

Psappa Kids: **Music Explained**

# History of the World in Seven Acts

## INTRODUCTION FOR TEACHERS

Composers sometimes use works of art as inspiration for their music. For *History of the World in Seven Acts*, composer Michael Gandolfi worked with computer animator, Jonathan Bachrach. The music interprets images created by Bachrach. In fact, the music and animation are meant to be experienced at the same time.

The animation uses repeated patterns, as does the music. But, to give the music interest, Michael Gandolfi uses certain musical devices:

- contrasts in duration (long and short)
- contrasts in dynamics (loud and quiet)
- musical conversation (swapping musical ideas)
- scales and scale-like passages (a series of notes going up and down)

After exploring these devices through the musical activities presented in the four lesson plans, there is a further plan for an audio visual project. Through this optional project the children create a visual image which is combined with their own musical composition.

Suggested timings have been given to the four lesson plans contained within this scheme of work. Lessons 2 and 3 could be shortened by omitting the extension activities.

Some teachers might like to show the children the film of the animation or the performance given by the musicians of Psappa before starting the scheme of work. Both films are available and included with the films for each lesson plan.



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# History of the World in Seven Acts

## Lesson Plan 1

### Exploring Duration – Long and short sounds

This lesson plan will take approximately 40 minutes to deliver.

#### TEACHER INSIGHT

Music consists of long and short sounds. In this lesson we investigate the resonance of different materials.

#### ACTIVITY 1

Watch film 1 (1 minute 42 seconds) – Tom’s introduction.

Then, watch films 2 (38 seconds), 2a (25 seconds) and 2b (30 seconds). These short clips explore DURATION on the piano, the violin, and the bass clarinet.

Can the children suggest how each instrument might make short and long sounds BEFORE watching each film?

#### ACTIVITY 2

An investigation into how we can make long and short sounds on \*percussion instruments or \*\*everyday sound makers.

##### RESOURCES

If using \***percussion instruments**, select a few percussion instruments ensuring that there are an equal amount of **wooden instruments** (e.g. woodblock, castanets, claves, guiro, xylophone) and **metal instruments** (e.g. cymbal, triangle, indian bells, glockenspiel).

If using \*\***everyday sound makers**, locate a range of **wooden items** to hit (e.g. a broom handle, a wooden chair, a wooden chopping board, a wooden table top, a rounders/cricket bat) and **metal items** (e.g. a radiator, a frying pan, a metal filing cabinet with the drawers open, a metal handrail. Check the metal items have a sound that resonates to some extent.)

##### INVESTIGATION

One child plays a single sound on an instrument. Another child times the length of the sound using a stopwatch or the second hand on a clock. The rest of the class put their hand up when they can’t hear the sound any more. They can use the **downloadable worksheet** to note each instrument’s name and the length of its sound after it is timed.

After timing a few instruments, the children might get the idea that metal vibrates and therefore produces a longer, ringing sound, whereas wood makes a short, dry sound. At this point, ask them to predict the amount of seconds for each instrument’s sound.

#### ACTIVITY 3

Discuss and complete the conclusion on the **downloadable worksheet** from **ACTIVITY 2**.



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# History of the World in Seven Acts

## Lesson Plan 1 continued

### Exploring Duration – Long and short sounds

#### **ACTIVITY 4**

Watch film 2c (26 seconds) – which explores DURATION on percussion instruments.

*In this clip, the percussionist shows that to make a longer sound on a wooden instrument, he has to use two beaters and keep 'rolling' on the instrument. The tam tam rings on after only one hit!*

#### **ACTIVITY 5**

Watch film 3 (1 minutes 59 seconds) – Listen to a clip from *History of the World in Seven Acts*. This section, called 'Egg' demonstrates the piano, woodblocks and cello playing short notes. The violin and flute play a mixture of short and long sounds.



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# History of the World in Seven Acts

## Lesson Plan 2

### Exploring Dynamics – Loud and quiet

This lesson plan will take approximately 60 minutes to deliver.

#### TEACHER INSIGHT

Musicians need to be able to play not just loudly and quietly, but all the different volumes in between! These are called DYNAMICS, which is the musical word for VOLUME.

In printed music, the required volume is usually written in Italian.

English	Italian	Pronounced
<i>very quiet</i>	<i>pianissimo</i>	<i>pea-ah-nissimo</i>
<i>quiet</i>	<i>piano</i>	<i>pea-ah-no</i>
<i>moderately quiet</i>	<i>mezzo piano</i>	<i>mets-oh pea-ah-no</i>
<i>moderately loud</i>	<i>mezzo forte</i>	<i>mets-oh four-tay</i>
<i>loud</i>	<i>forte</i>	<i>four-tay</i>
<i>very loud</i>	<i>fortissimo</i>	<i>four-tissimo</i>

However, to save space on the printed music, abbreviations are used:

*pianissimo* - *pp*  
*piano* - *p*  
*mezzo piano* - *mp*  
*mezzo forte* - *mf*  
*forte* - *f*  
*fortissimo* - *ff*

Sometimes, composers want the musicians to move gradually from one dynamic to another and the Italian words *crescendo* and *diminuendo* are used:

English	Italian	Pronounced	Abbreviation
Get gradually louder	<i>crescendo</i>	Kre-shen-doh	cresc.
Get gradually quieter	<i>diminuendo</i>	Dim-in-you-end-oh	dim.

#### ACTIVITY 1

Watch film 4 (1 minute and 29 seconds): Exploring Dynamics

**Download the Dynamics PDF.** Display the Italian words for volume, their English meanings and abbreviations on the whiteboard.

#### ACTIVITY 2

Introduce a short rhyme, for example:

*Oh, the Grand Old Duke of York,  
He had ten thousand men.  
He marched them up to the top of the hill  
And he marched them down again.*

‘The children practise saying and clapping the rhythm of *The Grand Old Duke of York* (or another chosen rhyme).

Then, challenge them to perform it –

very quietly, (*pp*)  
quietly, (*p*)  
moderately quietly (*mp*)  
moderately loudly (*mf*)  
loudly (*f*)  
very loudly (*ff*)

# History of the World in Seven Acts

## Lesson Plan 2 continued

### Exploring Dynamics – Loud and quiet

#### ACTIVITY 3

Write the musical abbreviations on the board in a random order.

Challenge the children to re-order them, starting with the quietest and ending with the loudest:

(Answer) pp p mp mf f ff

#### ACTIVITY 4

Display the Dynamics PDF on the white board.

Game: One child secretly chooses a dynamic, and claps the rhyme at the chosen dynamic. The rest of the class guess which one has been chosen. Encourage them to use the Italian words when they guess.

N.B. Children can find it hard to make a difference between *mp* and *mf* but they like to try!

#### ACTIVITY 5

Watch film 4a (1 minute and 31 seconds) - Tom explains crescendo and diminuendo.

Then in groups, ask the children to practise the rhyme again but this time use a **crescendo** followed by a **diminuendo**.

#### ACTIVITY 6

Watch film 4b (1 minute and 6 seconds) - *Imitation* from *History of the World in Seven Acts*.

In this section, the piano, violin, flute, bass clarinet, cello, piano and bongos play a variety of different dynamics including crescendos and diminuendos.

#### EXTENSION

Ask the children to choose or invent their own rhyme.

They write down the words of the rhyme and then add musical abbreviations to show how loudly or quietly the words should be performed. Each line can be a different dynamic!

Can they add a crescendo (*cresc.*) or a diminuendo (*dim.*)?

Example:

*f* Twinkle, twinkle little star  
*mf* How I wonder what you are.  
*cresc.* Up above the world so high  
*dim.* Like a diamond in the sky.  
*p* Twinkle, twinkle little star  
*pp* How I wonder what you are.

Finally, can they perform their rhyme with accurate dynamics?



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# History of the World in Seven Acts

## Lesson Plan 3

### Musical Conversations – Imitation and swapping of ideas

This lesson plan will take approximately 60 minutes to deliver.

#### TEACHER INSIGHT

Composers often write passages of music where the instruments interact with each other. It can sound as if one instrument is asking a question which is answered by another.

*N.B. In advance of the lesson, watch the first 40 seconds of video 5 to assist with Activity 1.*

#### ACTIVITY 1

The teacher asks a question of a child, e.g.:

Question: Where do you live? Answer: I live in Birmingham.

Then, the teacher **sings** their question – *any notes will do!* - and the child sings their answer.

#### ACTIVITY 2

Working in pairs, the children take it in turns to sing questions and answers and then to have a sung conversation.

Make a list of emotions e.g. happy, sad, angry, nervous, excited, relaxed.

The children try having conversations that are sad, happy, angry, and excited. How does it change the speed of the conversation and the notes that they choose to sing when they add an emotion?

Share good examples with the rest of the class.

#### ACTIVITY 3

Watch film 5 (59 seconds) - Musical Conversations.

##### EXTENSION

Transfer the children's musical conversations onto instruments. If tuned ones are available e.g. recorders, xylophones, glockenspiels etc. they could compose melodies for their questions and answers.

If the children are using untuned instruments e.g. tambourines, bongos, woodblocks etc. challenge them to make their conversation fit over a steady beat, e.g.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
What's your	fav'rite	an-i	mal?
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
I	like	el-e	phants

Can they then make their conversations sound excited/sad/scared/happy? Does this change the volume (dynamic), the speed (tempo) or the way in which they play the instrument?

#### ACTIVITY 4

Watch film 5a (2 minutes and 10 seconds) - ask the children to listen out for the musical conversation between the instruments in this section of called *Swing* from *History of the World in Seven Acts*.

# History of the World in Seven Acts

## Lesson Plan 4 Scales and scale-like passages

Allow 60 minutes for this lesson plan which includes watching the full film of *History of the World in Seven Acts* with animation.

### TEACHER INSIGHT

There are 7 notes in the musical alphabet. (C D E F G A B)

When 8 or more consecutive notes are played, one after the other, (e.g. C D E F G A B C) it is called a SCALE.

Most Western music is based around MAJOR (happy sounding) and MINOR (sad sounding) scales. A 'scale-like' passage might have fewer notes, or some small leaps in it as well.

### ACTIVITY 1

Watch film 6 (1 minute 35 seconds) - Tom Introduces Scales.

### ACTIVITY 2

Using a \*computer music programme, ask the children to write a series of notes (a melody) that move up and down consecutively.

As a contrast, try writing a melody that includes big leaps between the notes. How does that affect the sound of the music?

*Answer: Scale-like melodies sound smooth. Melodies with big leaps sound more 'choppy'.*

\*The San Francisco Symphony music website has a free, interactive webpage -

<http://www.sfskids.org/compose/>

On the 'Compose' page, click on 'Let's Start!' and then 'Quick Start!'

Notes can be dragged onto a musical staff to create melodies.

The children can also add dynamics to make their melody change in volume (see lesson 2).

### ACTIVITY 3

Watch the full performance of *History of the World in Seven Acts* with Animation

# Optional Audio Visual Project

## The History of our Day in Seven Acts

Ask the children to think of seven activities from a typical day e.g.

arriving at school / registration / reading a story / solving a maths problem / a sports lesson / painting a picture / home time

OR -

Waking up / preparing for the day (washing, dressing, eating breakfast) / going for a walk / playing in the park / playing a computer game / talking to friends / falling asleep

- the children will think of their own ideas, but ensure there's a range of quick and slow activities to give contrast.

Split the class into seven groups and allocate one activity to each group.

Firstly, the children recreate the activity visually by using one of the following:

- a computer animation programme such as pivotanimator.net
- taking a photograph
- shooting a video
- drawing pictures

They then compose a short piece of music, using either musical instruments, voices, body percussion or junk instruments, to match the visual.

- The children should consider the speed (tempo) and volume (dynamics) of the music. Will these change or stay the same throughout?
- Will they use long or short sounding notes (duration) or both?
- Can they include a musical conversation?
- If they are writing or singing a melody, does it need to sound smooth and scale-like or choppy?

The finished series of visuals, when accompanied by the music will show – *The History of our Day in Seven Acts*.