

FUGUE!

LESSON/ACTIVITY PLAN

Teaching the compositional technique of fugue in its truest sense can be tricky unless students have a very firm grasp on tonality and modulation. The following exercise is based on rhythmic imitation, making it easily accessible for all students.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of fugue through active performance.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Begin by splitting the group into two subgroups. Give each member of the *first* group the same music-maker, like a woodblock or a shaker.
2. Give each member of the *second* group an instrument with a similar but different timbre, like claves or a cabasa (if paired with the instruments mentioned above).
3. Ask each group to collectively come up with a rhythm and two variations. The first rhythm will be the *subject*.

Subjects should:

- be between four and six beats;
- use a combination note durations (quarter note, eighth notes, etc.).

Encourage students to use speech rhythm to remember their pattern. An easy way to incorporate speech rhythm is to pair each kind of note value with the name of a fruit. For example:

Quarter note= Pear

Eighth notes= Apple

Triplet= Strawberry

Sixteenth notes= Watermelon

If the students chose a subject of two sets of sixteenth notes, followed by a pair of eighth notes and then one quarter note, their speech rhythm would be:

“Watermelon, Watermelon, Apple, Pear”

Ask students to write down their subject and two variations using either traditional notation or speech rhythm. The subject and its variations should be written down on one large piece of paper/tag board—large and clear enough for the whole group to be able to read.

Here's what a group's finished product might look like:

SUBJECT	Watermelon, Watermelon, Apple, Pear
VARIATION ONE	Apple, Pear, Apple, Pear
VARIATION TWO	Pear, Pear, Watermelon, Pear

If the group is prohibitively large to accomplish collectively, decide on a subject rhythm, and split the class into two groups of two, for a total of four groups.

4. Ask the first group to “lead” first. This means they will play and repeat their subject. After three repetitions (enough for the second group to “get it”), the second group should start imitating. Give a signal to the first group to move to variation one while the second group continues with the subject. After three repetitions, cue the second group to begin the first variation. Repeat the process with the second variation, and finish by going back to the subject.

At some point, it may be possible for the teacher to step aside as ‘conductor,’ asking a student to take on that role instead. Or: practice the ensemble skills of cueing and listening to see if the groups can communicate on their own without a conductor.

5. After the first group has had a chance to be “leader,” swap roles and let group two lead with their subject and variations.
6. After a few rehearsals, record the performances and playback for students, asking them to notice the imitation and overlapping of musical ideas.

EXTENSIONS/MODIFICATIONS/NOTES:

1. Adjust to incorporate various levels of rhythmic complexity, reflecting the kinds of rhythmic patterns students have been learning in class.
2. Experiment with a wide variety of tempi. Draw students' attention to the fact that performing accurately at a slow tempo is often more challenging than a fast tempo.
3. Add metronome and see if the group can do this exercise without speeding up.
4. Once shorter beat patterns feel comfortable, try extending to longer patterns, or adding an element of melody/pitch.

STANDARD:

1. This multi-faceted activity incorporates many standards simultaneously, but feature most prominently:

Grades 6-8: 1. Artistic Foundations. 1. Demonstrate knowledge of the foundation of the arts area. Music. 6.1.1.3.2. Analyze how the elements of music and related concepts such as articulation and major/minor and fugue are used in performance, creation, or response to music.



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