

The Elementary Music Classroom: Melodic Improvisation using Handchimes

A Lesson Plan with Animated PowerPoint Examples

by Paul Weller



a resource for members of
Handbell Musicians
OF AMERICA



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The Elementary Music Classroom: Melodic Improvisation using Handchimes

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Improvisation is one of the most daunting concepts facing the music educator. We all know that we should be doing something with improvisation, but the task seems so intangible and scary, that we often shy away from it. However, this bias is only found in the adults of the classroom. For children, improvisation is part of their everyday life. Just listen to them on the playground making up songs as they go. Successful melodic improvisation in the music room can be just as easy as long as you follow a few simple rules:

1. Give the students a framework in which to improvise. This will look different at every level that you teach and can be as simple as singing their name in a game.
2. Develop strategies to help your students construct good melodies and then notice these strategies in known songs. Common melodic strategies found in most music are:
 - o Back and forth, Repeated notes, straight line up/down, mostly high/low, and copy
3. Be willing to let the students fail. Improvisation is all about exploring and finding what works and what doesn't,
4. Be willing to correct the students. If they don't hear it the right way, they won't "know it" the right way. Correct them quickly or have another student attempt to sing the improvised melody the correct way.

Handchimes are a wonderful tool to use during the early stages of melodic improvisation because they give the students a pitch reference as they are singing, provide an incentive to participate, and take some of the fear away from singing alone. Also, chimes provide a much easier visual reference for notes, as they can see the size and know that one hand is always this pitch and the other hand is the other pitch.

Please note that the PowerPoint slides included with this lesson have multiple options for a single slide view (i.e. poem with words or poem with words and rhythms) and they are not intended to be used as a sequence in their entirety.



Click [HERE](#) to download accompanying PowerPoint Slides. (Please note that the PowerPoint slides included with this lesson have multiple options for a single slide view (i.e. poem with words or poem with words and rhythms) and they are not intended to be used as a sequence in their entirety.)

Lesson Plan

Objective: Melodic Improvisation using 2 notes of the pentatonic scale (sol/mi)

Materials Needed: 2 handchimes (A and C, or any minor 3rd), a poem, or a short rhythm

Level: Grade 1 or Grade 2

Source: Traditional Poem

Process – Stage One: Vocal Exploration with Strategies

- Explore and echo sing patterns using the melodic strategies and “high” and “Low” or “sol” and “mi”.
 - Begin with teacher directed, then move to students being in charge of creating and singing patterns.
 - Make sure the student can identify the melodic strategy being used before they sing. — If a student sings something incorrectly, do not be afraid to correct it...if left uncorrected, it will reinforce the wrong interval.

Process – Stage Two: The Text, Poem, or improvised rhythm

- Teach poem by rote or have students read the rhythms and words from visual
- Explore and practice the word rhythms in the poem as well as explore keeping the beat while saying the words.

Process – Stage Three: Improvisation with text and voice

- As a class read the words from visual while singing them in high or low places as indicated
 - Give the students time to practice this in their minds before attempting to sing it out loud.
- Use hand signs or body placement to solidify the feeling of “high” and “low” voice placement

4/4

Two, Four, Six, Eight,

meet me at the gar-den gate.

If I'm late, do not wait,

two, four, six, eight.

- Invite a student to choose a melodic strategy and sing the poem (or a single phrase) using that strategy and the minor third interval.
 - This would be a fantastic activity to create on a SMART-BOARD where the students could manipulate the words into high and low places in real time.

Process – Stage Four: Improvisation with text, voice, and handchimes

- Explore and echo sing patterns using melodic strategies on the handchimes
 - Teacher plays and sings (or just plays) a 4 beat pattern and students echo on sol/mi or high/low
- Invite a student to play and sing the rhythm of the first phrase of the poem or rhythm using the sol and mi chimes.
- Then ask them to sing what they just did. Or ask the class to echo sing what was just played using solfege.
- Ask the student to use the exact same pattern/strategy to play the second phrase, and the third phrase, and the last phrase.
- Student must be able to sing what they played, if they can't (or if the class cannot echo it) then it was too hard and they should make it easier.
- Have students sing the entire poem with the pattern created by the student with the handchimes.

Lesson Extensions

- Add a drone on do and sol (F and C) while singing the improvisations
- This same idea works well for any pitch set that you want to work with. Try it with Mi,Re,Do or any notes of the pentatonic scale.
- Decide on a student's melody that is easy to remember, and then notate it as a class.
- Create more than one way to sing the rhythm or poem then showcase these at your next concert as "student composed" songs.
- Use the rhythm as a framework for melodic improvisation b-section to an already known song, then perform ABA or as a rondo.

two	four	six	eight
meet me	at the	gar-den	gate
If I'm	late	Do not	wait
Two	four	six	eight



For more information you may contact the author, Paul Weller, at pkweller@gmail.com



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