

## LESSON PLAN #2

SSG Alex Tedrow, staff arranger\*

Students will use The U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own" recording of Paul Hindemith's *Symphony in B-Flat* to learn about counterpoint and the difference between musical "chaos" (polyphony) and musical "order" (monophony). Students will examine Hindemith's original handwritten manuscripts to make their own observations and then demonstrate their understanding of counterpoint through improvisation on classroom instruments.



### SETTING

General Music (Grades 4-6+, middle school)

### AREA OF FOCUS

Counterpoint/Monophony vs. Polyphony

### NATIONAL STANDARDS ADDRESSED

#### Creating

Anchor Standard #1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

#### Performing/Presenting/Producing

Anchor Standard #6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

#### Responding

Anchor Standard #7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

### PRIOR UNDERSTANDING NECESSARY

Students should have experience playing and improvising on classroom instruments (Orff keyboards, recorders, ukuleles/guitars, or various percussion). Students should also be familiar with the tune "Three Blind Mice" (or a similar basic folk song that can be performed in canon), and singing in rounds.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

#### Knowledge/Skill

Students will demonstrate their understanding of counterpoint by observing and distinguishing between musical "chaos" (polyphony) and musical "order" (monophony).

#### Artistic Expression

Students will improvise on classroom instruments to further their understanding of counterpoint through performance.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Projector screen and sound system
- Chalkboard/whiteboard or electronic equivalent
- Paper and pencils (or electronic equivalent) for student responses
- Recording by U.S. Army Band - MVT II **CLICK TO LINK**
- Classroom instruments (Orff mallet instruments, percussion, body percussion, or any combination)

## PROCEDURES

### PART I: Listening and Response

1. Before class, hang up a sign on the wall that displays "MONOPHONIC" in big bold letters on the left side of the room, and a similar sign that displays "POLYPHONIC" on the right side of the room. Have the word "COUNTERPOINT" written on the center whiteboard/chalkboard.
2. Play recording of 2nd movement of Hindemith's *Symphony in B-Flat* as students enter the room.
3. Ask students to write down their response to this question: "Would you describe this music as simple and 'ordered' or complicated and 'chaotic'? Why?"
4. After a few minutes or a convenient stopping point in the recording, pick a few students to share what they wrote down with the class; briefly discuss their ideas/questions.

### PART II: Counterpoint, Monophony, and Polyphony

5. Vocal warm-up: vocal sirens in call-and-response (or quick warm-up of teacher's choosing).
6. Point out the term "COUNTERPOINT" written on the board; explain its meaning: "two or more independent musical lines played at the same time."
7. Demonstrate using a canonic round song (such as "Hot Cross Buns" – teacher may choose more difficult round song if appropriate); sing through the song a couple times slowly in call-and-response. Have students sing the song as a whole group in unison multiple times.
8. Have students sing in unison while teacher sings in canon to show students how it works.
9. Split students into sections singing as a round; have students do body/hand motions to differentiate the sections of the song (finger numbers, pointing, clapping, etc.). Use these motions to help students understand that when a song is sung in rounds, it is using counterpoint because "two or more independent musical lines are played at the same time."
10. If there is extra time, write out the song in music notation on the board/projector and have students sing on note letter names.
11. Write the terms "MONOPHONY" and "POLYPHONY" on the board.
12. "What do we think these mean? Does anyone know the difference between the prefix 'MONO-' and 'POLY-'?"
13. Relate these terms to counterpoint. Simplify by distinguishing between musical "order" and musical "chaos."
14. Make sure to emphasize that just because multiple instruments are playing doesn't necessarily mean that music uses counterpoint.
15. Have students stand up; play recording of 2nd movement of Hindemith's *Symphony in B-Flat*.

16. "If you think a section of the music sounds 'MONOPHONIC' move to the left side of the room" (point in that direction toward the sign hung up on the wall); "if you think a section of the music sounds 'POLYPHONIC' move to the right side of the room" (point in that direction toward the sign hung up on the wall); participate in the activity with the students.
17. Briefly discuss the activity as a class.

### **PART III: Group Improvisation**

18. Split class into 3-4 groups (based on available classroom instruments); assign each group a different set of classroom instruments (recorders, Orff keyboard instruments, percussion, guitars/ukuleles, etc.).
19. Lead the group by establishing a simple collective "monophonic" gesture the class can play simultaneously (quarter notes on C, a simple melody like the first measure of "Hot Cross Buns", or something the students are all very familiar with already).
20. Assign a set of parameters for students to refer to to guide improvisation during "polyphony" (only use pitches from the C major scale, only use quarter and half notes, etc. — this can be as specific or broad as the teacher would like depending on age group and goals for the class).
21. "Okay class, when I move to the left side of the room and point to the 'MONOPHONY' sign, we all need to play the collective monophonic gesture as a single team; when I move to the right side of the room and point to the 'POLYPHONY' sign, improvise something on your own and try to be as different as possible from the student playing next to you!"
22. Repeat the activity 4-5 times, then discuss.
23. Ask students to write down whether they liked performing "MONOPHONY" or "POLYPHONY" more during the improvisation activity, and why on the sheet they used for the beginning listening activity.
24. Collect answer sheets from Procedure 4 and Procedure 21 as students exit.

## **ASSESSMENT**

### **Informal**

Listen to student verbal responses. (Procedures 4, 12, 17, and 22)

Listen as students perform "Hot Cross Buns" as a round and assess their ability to perform in counterpoint. (Procedures 9 and 10)

Watch students move to the left and right side of the room during Hindemith recording to demonstrate their understanding of monophony and polyphony. (Procedure 16)

Listen to students collectively improvise and come to a group performance demonstrating the difference between monophony and polyphony. (Procedure 21)

### **Formal:**

Collect completed answer sheets as students exit. (Procedure 24)

## **NOTES/FEEDBACK/SUGGESTIONS**

Please let us know how this went in your classroom! Email our educational outreach coordinator: SFC Sonia Dell'Omo: [sonia.c.dell'omo.mil@army.mil](mailto:sonia.c.dell'omo.mil@army.mil)

*'SSG Alex Tedrow is a Staff Arranger at The U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own." He frequently works as a composer and clinician of early educational music. He holds dual master's degrees in Music Education and Composition from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.*

2024