

This activity simplifies the composition process by giving students three basic pitches from which to choose—low, medium or high.

## DO YOU KNOW?



The staff didn't always have five lines and four spaces. That didn't become standard practice until the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, there was a time early on in the notating of pitch when only one horizontal line was used. These one-line staves served to indicate approximate pitch, rather than definite pitch (F#, A, etc.). And because the range of most music back then wasn't anywhere near what it is today, notating the music didn't require as many lines. By contrast, some music in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries was written on six-line staves to accommodate the broader range.

**Materials:** Paper and pencils

## Tip

This activity makes a great follow-up to *River of Sound*, found on page 9, as it brings the creative process one step closer to conventional notation.

## Process

1. Give each student a sheet of paper and a pencil. Have each student turn the paper horizontally and draw a line across the length of the paper.
2. Next, have each student think of his or her favorite food and write it under the line in the form of a sentence. For example: My favorite food is cauliflower. (I doubt you'll hear *that* one in class.) Instruct students to make the words fairly large and to leave a little extra space between words.
3. Then, have the students assign a different pitch—low, medium and high—to each syllable in the sentence. The students may do this by placing a colored-in oval on (medium), just below (low), or just above (high) the line.
4. Once all the students have completed their melodies, invite a student to sing his or her original composition for the others. Allow each student an opportunity to share his or her original piece.

## Want to do more?

### The Three-Line Staff

The three-line staff offers students five pitch choices and is a natural progression from one-line staff to the traditional five-line staff.

1. Give each student a pencil and a copy of the three-line staff reproducible on page 14.
2. Have the students think of something they are good at doing. Then, have each student write this in the form of a sentence underneath the three-line staff. Examples include: I am good at helping my family with the chores; I am an excellent singer.
3. Then, have the students assign a different pitch to each syllable in the sentence by placing colored-in ovals on any of the three lines or the two spaces between the lines. This gives the students five basic pitches from which to choose—low, medium low, medium, medium high, and high. (Now might be a good time to mention to students that just as Beethoven didn't use every note in every piece, they don't need to either.)
4. Once all the students have completed their melodies, invite a student to perform his or her original composition for the others. Allow each student an opportunity to share his or her original piece.

## DO YOU KNOW?



The three-line staff has seen a recent resurgence in popularity. Modern composers are attracted by the freedom the three-line staff offers performers and are using this type of staff to indicate the approximate pitch range. The actual pitches are determined by the performer, meaning each performance can vary greatly.

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(Title)

By

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(Write your sentence here)

For those who don't know, Boomwhackers® are those ingenious plastic tubes of different lengths which sound at different pitches. Not only are they different lengths, but each pitch has its own corresponding color. This is great news for young composers, and the foundation for this activity, which removes rhythm as well as conventional notation from composition.

## Materials

Paper and markers or crayons  
Diatonic set of Boomwhackers®

## Tip

If you don't have access to Boomwhackers®, you can create your own tone tubes using cardboard wrapping paper tubes or mailing tubes cut to different lengths (see box below). After they're cut, run a piece of colored electrical tape along the spiral seam of each tube. Not only will this make the tubes more durable, but using a different color for each tube will color code the tubes. (Electrical tape in a variety of colors is available from virtually any hardware store.)

## Process

1. Play a set of Boomwhackers® for your students, having them observe how the length of each tube affects the pitch. (The longer the tube, the lower the pitch. The shorter the tube, the higher the pitch.)
2. Give each student a sheet of paper and an assortment of colors corresponding to those of the Boomwhackers®. (It may be necessary to divide the students into small groups and have them share the colors.)
3. Have the students create original melodies for Boomwhackers®. To notate them, the students should draw a small triangle (or some other simple shape) in the color that corresponds to the Boomwhacker® that should be played. It is not necessary to set the melody to a specific rhythm. (Since red indicates the pitch C in two different octaves, have the students draw a small square (or other contrasting shape) to notate the upper-octave C.)
4. Choose eight students to play the Boomwhackers® (or more, if you have multiple sets). Have each student conduct his or her original score by placing it where all can see it and then pointing to each colored triangle when that Boomwhacker® is to be played. Of course, be sure all students have a chance to conduct their piece, and make sure all the students get a chance to perform the melodies, too.

### **Tone Tubes**

Pitch and length, in inches

Low C	24 $\frac{5}{8}$ "
D	21 $\frac{7}{8}$ "
E	19 $\frac{3}{8}$ "
F	18 $\frac{1}{8}$ "
G	16 $\frac{1}{8}$ "
A	14 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
B-flat	13 $\frac{3}{8}$ "
B	12 $\frac{5}{8}$ "
High C	11 $\frac{7}{8}$ "

This cooperative or small-group activity focuses on timbre and form as students listen to, order, perform, and record sounds from various sources.

## Materials

Portable recording device\*

### DID YOU KNOW?



Collage comes from the French word *coller*, which means “to stick.” Originally, collage was a type of visual art in which different materials were put together to create a whole new work. These materials could be ribbons, fabric, newspaper and magazine clippings, wire, etc. As audio technology developed, the idea was adopted by composers including Iannis Xenakis, John Cage, and even The Beatles, who assembled many different recorded sounds into very effective sound collages.

## Process

1. Have the students explore the sound possibilities found in the room.

A short list of options includes:

- Rhythm instruments played individually or together
  - Mallet instruments
  - Recorders
  - Spoken word
  - Body percussion
  - Mouth sounds
  - Group or solo singing
  - Laughing
  - Imitated sounds, such as animal or mechanical sounds
  - Snoring (though hopefully just as part of this activity)
  - Found objects, such as a pencil sharpener or a clicking pen
2. Have the students decide which sounds to include in the composition, the order in which they are to be recorded, and how long to record each sound. This is where the true composition happens.
  3. Choose one student to operate the recording device while the others perform. The student in charge of recording can press pause in between sounds so the other students can get ready to create each successive sound.
  4. Play back the recording so the whole class can hear the original sound collage.

## Want to do more? I

Have the students decide on a theme for the collage such as “happiness,” “the blues” or “outer space.” Then have the students create a collage including only the sounds they think will help express the theme.

## Want to do more? II

Ask your school administrator if the class may explore sounds outside the music room, such as the cafeteria, the playground or the halls. There are so many sounds outside of the means of traditional musical instruments that can contribute greatly to a sound collage.

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\* You could certainly use a hand-held tape recorder but remember that many cell phones also have recording capabilities, as do some iPods.