



Step 3: Music & Lyrics

Step 1: Music & Lyrics

This website will give you an insight into the creative challenges faced by Dennis Kelly as writer and Tim Minchin as composer and lyricist when adapting Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda* into a musical.

The RSC invites students to go on the same creative journey as Dennis and Tim, creating a scene or song for a new character who is introduced to us on the first day of term at Crunchem Hall.

The scene should contain no more than four speaking characters.

We have created a webpage for each of the steps that we feel are essential in creating a good scene or song, they are:

- Create a believable *Character*
- Plan a strong *Plot* - including an *Inspiration Gallery*
- Develop *Music and Lyrics*
- Write the *Dialogue*
- *Rewriting* what has been written and then *Rehearsing it*

To make the most of this resource, we suggest that you work through these pages in this order with your students.

By following the stages on the site so far, students will have started to create their character and begun to plot out their scene or song.

The next step is to think about the music and songs. For students who are just writing a scene, this is still an important step to fully understand the process of creating a musical.

In the film on the web page, students will gain a real insight into Tim Minchin's process for creating lyrics and music. After watching the interview students can play with the sound buttons to start to build up their ideas for the music for their song. Songs don't have to be set to music but even so using the buttons and taking part in activities will give them a good start for thinking about the tone of their song and what their ideas would be for any music that would be created around their lyrics.

The activities outlined in the pack are accompanied by a film (Coughton School) which shows how they might be used in the classroom. The exercises aim to help the students write rhythmically and lyrically. The resources can also act as standalone activities that can be adapted to other forms of music in your school curriculum.

Using the films in class

The filmed interviews are the inspiration for your students writing. The films are all different lengths and none last more than 10 minutes. Each one been broken down into chapters, and when you click on a tab you will automatically be taken to the specific chapter point.

We suggest you ask your students a series of questions or points to consider before watching the films and again after watching the films.

For Example for the music films :

Before watching

- Ask students in pairs to think about any songs from musicals that they know and like?
- Why do they like them, what makes them good songs?
- What job does a song in a musical do?

After watching

- Tim talks about music being angular or smooth, play some music to the students, how would they describe it?
- Talk through the plot of a well known story with the class one they all know, Cinderella for example. Split the class into 4 groups and divide the story into four main sections with each group taking a section. Ask the groups to decide which character they would write a song for, why and at what point would the song be?
- Once they have decided who is singing and what they are singing about, what would the song sound like? Ask the students to list 4 words to describe the feeling and sound of the song.

Using the Music Resources

1. Rhythm Listen Clap

Students listen to a selection of rhythmic patterns. They repeat the rhythms and continue their line as other layers are introduced.

2. Rhythm Words & Patterns Step One And Two

A simple introduction to rhythmic notation using words as a guide. Including:

Right Rhythm Wrong Rhythm

An exercise for teachers who are confident with notation. Students learn to write notation with increased accuracy

3. Creating An Ostinato Using a Chosen Phrase:

Students create a rhythm for a simple background pattern or theme

4. Creating A Melody For Your Ostinato

Students create music for the rhythm

5. Writing Rhythm & Lyrics

Students put music and words together to create verses for their song

6. Extension Activity

A reference to the online film of the music lesson

Creating a Song For a Musical in Class

The films on the Music webpage can serve as very useful companions to the activities you will read below. Tim's inspiring explanation of how the music was created is a thoughtful and extremely helpful starting point to support the teaching of lyrics and music. The film of the music lesson shows many of the activities below in action in the classroom, and also shows the way in which pupils have responded to them. Using these step-by-step activities will help your students write rhythmically and lyrically.

Rhythm Listen Clap

Students listen to a selection of rhythmic patterns. They repeat the rhythms and continue their lines as other layers are introduced.

Purpose of activity: Students become accustomed to holding a rhythm when another rhythm is being played. They will need to do this when playing an ostinato later on.

How it works:

Clap 1 2	Clap 3 4	Clap - Clap 1 2	Clap 3 4
--------------------	--------------------	---------------------------	--------------------

Step 1

The group starts in a circle. The leader of the group (initially this should be you) claps a simple background rhythm and after hearing it, the whole group joins in. e.g.

Explain that the leader will change their rhythm, but the students should continue to repeat the first rhythm until the leader calls out 'change'.

For example, the leader may change to 'clap clap-clap clap', but the rest of the group continue to clap the original rhythm until the leader says 'change'. They then join in and repeat the second rhythm until the word 'change' is called out again. This creates interesting patterns when the rhythms are layered on top of each other.

When students are confident with this activity, you can split the group into more sections: one group might change their rhythm on 'change'; another on 'now'; another on 'go'. This means up to four different rhythms could be played at the same time as each group waits to change to the next rhythm.

Step 2

This time, now the group know which word they need to listen for to change their rhythm, they move around the room, in and out of each other. They will find this challenging but fun. You could also introduce background music.

Rhythm Words & Patterns (Linked to online Sound Buttons) Step One

A simple introduction to rhythmic notation using words as a guide

Purpose of activity:

The function of this exercise is not about reading music (although pupils will be able to learn a little about rhythmic notation) it's more about playing with rhythms and phrases and understanding different blocks (of 4s, 3s, etc.)

What you will need:

It is a good idea to open the activity with the online sound button resource on the music webpage. The pupils click on each sound button to hear each rhythm; all of the rhythm buttons add up to one beat.

How it works:

Step 1

On an interactive whiteboard show the class the sound buttons from the Music page on the website. Each sound button represents a particular rhythm that adds up to one beat. Every rhythm is worth one beat so students are able play groups of rhythms which can be built into a simple time signature of three or four beats to a bar. The students will see the notation for this rhythm and understand how it sounds because a word will be attached to the rhythm. When words are spoken aloud students create exactly the same rhythm as the notes:

For example:

School
(1 crotchet = 1 beat)

Trunch-bull
(2 quavers = 1 beat)

Disc-i-pline
(triplets = 1 beat)

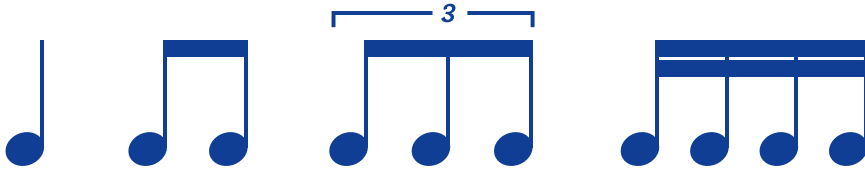
Hamm-er throw-er
(4 semi quavers = 1 beat)

Decide if the rhythm adds up to four or three beats in total and clap this out for the students

For example:

Clap out the rhythm:

School, Trunchbull, Discipline, Hammer thrower



Do not tell students which '*rhythm words*' you have chosen. Just clap the rhythm without words.

Students listen to this, then repeat it. They must then identify the particular words that match with the rhythm and call those out.

Extension Task: Right Rhythm/Wrong Rhythm

If you are comfortable with writing notation, try to fool the students by writing some notes incorrectly on the board. The teacher in the film clip preceded the work you can see on screen with a game called '*Right Rhythm/Wrong Rhythm*'

On a whiteboard show collection of rhythmic notation. If the students know the rhythmic notation is correct they read the notes and clap them back. If there is a set of notes written incorrectly (as example in the film clip of some notes that should be written as triplets have been written as three joined semiquavers) the students do not play them. Instead they call out (in a soulful Bluezy style)

Hey that's just the wrong rhythm lady! (Or man!)

Rhythm Words & Patterns (Linked to online Sound Buttons) Step Two

Once the students are comfortable with reading and clapping a range of different rhythms, give them a 'question rhythm' for which they must create an 'answer'. Ascertain how many beats you used in your question phrase so that their answer can include the same number of beats.

For example:

Question rhythm: (4 beats)

Hamm-er
throw-er 1

Hamm-er
throw-er 2

disc-i-pline
3

school
4

The response should also be 4 beats, so pupils might clap back with a rhythm such as...

Answer Rhythm: (4 beats)

school
1

school
2

Hamm-er throw-er
3

school
4

Challenge students if they suggest a 3 beat rhythm such as 'discipline, discipline, school'. Explain to them that they could use a musical rest, (a silent beat in which we wait and no music is played)they just wait and don't clap and the music will still add up to the right time.

For example:

disc-i-pline
1

disc-i-pline
2

school
3

rest
4

Now the students have had the opportunity to explore the rhythms using these words, the next step is for them to choose their own words to fit with the rhythms.

They should refer to any language work they have already created from other packs or in general and choose alternative words for the rhythmic phrases.

For example:

disc-i-pline could be changed to ***arr-o-gant***

school could be changed to ***Bruce***

Creating An Ostinato Using A Chosen Phrase:

Students create a rhythm for a simple background pattern or theme

Purpose of activity:

Students create an overall theme for their piece of music.

Now students have understood that words and phrases can also represent rhythms, explain that they are going to create a rhythm that will provide a background for their song. Eventually, they will create an 'ostinato' (a repeated pattern) that will help give their music theme and atmosphere.

To help students understand what an ostinato is, you might decide to play some examples for them. For example, there is a strong ostinato in the song, 'It must be love' by Madness, which is played on piano from the very first beat. This repeated pattern is played through most of the song. Ask students to listen to the James Bond theme music and identify the ostinato in that piece.

Up to this point in these activities, students have been exploring ideas about character and the plot for their scene. They can use this information to help them create or choose a spoken phrase using some interesting words. For example, if they wanted to create a song about Miss Trunchbull, they might write: 'Formidable holy terror'

Once they have chosen their phrase, ask them to say this rhythmically:

The image shows a rhythmic notation for the phrase "For mid-a-ble ho-ly te-rror". It consists of four groups of notes, each corresponding to a word. The first group is a single quarter note labeled "For" with a "3" below it. The second group is a triplet of quarter notes labeled "mid-a-ble" with a "1" below it and a bracket above it labeled "3". The third group is a pair of quarter notes labeled "ho-ly" with a "1" below it. The fourth group is a pair of quarter notes labeled "te-rror" with a "1" below it. Slashes are placed between the groups to indicate the start of a new beat.

(Each slash represents the start of a new beat so the phrase adds up to four beats).

If your students are confident with notation, you could ask them to write the notes next to their phrase.

Choosing Notes For Your Ostinato

Students create music for the rhythm

Purpose of activity:

Now students have created their simple rhythm, they can choose a melody for their ostinato.

What you will need:

Preferably, you need a selection of keyboards, with students working on them in groups. However students could just use their voices.

How it works:

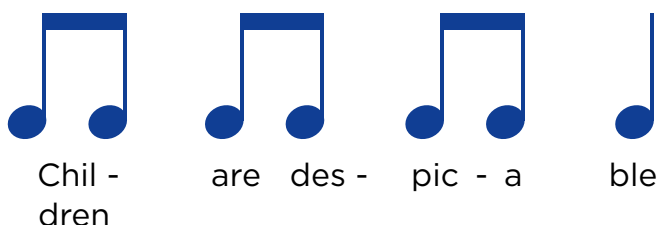
Students will now have a simple rhythm pattern that can be repeated and used as a background in their music. They need to add notes to this.

The film on the webpage shows a teacher modelling for her pupils how a tune can be written for an ostinato rhythm. Because it's a background pattern, it doesn't need to be complicated with lots of different notes. Sometimes it is better to use fewer notes, repeated across the rhythm as this makes the theme more memorable.

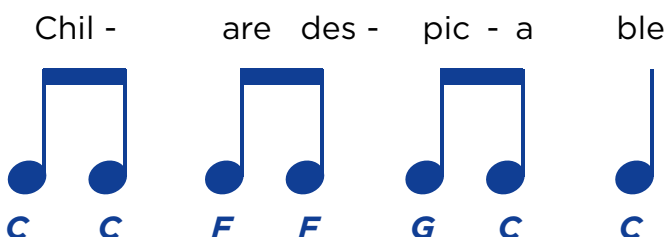
For example, the children may have chosen the phrase

'Children are despicable'

Rhythmically, it might be played as below:



If there are students who are not very confident with playing or singing notes, it can help to provide them with a created restriction. Many ostinatos use no more than three different repeated melodic notes. Give them the notes **c**, **d**, **e**, **f** and **g** and ask them to use no more than three of these for their melody. They can repeat notes as often as they like.



Ask students to consider how they want the audience to feel when they hear the music. What effect do they want to create?

Students can now rehearse their pattern so they are comfortable performing it to the rest of the group.

Writing Rhythm & Lyrics

Pupils put music and words together to create verses for their song

Purpose of activity:

The students are now ready to create their song for the musical. This is the time to get writing.

How it works:

Creating the lyrics and the music for the song is really an extension of creating an ostinato. The students have also practised writing question and answer phrases; again these skills will help them with creating the lyrics and melody.

Students should begin by creating the first verse. Before doing so it would be helpful if they chose whether their song was going to be in three beats (*waltz time*) or four beats (*a march*). Sometimes it is a good idea to discourage pupils from rhyming each line as this can create more limited language choices. However, some more able pupils may feel confident with rhyming and encouraging this skill would provide them with an interesting challenge.

The groups of notes and phrases they use must add up to blocks of the same time. In the example below, rhyming has not been used. Each line adds up to three beats.

Watch / the / glass
1 2 3

Tremb-ling / ratt-l-ing / glass
1 2 3

Cover / chil-dren / hide
1 2 3

The rhythms in this verse are played quite quickly which emphasises the sense of urgency that members of the school might experience when Miss Trunchbull approaches.

Once the verse has been edited and redrafted (see re writing resources for further ideas) the students can move onto creating other parts of the song.

Creating the Melody

As shown in the film of the music lesson, using keyboards is an effective way to encourage students to write music for their words. If you have students who find putting notes to music very difficult, you can offer them a creative restriction such as,

Write the music for the chorus using only five notes **C, D, E, F** and **G**.

Play around with the different ways that you can order these notes.

For Example:

Watch / the / glass **Trem-bl-ing / ratt-l-ing / glass**
G G G G G G

She / must-be-a / pproach-ing **Cover / chil-dren / hide**
C D C D E E G G G G C

Repeating lots of high notes at the beginning makes the situation sound more precarious. (In this case, **G** is the highest pitched note from **C** to **G**)

The students might notice that this tune sounds happy. This is because it is in a major key. Turning it into a minor key (by using an **E flat** instead of an **E**) will make the tune sound quite different.

Now the students are ready to add a chorus. This should be a slightly different tune to the verse but it can be created in exactly the same way.

Further Extension of Composition Work

Once the students have completed their lyrics and melody, you may wish to challenge them further by encouraging them to consider the atmosphere that they wish to create in the piece. The film of the music lesson shows simple activities that enable children to vary the texture of the music. This is done by playing blocks of sound that are large or small, high or low, smooth or sharp, sudden or gradual. In doing this, students recognise that they are not just creating music, but also creating a feeling that can be experienced by their audience.