

# Musical. magic



Sue Nicholls invites you to draw KS1 children into the delight of storytelling by asking them to compose soundscapes for traditional tales...

## Activity

### 1 THE THREE LITTLE PIGS

(Simple improvisation)

Having introduced the traditional tale, revisit the story with this simple sung version, encouraging the children to join in with each repeated phrase, e.g. 'home one day':

**M**usic is frequently associated with storytelling. It offers us an immediate sense of atmosphere, engaging our interest by the allocation of instruments and melodies to different characters and deepening our understanding of events by using repeating themes and musical episodes. In

short, music brings a deeper dimension – you have only to reflect on the popularity of Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf to recognise the power of music as a medium for embellishing and illustrating stories.

Here are some simple ideas that harness improvisation and composition to enhance storytelling, bringing these two art forms together to provide successful outcomes that benefit teaching and learning.



### The Three Little Pigs

(Tune: *Here we go round the mulberry bush*)

*Now three little pigs leave home one day  
Home one day, home one day  
Telling their Mum they just can't stay  
They want to build their own houses*

*The first pig builds a house of straw  
House of straw, house of straw  
He builds a roof, he builds a floor  
The big, bad wolf blows it down*

*The second pig builds a house of wood  
House of wood, house of wood  
He thinks the house looks pretty good  
The big, bad wolf blows it down*

*The third pig builds a house of brick  
House of brick, house of brick  
The roof is firm, the walls are thick  
The wolf can't blow the house down*

*The wolf climbs up the chimney pot  
Chimney pot, chimney pot  
He slips and falls – the water's hot  
The wolf won't chase them again!*

Talk about the sounds that would be heard in each verse, e.g.

**V1:** calling 'Goodbye', doors slamming and the tapping of their trotters as they walk down the road.

**V2:** cutting through straw and the wolf's huffing and puffing

**V3:** sawing and hammering and the wolf's huffing and puffing

**V4:** bricks knocking together and the wolf's unsuccessful huffing and puffing

**V5:** climbing feet – perhaps using a pitched instrument such as a xylophone or glockenspiel to

underpin the rising movement, with some splashes as he falls into the pot

Encourage the children to explore instrumental and vocal possibilities in order to select the best timbre (unique sound quality) match for each story event. Divide the class into five groups, one per verse, allowing every child to choose an instrument, vocal effect or sound source. Explain that each group will provide a musical interlude to illustrate a particular verse. Introduce the 'magic clock': this is a device that gives children a visual time-frame for their improvisations. The practitioner holds both hands up above their head, just like clock hands set at midnight. The improvisation begins as one hand moves round in a circular sweep and ends as the hands are rejoined up at 'midnight'. Sing the song adding the interludes after each verse. Record first attempts, play them back, discuss their effectiveness and then implement any changes. Now you're ready for a grand performance!

# Activity

## 2 JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

(Group composition)

This activity requires the children to work collaboratively in groups to create short descriptive 'soundscape' pieces to insert into the story.

Make a red and green 'Stop/Go' lollipop – a table tennis bat would be an ideal template. Having told the story, talk with the children about the sequence of sounds they might hear during the tale, e.g.

### Suggested sounds

- Mum doing all the work (chopping wood, digging the garden) while Jack idles his time away.
- Jack and Daisy walking to market
- Mum's anger when she sees the beans
- The sound of the beans hitting the ground
- The stealthy growth of the beanstalk overnight
- Jack climbing the beanstalk
- The giant's famous chant 'Fee, fi, fo fum...'
- The magic hen calling to her master
- The axe chopping down the beanstalk
- The clink of money now that Jack and his mother are rich!

Decide which sounds to incorporate into the storytelling, then arrange the children in small groups, asking them to select instruments, sound-makers or vocal sounds. Each group then rehearses a short piece for one specific incident.

Introduce the 'Stop/Go' lollipop to guide each group of players in the length of their musical interpretation then retell the tale with the added 'soundscapes'. Once this idea is established, try applying the 'lollipop' more subtly by allowing the music to encroach slightly over the spoken passages, thus providing a more seamless performance and a greater fusion of speech and music-making. You might invite a pupil to operate the lollipop or narrate the story.

## tip

Why not make up more traditional story songs to this tune or use other nursery rhyme melodies, adding interludes suggested by the children?



# Activity

## 3 THE ELVES AND THE SHOE-MAKER

(Creating a backdrop of bucket drumming)

This story is full of rhythmic patterning: the cutting of the leather, the tapping of the elves' hammers and the stitching of the finished shoes. This soundscape can be performed on plastic buckets drummed with sticks made from lengths of dowel - approximately 1.5 cm in diameter - and available from any DIY store. Sticks of about 17cm long are just right for small hands. Just sandpaper the ends for a very useful, and cheap, set of classroom rhythm instruments. You will need one bucket for every four children, with two sticks per player.

### Percussion patterns

Tell the story and collect descriptive words for the sounds heard during the elves' nightly visits, e.g.

- Tapping hammers ...**
- Snipping scissors...**
- Needles darting...**
- Thread flying**

Organise these words into three phrases that will fit to a four-beat pattern, then order these according to the dynamic quality (degrees of loudness or volume):

1	2	3	4	
Dart-ing	needles,	dart-ing	need-les	[quietest]
Snip	the	leath -	er	[louder]
Tap-ping,	tapping	ham -	mers	[loudest]

Sit four children around each upturned bucket; this will secure the 'instrument' and stop it sliding around the floor. Give each child a pair of sticks and then practise each phrase altogether, on different areas of the

bucket: 'darting needles' is played on the bucket sides, 'snip the leather' is tapped on the rim and 'tapping, tapping hammers' is played on the top. These three playing positions will produce dynamic variety and add to the drama! Say each pattern steadily and rhythmically as you tap to support accurate playing and resist attempts to speed up. When these three phrases are familiar and well-rehearsed, divide up your drumming groups and try playing the music as a layered piece. As a class, decide at which points in the story you should add this rhythmic backdrop, then, introduce one phrase the first time and gradually changing the texture of the music by adding the other tapped patterns as the story develops.

There are excellent KS1 activities for adding drama and percussion to traditional stories to be found in *Three Singing Pigs* and *Three Tapping Teddies* (published by A & C Black, [acblack.com](http://acblack.com)).

Music can heighten dramatic impact, leading children to explore fresh ways of experiencing well-loved tales. Adapt and change these simple ideas to accommodate other traditional tales and enrich the legacy of storytelling in your classroom.