

LESSON 3, ACT 3: BATTLE!

Key stage 2 National Curriculum Objectives featured:

Pupils will

- play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the inter-related dimensions of music
- use and understand staff and other musical notations
- appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians
- develop an understanding of the history of music.

American composer Leonard Bernstein created one of the most famous re-tellings of Romeo and Juliet in the 1950s when he shifted the story from Verona to New York City, changed the Montagues and Capulets to rival gangs and Romeo and Juliet became Tony and Maria. West Side Story was first a stage musical and then a film and features some amazing Latin-inspired music. The fight scenes are all incredible dances.

1. Tell your class about West Side Story and listen to this famous 'Rumble' from it (link below). This is the fight between Riff (Mercutio) and Bernardo (Tybalt) during which Riff (Mercutio) dies as Tony (Romeo) watches on.

[Bernstein: Rumble](#)

For this task you will need a large space such as the main hall or even the playground, and a recording of Bernstein's Rumble from West Side Story.

2. Split the class into two teams and call them 'Jets' (Montagues) and 'Sharks' (Capulets). Ask them to stand far apart from each other on opposite sides of the room. Play the opening of 'Rumble' again and ask each group to come up with three gestures, one for each 'bang' at heard during the first 7 seconds or so.
3. Have a look at their suggestions and make sure they are neat and together, then challenge each team to perform them in time with the music – one gesture for each 'bang'.

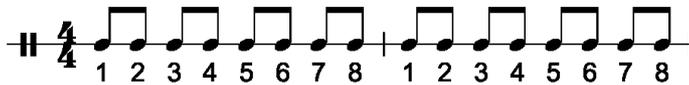
The bangs repeat after some quicker music at about 11 seconds in. Ask your children which gang should move on the first set, which on the second and what should they do in between. Or perhaps your dance will look stronger if both teams move on both sets.

4. Continue in this way - listen to a short extract of the piece and ask each team to invent a movement or gesture to match the sounds they hear, then challenge them to perform it to the music. Try to create a dance to fit the first 45 seconds of the piece (the music stops briefly at this point).

Next, move onto instruments and create your own 'battle' music inspired by Bernstein using the method below:

- Using a drum or a woodblock, play a steady pulse and encourage your class to clap or tap along. When they are good at this you might like to choose a child to play the drum and lead everyone else. Pay particular attention to starting and stopping together.

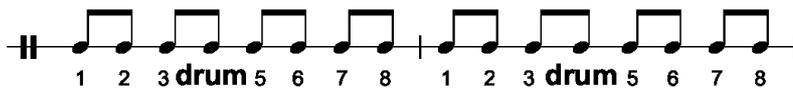
Now encourage your class to count to eight as they clap. We are heading towards making patterns that will fit one bar of 4/4 and so are counting the 8 quavers, like this:



*This is a great opportunity to introduce your children to simple musical notation, the notes above are **quavers** and last for half of one full (**crotchet**) beat.*

- To make an interesting pattern we have to choose some of the beats to be highlighted or made 'special'. Ask your class to choose one of the beats (one number from 1 to 8). Challenge your children to tap out the pulse and count in their head. When they reach their 'special' number they must say it out loud.

Now ask your class which instrument should play on their chosen 'special' beat. Give out that instrument and practise with everyone tapping the 8 and the players just playing on the 'special' beat. Like this:



- When this is achieved repeat the process a couple of times more choosing other numbers to emphasise and add these (with new instruments playing them) into your pattern. Limit your class to a maximum of four 'special' beats. Perhaps appoint one child to play the pulse throughout to help keep everyone in time. You may end up with something like this:



Again, you could draw this on the board substituting symbols for the words. These are the first steps in reading staff notation

- Split into two groups (Jets and Sharks, as above) and challenge each group to go through the steps above to create their own rhythm. If you don't have enough instruments for everyone, encourage those without an instrument to make up angry gestures to go with the 'special' beats thus creating a dance

5. Bring your class back together. Watch and listen to each group and then structure the two groups to create a battling piece of music and dance. Ask the class – ‘who goes first?’ ‘how many times should they play?’ ‘can the two teams fit together?’

6. End your session by putting all your ideas together, you could start with Bernstein’s Rumble and then move over to the instruments to finish off.

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