

The Alice Sound



SILLY SONGS

CREATIVE MUSIC PROJECT

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Symphony
Orchestra

Queen Mary
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CREATIVE MUSIC PROJECT – SILLY SONGS

Almost all of the lyrics in the *Wonderland Suite* were taken directly from Lewis Carroll's book. The challenge was to take his clever character dialogue and make a melody to fit with the witty text. This project will inspire your students to do just that.

But before we begin, let's start by highlighting...

THE SECRETS OF A SUCCESSFUL MELODY

Although every songwriter approaches their craft in a different way, there are some secrets to uncover which will make your work as easy as possible.

1. RESTRICT YOUR CHOICE OF NOTES – SEVERELY.

Almost all pop songs are built from a very small range of pitches. Some very famous tunes use just a few notes (this is why Taylor Swift songs are so catchy). The truth is, you only need a couple of notes to make a good song, and nearly never more than five.

Restrict yourself to just these pitches - **C D E F G** (the first five notes on most classroom pitched percussion instruments) - and you will have everything you need to create a strong melody.

Try it – make a short melodic phrase from these five notes (and you don't have to use them all).

2. EXPERIMENT – AGAIN AND AGAIN.

Every single composer created their masterpiece through a process of trial and error. We all know the famous saying, "*if at first you don't succeed...*" and it's true!

Try and find the best way to make your melody. It could simply be by humming a tune, or perhaps sitting at the piano and noodling around a few notes (you certainly don't need piano lessons to do that). Use your ears and ask yourself – *does it sound good? Do I like it?*

Please know, in a classroom situation, this activity could really can be as simple as sitting down with five chime bars and working-out a tune.

Try it – experiment with different ways to make a short melodic phrase. Some composers start off by writing a lyric and then finding a tune to fit with it. Others work in reverse. *Which way feels best for you?*

And if you come up with something that sounds good, do it again and again. Which leads me to...

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3. REPETITION. REPETITION. REPETITION.

This is why your favourite song is memorable. In fact, this is why every song is memorable. Composers repeat things, over and over, to make their music stick in your head and become an earworm.

Examine it – listen closely to a favourite song. Try and spot how much repetition there is in the music (you'll be amazed at just how much there is!)

SET LEWIS CARROLL'S WORDS TO MUSIC

There are so many fantastic words and phrases in the *Alice* books, it could be difficult to know where to start.

You could begin by reading a chapter (from either book) and then make a note of any words/sentences/dialogue you think could work well in a song.

Or, as a quick start, here's a random selection of dialogue spoken by Alice in the first couple of chapters of *Wonderland*:

- "What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?"
- "I wish I could shut up like a telescope."
- "What a curious feeling."
- "It's no use now to pretend to be two people."
- "There's hardly enough of me left to make one respectable person."
- "Which way? Which way?"
- "Good-bye feet."
- "Oh dear, what nonsense I'm talking."
- "Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle."
- "O Mouse, do you know the way out of this pool? I am very tired of swimming about here,"
- "Oh, I beg your pardon. I quite forgot you didn't like cats."

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1. CHOOSE A SHORT PHRASE TO SET TO MUSIC.

Pick words from the book (or the list above) and turn it into a melodic phrase you can sing (and perhaps play on classroom percussion).

If working in school, it may be best to start out doing this task altogether as one big group. Then, once the children are comfortable with the process, split them into smaller groups and challenge each group to set a different phrase to music.

TOP TIP

The shorter the phrase the easier the task. Start off with something simple.

2. SAY IT, THEN SAY IT AND CLAP IT.

Let's take the phrase: "*Good-bye feet.*"

Invite the children to say these words in lots of different ways. Experiment with the volumes and try saying it in different rhythms.

Then, repeat the exercise but say **and clap** the rhythm of the phrase. Clap every word or syllable spoken. It may be fun to do this activity as a call and response exercise with the entire class.

Once the class clearly understand the relationship between the words they are saying and the rhythm they are clapping, choose one phrase to set to music.

3. SING IT.

If the class are strong singers, jump straight in and invite them to sing the phrase they selected. The only restriction is – the children must sing the phrase with the same rhythm as in the previous exercise.

If your students are not confident singers, start by using pitched percussion. I always find chime bars to be the best instruments for this exercise.

Restrict your pallet of notes to just **C D E F G**. Then, try to play the phrase on the chime bars. *Which notes sound best?*

TOP TIP

Even when playing chime bars, don't stop saying the words of your phrase. It is important that the children understand the connection between the notes they are playing and the words in their phrase.

Once they are happy playing and saying their phrase, try singing it.

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HERE ARE SOME IDEAS TO DEVELOP YOUR MUSIC FURTHER:

1. EMPHASISE THE IMPORTANT WORDS!

The pitches you select can really help reinforce the meaning of your phrase.

For instance, in the phrase “*Good-bye feet*”- I might choose the following notes:

	1	2	3	4	5
G		BYE			
F	GOOD				
E					
D					
C					FEET

Notice how the phrase falls downwards to the word “feet”. Those feet must be firmly on the ground!

But what if they fly up into the air? Maybe this would be better:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
G			FEET				
F							
E		BYE					
D							
C	GOOD						

No matter how short a phrase you are working with, encourage the children to think carefully about how the words and pitches fit together.

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2. MAKE A SECOND PHRASE

If working with a small number of children, choose some more words from the book and make a second phrase. Maybe even a third.

NB: you won't need to do this if working with a large class, split into different groups all working with different text.

3. STRUCTURE ALL THE PHRASES INTO ONE COMPLETE SONG

Invite the children to share all their phrases with each other. Then, find the best possible way to assemble them all into one complete song.

Depending on which words you selected, there is a danger that when combined, the lyrics won't make much sense. Brilliant! Lewis Carroll is famous for writing nonsense poetry, so I'm sure he would be absolutely delighted with your nonsense song.

TOP TIP

Why not choose one phrase to use more than once in the song, to act as a refrain?

4. ADD AN ACCOMPANIMENT.

As a final challenge, can the class to add a simple accompaniment to their song? Perhaps a simple pulse on a drum, or perhaps something more rhythmically interesting.

Can you emphasise certain words in the song with musical sound effects?

HAVE FUN.

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