

‘SOUND IDEAS’

MMF Primary Music Programme

Teachers’ Tips KS1 & 2 – Vocal development. Strategies for developing vocal part work. KS1 into KS2

Before tackling vocal part work successfully, children need to:

1. Have found their singing voice and be able to pitch-match with growing accuracy and confidence.
2. Recognise and respond to pulse in music.
3. Recognise the difference between pulse and rhythm in a song.
4. Have developed the internal ‘thinking voice’ to sing ‘in their heads’.
5. Recognise phrase and its role in shaping the structure and meaning of a song.

KS1/2 Using Rounds and Cannons

Any song used to develop part skills should be very well-known to pupils before attempting to put it into cannon or round. It is important that pupils understand the need to hear what is going on around their own line, rather than ‘blocking it out’, so the parts fit together like a jigsaw. Thus, singing quietly is likely to be more helpful than blasting it out!

The strategies below will help to introduce the concept of part work and encourage a successful outcome with pupils able to maintain their own line confidently and accurately, with awareness of how the parts fit together and the effect created.

Stage 1

Once the song is well known in unison:

1. Sing alternate phrases of the song in two groups. Then repeat with each group holding its last note on throughout the following phrase. This creates simple harmonic layering and gets the ear used to hearing another musical line whilst singing.
2. Group 1 chants the melody whilst Group 2 taps the rhythm of the words. Swap groups. Then repeat with Group 1 chanting the words and Group 2 also chanting but one phrase behind. Swap again.
3. Both groups chant the rhythm of the words in their two groups, one phrase behind the other. The first group then sings whilst the second continues to chant softly, still one phrase behind. Swap! Then try with

both groups singing in their two parts, keeping the dynamic level quiet. It may help to keep a steady pulse on a drum or other clear sounding un-pitched percussion instrument.

Stage 2

When using canons, develop skills further by bring the groups in after a smaller interval e.g. after $\frac{1}{2}$ a phrase or 2 beats and then by increasing the number of groups entering, to create 3 and 4 part harmony. Use this as an opportunity to discuss the effect this has on the music e.g. makes it feel more exciting or mysterious.

KS2 Partner Songs

Using partner songs is the next step towards developing the skill to sing in independent parts. Songs which share the same harmonic structure can be slotted together and sung simultaneously. Note that sometimes the songs will not begin on the same beat, e.g.

- 'Swing Low' starts on Beat 1
- 'I'm Gonna Sing' starts on Beat 4
- 'Oh when the Saints' starts $\frac{1}{2}$ beat earlier, in-between beats 3 and 4 before
(See Y5/6 Songs)

KS2 Singing Independent Harmony Parts

The move from singing in canon to using independent harmony parts requires pupils to have plenty of experience of singing in parts using rounds, canons and partner songs. Ideally, pupils should learn all the parts rather than either the melody or harmony as this will enable them to understand more clearly how the independent parts fit together and hold their own line more accurately, with confidence.

Stage 1

Using canons with vocal drones and ostinato is a good way to help pupils build up confidence and begin to hold an independent part.

1. In 's-m', 's-m-d', 'm-d' and 'm-r-d' songs, the 'home' note 'doh' will fit throughout the song as a drone. Sing the melody accompanied by a vocal drone on 'doh' pitch. Later try adding a 'soh' and 'me'. 'Doh' and 'soh' drones together give the 'bagpipe' effect which is familiar from traditional Celtic folk music. Many of the simpler traditional songs selected for KS2 can be accompanied in this way.

2. Add a short 2 or 4 beat vocal ostinato (repeated pattern) taken from the words and rhythm of the song itself. Firstly, perform it as a spoken chant with the melody sung simultaneously. Then add pitch to the pattern, using a limited number of pitches, e.g.

- 'Round and round' (*te-te ta*) becomes '*s-m-d*'
- 'Rain, rain, go away' (*ta ta te-te ta*) becomes '*s-m- ss- m*'
(See Y3/4 Songs '*Spinning Top*' and '*Rain, Rain*')

Stage 2

Teach pupils both the melody and harmony parts of the song. When these are both confidently known, employ similar strategies to those used to put cannons together.

1. Melody and harmony groups chant their lines together, noting places where the words or rhythm are the same or different.
2. Group 1 sings the melody whilst Group 2 chants the harmony. Reverse.
3. Group 1 hums the melody whilst Group 2 sings the harmony. Reverse.
4. Group 1 sings the melody twice through. Group 2 joins with the harmony second time round. Reverse, with the harmony group starting first.

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