

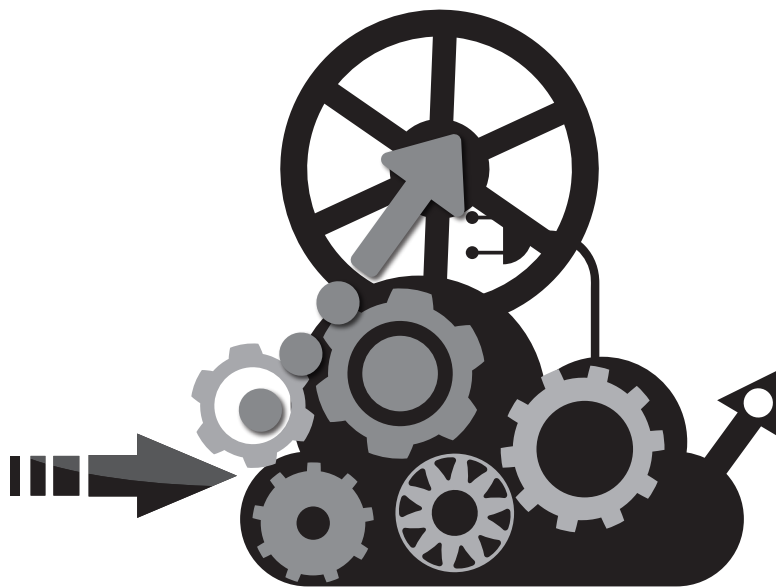
Introduction

About This Book

As the world of education becomes increasingly focused on standards-based instruction, music teachers must reinvent their curricula to include a wider range of musical opportunities for their students. We can no longer just sing songs and play recorders. Meeting the standards for singing, playing, and music literacy comes naturally to many of us; however, finding a meaningful way to compose with our students can be challenging.

The goal of this book is to provide a framework for composition projects for the general music classroom. The premise is the same for each project: students follow step-by-step instructions to add melody to the natural rhythmic structure of a repetitive poem. The activities are organized by musical concept, with each section further organized by difficulty. The first few composition activities should be achievable by first or second graders, but the later ones require more musical skill and knowledge of musical content. These activities are more appropriate for students in upper elementary school.

Composing with kids can be a daunting challenge, both in terms of the skills and knowledge required and in terms of the time needed. The poems in this book are only a starting point. Hopefully, your students will be excited by the process and proud of their compositions and will want to explore further techniques. While many of the early attempts may be somewhat awkward, I have seen and heard my students come up with some great music with very little guidance. I hope your students will enjoy both the process and the results of their efforts.



section 1: simple composition

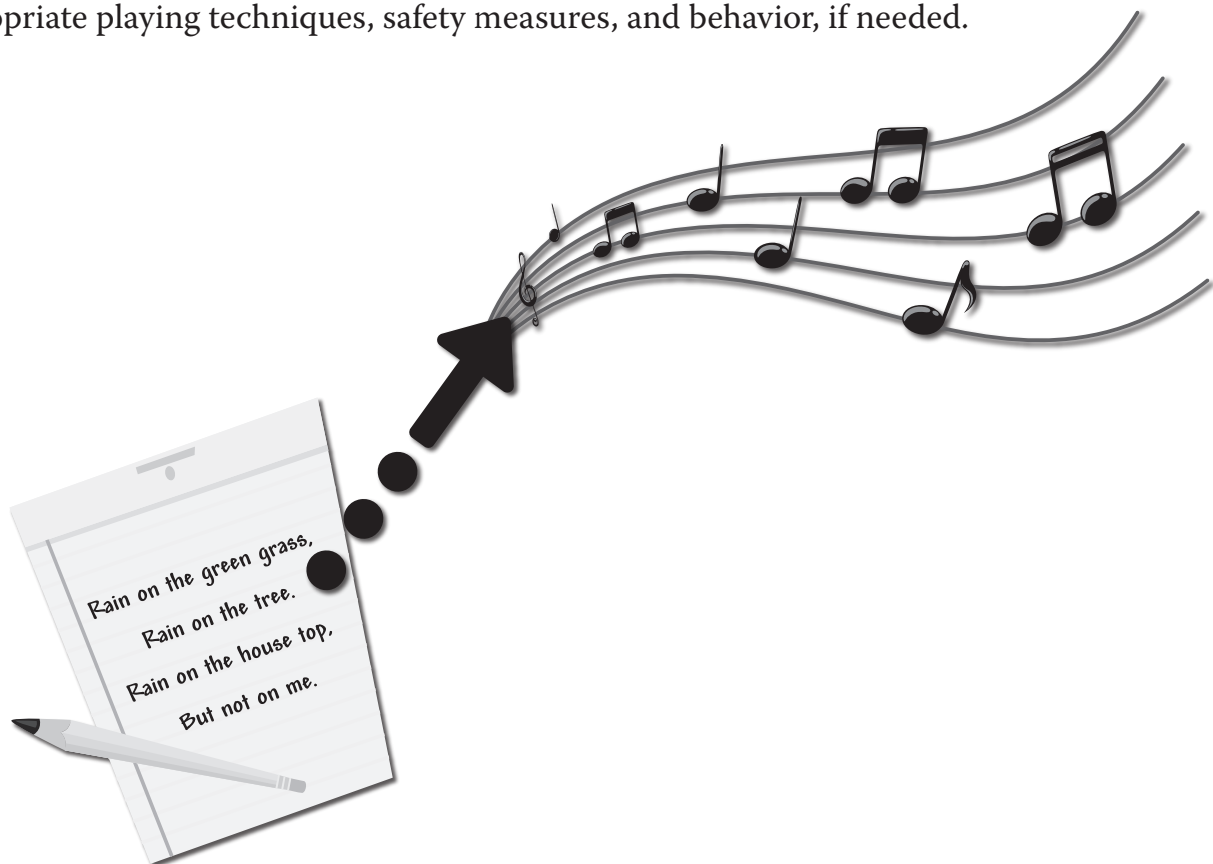
The first four pieces in this section are intended to provide initial success in composition. Only a few pitches are needed and any pitches will work. Either pentatonic or diatonic scales will provide good results. The rhythmic elements are limited to quarter notes, quarter rests, and beamed eighth notes.

“Going to Saint Ives” and “My Limerick” both use six pitches, which means that a pentatonic scale will not work without repeated pitches. “My Limerick” and “Spring Storm” use $\frac{6}{8}$ rhythms, which may make these pieces more suitable for students in later grades.

To extend “My Limerick,” use this composition to study limericks. Encourage each student to write his or her own lyrics to replace the original ones. Check with colleagues to find out what grade level studies limericks in language arts.

“Spring Storm” provides young composers the opportunity to create a sound collage by adding dynamics and sound effects to their composed melodies. By adding dynamics to “Spring Storm,” a student will make the piece more reflective of the poem and more interesting. Sound effects will add drama to the text. Fingernails scraping on a drum, rainsticks, and thunder tubes could mimic a storm; triangles, guiros, and animal sound effects might bring out the sun.

Once again, I suggest that you teach these poems before handing out the compositional worksheets. Your students will need to be familiar with the rhythm and structure of a poem before they begin their compositions. I also suggest that you outline the compositional process dictated on each worksheet and list your expectations on the board. Consider discussing appropriate playing techniques, safety measures, and behavior, if needed.



Name: _____ Teacher: _____ Date: _____

ABC

Great A, lit - tle a, bounc - ing B. The
1 2 1 1 2 3 3 3 3

cat's in the cup - board and can't see me.
1 2 2 1 1 2 3 2 1

Choose your pitches for the poem "ABC." Write the pitches you have chosen in the blanks below and in the blanks above each syllable in the score.

Pitch 1: _____

Pitch 2: _____

Pitch 3: _____

Play your song. If you don't like how your song sounds, try changing one pitch at a time until you like what you hear.

section 5: MOTIFS

A motif is a short melody that represents a particular character, place, or event in a story. “The House That Jack Built” is an additive story. In each repetition of the story, the previous characters are mentioned, along with one new one. So, the motifs in this piece gradually add up to a long melody.

Like the other pieces in this collection, this piece can be composed by individuals, partners, or small groups; however, it can also be composed by a whole class with small groups composing just one motif each. If the piece were performed with a variety of speaking parts and sound effects, in addition to the motifs, it could turn into a full performance with each student having a role to play.

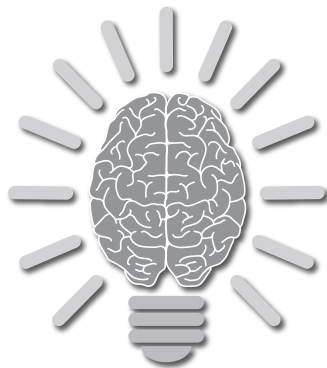
Start by reading the story *The House That Jack Built*. There are several picture books available, or you can read the version on page 48.

Note that each motif for the first eleven characters has two parts which are separated by a “railroad track.” The first motif is to be used when the character is introduced. The second is to be used throughout the story to describe what happened to the character and it will become the repeated motif as the story unfolds. The Cat motif has four notes in “This is the cat” but five in “That worried the cat.” As with this example, the second phrase of each motif may be a slight variation of the first. Ask your students to analyze the rhythmic similarities and differences and come up with a solution. They may choose a note to repeat or a note to add or come up with a solution of their own.

Decide how you wish to proceed with the compositional activity and follow one of these plans:

Individual, Partner, or Small-Group Composition

1. Print the motif sheet (page 50) for each student or group and ask the student or group to compose a motif for each phrase.
2. Ask the class to brainstorm ways to keep from getting too confused by the various motifs. For example, they should keep each motif easy to play; they could build or add notes from one to the next; they could use just a few motifs, but add sound effects; or they could transpose motifs so that small creatures are played high and large ones are played low.
3. Offer plenty of time to compose and practice playing the compositions slowly, as it is quite complex when composed in this manner.



The House That Jack Built

Jack  This is the house that Jack built. That lay in the house that Jack built.

Malt  This is the malt. That ate the malt.

Rat  This is the rat. That killed the rat.

Cat  This is the cat. That worried the cat.

Dog  This is the dog. That tossed the dog.

Cow  This is the cow with the crumpled horn. That milked the cow with the crumpled horn.

Maiden  This is the maiden, all forlorn. That kissed the maiden, all forlorn.

Man  This is the man, all tattered and torn. That married the man, all tattered and torn.

Priest  This is the priest, all shaven and shorn. That woke the priest, all shaven and shorn.

Rooster  This is the rooster that crowed in the morn. That kept the rooster that crowed in the morn.

Farmer  This is the farmer sowing his corn. That belonged to the farmer sowing his corn.

Horse  This is the horse and the hound and the horn.

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