support students to understand more about dynamics.



Donkeys and Carrots (round)

Belgian folk song



To Stop the Train



Ah, Poor Bird

Folk Song



One Bottle of Pop

Folk Song



Peter and the Wolf

This activity draws on the widely known and commonly available Peter and the Wolf story and composition. Through the activity, students become familiar with the various characters and the way they are represented musically. This activity creates a rich context to talk about musical dynamics.



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Year F-6

Locate a version of the story and music and read the story of Peter and the Wolf to your students. With help from students, write a list of the characters in the story on the board.

Read the story again and have students write a list of character traits for each character.

- Ask students to share what they wrote for Peter's character traits. Have students describe how they think his music might sound, then play Peter's theme. Does it sound the way they thought it would? Explain that Peter's theme is played by the string section of the orchestra. Listen again, and this time have students imagine Peter in the meadow.
- Next, without telling students whose theme it is, play the bird theme. Have students guess what character is represented by the music, then reveal the correct answer. Discuss what makes the bird's theme sound like a bird. Tell students that the excerpt is played by the flute, which is commonly used to depict the sound of a bird. The flute is in the woodwind family.

This activity can be a great introduction to the different instruments and instrument families in the orchestra. Encourage students to discuss and identify dynamics associated with each instrument and how this relates to the emotions of the story.

This process of investigation can be applied to other orchestral pieces designed for children such as The Carnival of The Animals featured in The Elements of Music 5-6 course and Little Red Riding Hood (featured above and included in the ARTS:LIVE Fairy Tale Dance resource).

Dynamics Quiz

What musical terms do you know? Which words, pictures or symbols can be matched together? Could you add in any other symbols, words, pictures or examples?



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Conductor

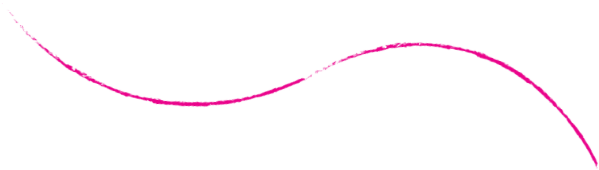


Forte



Pianissimo

Piano



a sound
that gets
louder
and louder



Conductor

