

# ‘SOUND IDEAS’

## MMF Primary Music Programme

**Teachers’ Tips KS2 – Introducing Simple Rhythm Stick Notation**  
(see also ‘Can You Tap?’ Y3/4 and ‘Danger, Men at Work!’ Y5/6)

### Stage 1 – Body Works!

The following representation of simple rhythm provides an additional **visual and kinaesthetic link** between **aural and written understanding of** sound. Pupils are therefore much more likely to make a meaningful connection between rhythm heard and performed aurally and the written stick notation. It also helps pupils to understand that a 4-beat pattern can have more than 4 sounds within it because some pulse beats may have been divided. Equally a 4-beat pattern can have less than 4 sounds as it may include a longer sound or a rest (this applies to patterns of other lengths too). This method works best by beginning with a unit (bar) of four crotchet (1 beat) pulses, then expanding to use 2 bars, to make a pattern 8 pulse beats in length.

- Use 4 pupils to represent 4 ‘ta’ pulse beats by standing pupils in a row very straight and tall with hands down by their sides. Speak the rhythm syllables, then clap them. Add a second group of 4 pulse beats next to them. Now ask another pupil to decide which pulse beat to divide into two shorter ½-beat sounds, to make a new, more interesting rhythm. That pupil then joins their chosen pulse beat, to make a pair of ‘te-te’ sounds (‘te-te’ pupils place arms across one another’s shoulders). You now have 2 bars of 4 beat rhythm patterns, for example:

1	2	3	4	/	1	2	3	4
ta	ta	ta	ta	/	ta	ta	ta	te-te
								□

Note that the length of the 8-beat phrase can be doubled by performing the rhythm pattern forwards then backwards. Chant / clap it both ways.

- Place pupils into 3 groups of 10. Give them 30 secs to make a variation of the phrase above by subdividing 1 beat in each bar, moving the 2 ‘te-te’ pairs into different places within the phrase. Each group needs to use 2 pairs of ‘te-te’ and 6 ‘ta’ sounds to make its 8 beat phrase. For example:

1	2	3	4	/	1	2	3	4
ta	te-te	ta	ta	/	ta	ta	te-te	ta
	□						□	

All chant then clap each new 2 bar rhythm phrase before making new variations in the same way. Later, these patterns can be transferred onto un-pitched percussion.

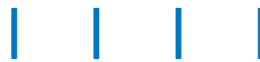
### Stage 2 - Body Works!

- Move on to compose more complex rhythms by subdividing more than 2 beats within the 8 - beat pattern (3 pairs of 'te-te' needs 11 pupils; 4 pairs needs 12 pupils etc).
- Develop further by including:
  1. Longer 2 beat sounds (minims) - 2 pupils link arms.
  2. 1 beat rests – 1 pupil sits cross-legged with head to one side.
  3. Sub-division of the pulse into ¼s (semi-quavers) - 4 pupils link with arms across shoulders (note that in conventional written rhythm notation 4 semi-quavers are joined by 2 horizontal lines, so they are not confused with 4 x½ beat quavers).

Continue to use the 'Say it then play it' method when improvising and composing these patterns, particularly when using more complex combinations of shorter and longer sounds.

### Stage 3 – Stick it down!

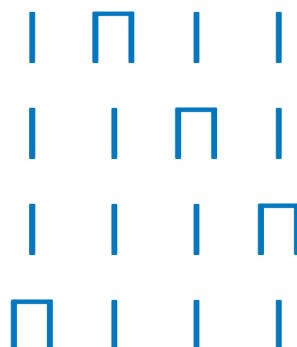
- Using a white board, show how each 'ta' pulse beat can be represented using a vertical line:



The 'ta' pulse, divided to make a pair of 'te-te' sounds, is shown by joining 2 vertical lines together across the top.



Write up the 4 possible combinations to demonstrate how stick notation can represent where a 1 pulse beat in a 4-beat bar has been divided (ie. either on beat 1, 2, 3 or 4).



- Number the 4 combinations. Choose one pattern to chant then clap – can pupils identify which pattern you have performed?
- Go on to speak then clap one of the 4 rhythms above for pupils to write down (using small whiteboards is ideal for this). Encourage pupils to use **thinking voices** to hear and chant the pattern before writing it down.
- This exercise can be extended by gradually increasing the complexity and length of the pattern dictated:

e.g. 1. Subdividing 2 beats instead of 1



2. Adding a 'Z' for a 1 beat rest (mark the rest by silently touching shoulders)



3. Making a 2 bar (8 beat) pattern



4. Introducing a longer sound 'ta-ah' (2 beat minim) - 2 vertical lines joined by an arch underneath (or smile). For example:

