

## Lesson Two: Melody Writing

“Melody is the essence of music.” Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

“A melody is a bunch of notes that took a hike in the mountains. Some of them go up, some go down, and some just keep walking along on the level ground.”- Paul Reisler

**Grade level:** K-6

**Group Size:** One general education class (20-30 students)

**Subject Area:** Music

**Length of Lesson:** 40 minutes

**National Core/SOL:** Music/ Language Arts (see attached)

**Materials:** Chart paper and markers, or dry erase board.

**Objective:** Students will generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. They will discover melody through the natural rhythm and pitch of the spoken word. They will create a melody for a section of lyric.

**Essential Questions:** How is melody like speech? What is the rhythm and pitch contour of a given phrase?

**Overview/Introduction:** Melody is the essence of music because it contains it all. It exists in time so it has rhythm. It contains the seeds of its own harmonization. It also suggests its own instrumentation. Melody carries the basic emotion in music and the harmony gives it the hue. The harmony can turn blue into sky blue or deep dark blue, sadness into depression or a smile into a belly laugh.

Melody and speech are fruits of the same tree. When we speak, we pitch the vowels and the consonants create the rhythm by cutting off the sound of the vowels. There is music in the way we speak and melody is but an amplification and embellishment of the natural rhythm and pitch of our speech. While there are plenty of exceptions in music such as 20th century art songs, etc., where the words can be just the frame that holds an acrobatic melody, popular song grows from the seeds sown by speech. While we speak in a fairly narrow range, we can exaggerate the pitch of the spoken phrase—the notes that go up can go up higher and the low ones can go lower. We can embellish the rhythm by holding out some of the vowels or playing with our phrasing. Still, it all comes from the way we speak.

When working with children, we have found that capturing the meaning of what children say should be the foundation for their songs. We write a section of lyric and then together, we find the music that expresses it most fully. For the music is in the words, and the words are in the music if we just learn how to listen to them. That doesn't mean there's just one set of words for some music, or one melody for a set of words, but that the two go together and they inform each other.

**Procedures:**

1. After writing a section of lyric, have someone speak the words of the first line

2. Clap the rhythm of what they have spoken while speaking the words and get the children to do the same so they can internalize the rhythm of their speech. Clap it several times with the words until everyone has it. Then clap it without speaking the words while imagining them.
3. Indicate the relative pitch of the different notes that they have spoken by your hands to indicate higher and lower.
4. Explain that the melody follows a natural rhythm inflection of speech. It's just amplified and ornamented a bit. Melody is just a bunch of notes that took a hike in the mountains. Some of them go up, some go down, and some just keep walking along on the level ground.
5. Ask for several volunteers to sing the first line. Let the children choose which of those most expresses the meaning of their lyric
6. Clap the rhythm and indicate the relative pitches they have sung
7. Have them sing it over a number of times until it is internalized
8. Find the tonic. Then harmonize and play it in several styles on the guitar or piano or do it a cappella. The styles may include blues, jazz, swing, rock, whatever. Vote on which style most evokes the emotion that the song is trying to express.
9. Ask the children how that style makes them feel.
10. Keep singing the first line and ask for a volunteer to sing the next line when you get to it. Repeat the above until you have worked your way through the section.
11. A few things to keep in mind:
  - a. This is a co-write with the children. If you feel an edit is needed, give options and explanations as to why it is needed. We want the children to experience the complete songwriting process and that includes editing. It may just require a change of one note to keep within the key, or to keep melody moving forward.
  - b. If the melody starts to get repetitive invoke the rule of 3—no more than 3 times repeating something until it needs to change.
  - c. Pay attention to the last note of each phrase and its harmonization to control the forward motion of the melody in order to keep the section from seeming to end prematurely.
  - d. The different sections (verse, chorus, bridge) should contrast with each other.
12. To avoid students only knowing the chorus and first verse, rehearse the song starting with the second verse. This will give importance and focus on each section of the song.
13. Always keep singing!

**Review/Assessment:** Have individual children take a line of dialogue and create a melody for it.

**Closure:** Sing the song one more time.

