

MOLD-A-MELODY

LESSON/ACTIVITY PLAN

OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will understand that musicians add expression to a melody by using special techniques, including: *rubato*, *vibrato*, *accents*, and *dynamics*.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Start with a simple familiar classroom melody. *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* works for just about everyone. Together with students, sing the melody as “flat” and inexpressively as possible.
2. Introduce vocabulary using vocabulary cards:

RUBATO

VIBRATO

ACCENTS

DYNAMIC

Give brief, easy-to-understand descriptions of each. Flash cards to practice definitions. Listen to and/or watch examples of each. (Suggestions for definitions and examples below.)

- Rubato – slight changes in tempo; speed up/slow down
- Vibrato – a pitch pulsates or vibrates for expressive effect
- Accent – emphasis on a particular note
- Dynamics – the volume of music; loud/soft

Rubato:

This is pianist Vladimir Horowitz playing a *Mazurka* by Frédéric Chopin. While listening and watching, and slows down.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8PJsO1u5w>

Vibrato:



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Vocal and string music include a lot of obvious, easy-to-hear vibrato. Watch the first minute of Steven Doane from Eastman School of Music to hear an excerpt of *The Swan* from *Carnival of the Animals* by Camille Saint-Saëns. Continue watching to find out more specifics about how vibrato is produced on a cello/string instrument.

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=2GhMUZCbC14>

Accents:

Watch conductor Michael Tilson Thomas conduct the San Francisco Symphony playing Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vf0e_n49dcQ

At about 3:30 minutes in, you will hear a great example of accents. Tilson Thomas's conducting cues give visual reinforcement. Listening to the full eight and a half minutes provides a wonderful opportunity to see and hear a vast array of instrument-specific techniques, such as pizzicato or trills. It's also a chance to practice instrument identification and see some great close-up shots of musicians playing their instruments.

Dynamics:

The Stravinsky piece listed above is also a great example of a pretty short piece that contains dynamic extremes. Another good example is Richard Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rzKXNQxjHs>

Or, juxtapose two pieces – one extremely quiet and the other very loud.

Quiet: Charles Ives's *The Unanswered Question*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trkFgIMC-Ks>

Loud: Richard Wagner's *The Ride of the Valkyries* from *Die Walküre*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AIEvy0fJto>

If you have students with long attention spans, see if you can make it through all of Maurice Ravel's *Bolero*, which begins very quietly and is basically one long, giant crescendo.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r30D3SW4OVw>

3. Once students are familiar with the terms and their definitions, repeat the

simple melody/song, applying one (or more) of the techniques discussed in class.

4. Continue to use the flash cards over time with various classroom repertoire and listening activities. Use in both singing and instrumental activities whenever possible.

STANDARDS:

1. Grades 4 – 5. Artistic Foundations. 1. Demonstrate knowledge of the foundations of the arts area. Music. 4.1.1.3.1. Describe the elements of music including melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, tone color, texture, form and their related concepts.
2. Grades 4 – 5. Artistic Foundations. 2. Demonstrate knowledge and use of the technical skills of the art form, integrating technology when applicable. Music. 4.1.2.3.2. Sing and play alone and in a group demonstrating proper posture, breathing, technique, age-appropriate tone quality and expressive intent.



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