

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH AN IDEA?

IMPROVISATION IN THE
ELEMENTARY MUSIC CLASSROOM



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TODAY'S PURPOSE AND GOALS

AS TEACHERS, WE KNOW HOW CREATIVE OUR STUDENTS ARE. ALL STUDENTS, REGARDLESS OF AGE OR MUSICAL ABILITY, HAVE A SPARK OF CREATIVITY INSIDE OF THEM THAT CAN LEAD THE WAY TO A MUSICAL ADVENTURE. IN THIS SESSION, WE WILL EXPLORE WAYS TO USE IMPROVISATION WITH STUDENTS OF ALL LEVELS WITHIN THE ELEMENTARY MUSIC CLASSROOM.

THROUGH A VARIETY OF MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES, WE WILL EXPLORE DIFFERENT WAYS WE CAN USE IMPROVISATION WITHIN OUR CLASSROOMS THROUGH A VARIETY OF LESSONS USING DIFFERENT STRATEGIES TO HELP US INCORPORATE IMPROVISATION INTO THE ELEMENTARY MUSIC CLASSROOM THROUGH ACTIVITIES THAT USE MEANINGFUL, MUSICAL CONTENT WITHIN STANDARDS-BASED LESSONS.



IMPROVISATION AND RHYTHM



Rhythmic Building Blocks as a Guide to Improvisation

Author: Emily Kinnunen

Rhythmic Building Blocks are a wonderful tool for students to use to organize their ideas when creating rhythmic improvisations. Even though Rhythmic Building Blocks are typically used in composition and rhythmic dictation activities, using them for improvisation activities can help students become more comfortable with the improvisation process.

Below, you will find some examples of the rhythmic building blocks I use with students. These were inspired by the Keetman's Rhythmic Building Blocks from *Elementaria* (pg. 17)

You can make your phrases longer or shorter based on your students' comfort level with improvisation.

Rhythmic Building Blocks Outline:



Standards used when Improvising with Rhythm

This is a two part lesson. This lesson will take you more than 1 class period with your students.

Bedtime at the Swamp!

Story by Kristyn Crow and Macky Pamintuan

Activity written by Emily Lopez

This is a two part lesson. This lesson will take you more than 1 class period with your students.

Part 1 (Without Improvisation)

Standards Aligned with this lesson:

MU.3.S.3.5 Notate simple rhythmic and melodic patterns using traditional notation

MU.4.S.3.5 Notate simple rhythmic phrases using traditional notation

MU.5.S.3.5 Notate rhythmic phrases and simple diatonic melodies using traditional notation

- Introduce the story *Bedtime at the Swamp* to your students
 - You can use this book to either introduce or review beamed 16th notes.
- Throughout the story, the phrase “Splish Splash Rumba-Rumba Bim Bam Boom” appears
 - Say, “Splish Splash Rumba-Rumba Bim Bam Boom.” Students repeat
- Read the story to the students. As this phrase appears in the story, have students’ be in charge of saying this rhythmic pattern when it appears.
- Extension: You can always have students add instruments to this book. Typically, when I have added instruments, I have used drums.

Part 2 (With Improvisation)

“There is no way the sound of the people going through the swamp was the same every time. What if we changed what it sounded like as we went through the book?”

Standards aligned with this lesson:

MU.3.S.1.1 Improvise rhythms or melodies over ostinati

MU.4.S.1.1 Improvise phrases using familiar songs

MU.5.S.1.1 Improvise rhythmic and melodic phrases to create simple variations on familiar melodies

- Review what students did in the previous lesson with this book.
- Display a large rhythmic building block outline for the class to use as an outline to what they will be creating.
- Have students practicing improvises their own rhythms (either 4 - repeated two times in a row - or 8 beats long) using the musical notation they already know
- Read the story *Bedtime at the Swamp* to your students
 - Instead of students saying the part of “Splish Splash Rumba-Rumba Bim Bam Boom,” have students improvise their own eight-beat pattern in this spot.

- Because students are improvising, their pattern should be different every time their part appears in the story.
- Students can either clap and speak their rhythmic patterns or you can have students do rhythmic sticks.

IMPROVISATION AND BODY PERCUSSION



Rhythmic Building Blocks and Body Percussion

Author: Emily Kinnunen

When thinking about Body Percussion, one usually does not associate Rhythmic Building Blocks with this idea. Using the rhythmic building blocks helps students, especially those who do not feel comfortable improvising, know where they are and help them organize their thoughts.

There are different ways that you can approach this lesson based on where your students are in their improvisation journey.

Duck! Rabbit!

Story by Amy Rosenthal and Tom Lichtenheld

Original Activity inspired by Eric Young

Improvisation Activity written by Emily Lopez

Original Activity

Part 1 (Without Improvisation)

Standards Aligned with this lesson:

MU.1.S.3.5 Show visual representation of simple melodic patterns performed by teacher or peers

MU.2.F.1.1 Create a musical performance that brings a story to life

- Read Duck! Rabbit! to your students
- Say, "Repeat after me. Duck (clap once)."
- Say, "Rabbit (clap twice)." Students repeat.
- Speak different 4 or 8 beat duck rabbit patterns.
 - Examples:
 - Duck, duck, rabbit, duck
 - Rabbit, rabbit, duck, duck, rabbit, duck, rabbit, duck
- Read the book again. Every few pages play the Duck! Rabbit! rhythmic patterns that the Teacher has created.
 - You can switch their rhythmic pattern cards every few pages so they have a chance to perform multiple patterns.

Improvisation Activity

"Not every duck and every rabbit looks and sounds the same. That's why we make each one sound different."

Standards aligned with this lesson:

MU.1.S.1.1 Improvise a four beat pattern in response to a musical question sung or played by someone else

MU.2.S.1.1 Improvise short phrases in response to a given musical question

Option 1: Have the duck and rabbit preset where students can improvise their body percussion patterns



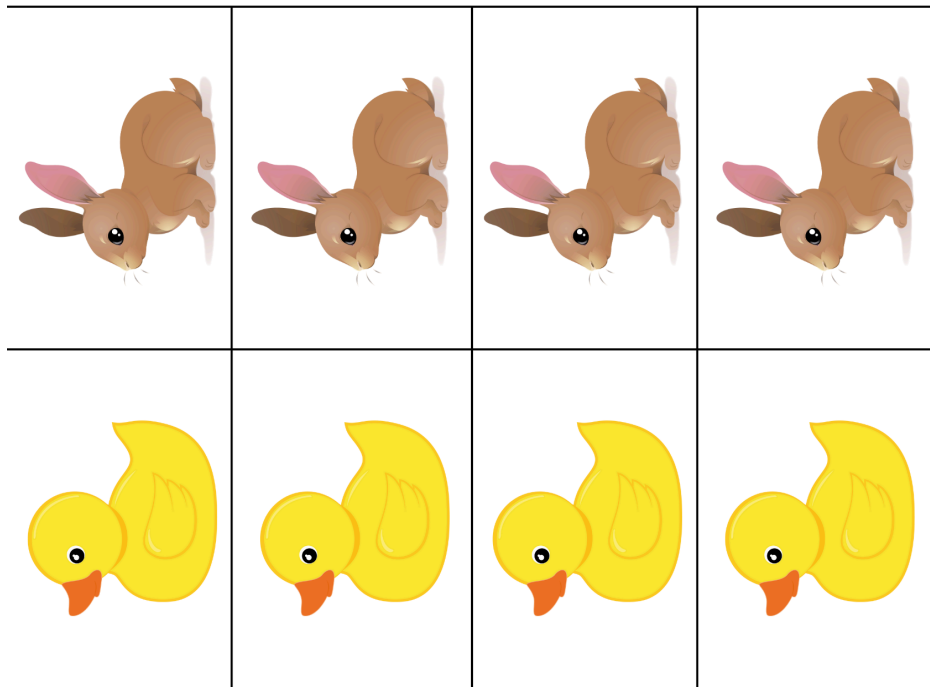
Option 2: Have anchors within the rhythmic pattern to help guide the improvisation.



Option 3: Have students just the beats and students can just purely improvise the patterns.



- Read Duck! Rabbit! to your students
 - Duck = Quarter Note
 - Rabbit = Pair of Eighth notes
- Use body percussion, have students perform different 4 or 8 beat duck rabbit patterns.
 - You can also set this up as a question/answer with you as the question and students as the answer
 -
- Read the book again. Every few pages play the Duck! Rabbit! rhythmic patterns that the Students improvise while using body percussion.
 - Because students are improvising, the patterns will never be the same.



Snap

Twist

**Shrug
Shoulders**

Jump

**Hammer
Hands**

**Chicken
Wings**

**Knock
Knees**

Pat

**Click
Tongue**

Hiss

Hop

**Slide
Hands**

**Windshield
Whippers**

Shake

Clap

Flick

Blink

King Tut

Stomp

Nod

IMPROVISATION, COMPOSITION, AND INSTRUMENTS



Moo, Baa, La La La!

Story by Sandra Boynton

Activity written by Emily Lopez

Standards aligned with this lesson when using pitched percussion instruments (i.e. Orff Instruments, etc.):

MU.K.S.1.1 Improvise a response to a musical question sung or played by someone else

MU.1.S.1.1 Improvise a four beat pattern in response to a musical question sung or played by someone else

MU.2.S.1.1 Improvise short phrases in response to a given musical question

Standards aligned with this lesson when using recorders:

MU.3.S.1.1 Improvise rhythms or melodies over ostinati

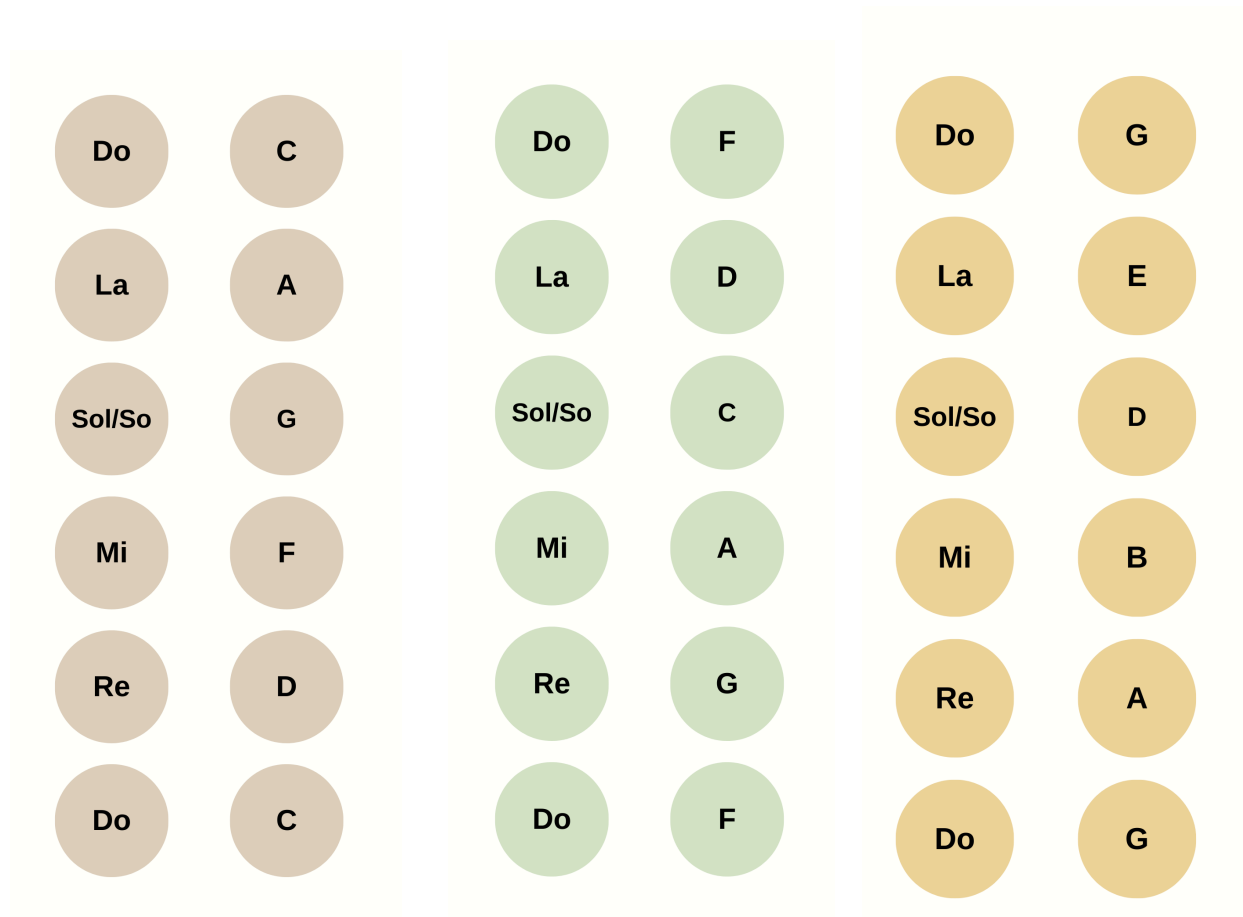
MU.4.S.1.1 Improvise phrases using familiar songs

MU.5.S.1.1 Improvise rhythmic and melodic phrases to create simple variations on familiar melodies

“Play me a Beautiful Song” - Billy Ferguson

Any time students get the chance to play a melodic instrument, give them a chance to play you a beautiful song. It gives students time to get their wiggles out and not have the fight the urge of playing an instrument that is sitting in front of them.

- Display the pitch ladder of your choosing for your students to see.



- If you are using barred instruments, have students play you a beautiful song while you check to make sure every student is in the right scale.
 - I usually just have my students pre-set so they just get more time to play me a beautiful song
- If you are using recorders, take some time for students to review things like left hand on top, using warm slow are, etc.
- Introduce the book *Moo, Baa, La La La!* To the students
- Anytime there is an animal sound in the book, students can pick any note on their instrument and play that note.
 - Take time just to practice this part. Some times, students will only play one note and some times, they will play three notes
- At the end of the story, the book says, "it's quiet now. What do you say?"
 - Students will have 16 beats (4 measures in 4/4) to improvise their response to this question in the story.
- You can repeat this story again (since it only takes about two minutes to read in total).

Bonus Lesson: La Luna

- Explain to student that today they will be turning into film composers
- Play clip from La Luna for students with the sound muted
- Students will get into small groups (No more than 6 students per group) and create their soundtrack to La Luna.
 - Each Group will get a set of instruments to compose with
 - Example
 - Hand Drum
 - Tambourine
 - Sleigh Bells
 - Glockenspiel
 - Bongos
 - Boomwhackers
 - Ukuleles
- Give students multiple times to watch through the video so they can come up with their composition
- Let Groups share for one another
 - 2 positive comments about what they hear from other groups
- Play clip from La Luna for students with the sound on
 - Have students compare what they noticed between their compositions and the actual sound from the clip

Here is the link to the Pixar Short, La Luna:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z73dtVAp53s>

IMPROVISATION AND MOVEMENT



The Aquarium from Carnival of the Animals

Composer: Camille Saint Saens (1835-1921)

Marzano Elements Considered:

- Organizing students to Interact with Knowledge
- Reviewing Content
- Organizing students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge
- Celebrating success

Materials Needed:

- Open Space for movement
- Fish on a Stick/Fish Pictures
- Aquarium Background Pictures
- MP3 of the The Aquarium

Teaching Process:

- Introduce the piece, “The Aquarium” composed by Camille Saint Saens, to students and explain how the depicts a picture fish swimming in an aquarium
- Students will take their fish on a stick/fish picture and have it move around the aquarium as the piece plays. They will make their fish move around the aquarium to match the music they are hearing.
- Before performing the routine, be ready to give students time to practice these movements before handing out Fish on a Stick/Fish pictures. I always tell my students that they must earn their materials before they are given one.
- If you don’t have Fish on a Stick/Fish pictures in your classroom, you can always do this with a scarf.

Here is the link to see this activity in real life:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7eouTvpepg&t=68s>