

SOUND & STORY

Composing Story and Music for the Elementary Classroom

Imagination might be the greatest resource we have in the elementary classroom. This project gives students the opportunity to reimagine the use of the guitar by discovering sound effects as a way to inspire the story writing process. This can be a great way to allow your students to collaborate, contribute their narrative, and successfully create something meaningful on their instruments.

This project will likely take 3 to 5 class periods to complete, so you might consider breaking this project up over the course of a few weeks depending on how often your class meets and the scope of your experience.

Objective

Students will work collaboratively to create sound effects on their instruments and write a story incorporating these various elements. The end result will be a story, narrated by students, while the class performs idiomatic sounds that contribute to the plot. The ensemble will also perform known repertoire as intro/outro music. This project provides opportunities to highlight and validate student voice in creatively meaningful ways. The story writing process offers a clear avenue for focus on social emotional learning objectives.

Warm-Up

Divide your class into groups of 3 or 4. Ask students to explore creating sound effects on their instruments and to share with the class what the sound means. For example, knocking on the upper bout could represent knocking at a door. You can give them a few examples and remind them to be kind to the instruments as they explore, but after some brief instruction, turn them loose!

After a few minutes, have each group share an idea or two with the class. I recommend listing the ideas on the board while the students demonstrate. This can be a useful idea list for the students to reference while they write the story.

Here are some sample sound effect ideas to help get started:

- Lightly tapping on the side of the guitar - Rain
- Scraping nails along string - Door creaking open
- Strumming strings behind nut – Windchimes

Activity

Now you are ready to begin writing a story. There are many ways you could approach this. You could have the students do this in groups, individually, or as a whole class. Here are a couple of ways you could approach this:

- Collaboratively write one story as a class where students frequently turn and share to discuss ideas, then call on students to give their input while you type the story on a text editor like google docs. You will have this document projected for the class to see while you type.

Here is a sample of what part of a story might look like:

Rachel was walking through the garden on a cool summer night when it started to rain.
**RAIN SOUND...*

- Another way to approach this is to have the students work in groups to write different parts of a story or have each group write a short story based on a similar theme. For example, you could assign each group to write a short story about traveling to outer space. You could have the class vote on a theme.

Presentation

Now that you have a story, it's time to put everything together! You can select one or more students to narrate the story while the class follows along playing the sound effects. Then you can have the class select a piece of music to perform as the intro/outro music to help set the mood. For example, Floating in the Cosmos could fit the outer space theme. The music can also be selected much earlier in the process to help inspire an idea for the story.

Additional Suggestions

- Consider adding other classroom instruments such as xylophones, bells, or chimes to create more sound possibilities.
- This project could be expanded by having some students act out the story while the class performs.
- Collaborating with other subject areas or clubs on your campus is another possibility. Working with the reading teacher or librarian could support the story-writing process, or you may invite the drama club to assist with creating scenes based on the story.

We hope you and your students give this project a try this year! This project would work great in any program or campus event such as PTA meetings, or literacy night.