



**London
Sinfonietta**

Teacher Resource

COMPOSITION CHALLENGES

Open up the world of composition and invite your students to write music for the London Sinfonietta.

For KS2 and KS3 (all levels of experience and ability)

COMPOSITION CHALLENGES



Welcome to the London Sinfonietta's Composition Challenges. This series of special commissions for schools invites young people to compose music for us.

We want to support your students to become composers, develop their creativity, explore different sound worlds and craft interesting and innovative new music. With each challenge we encourage you and your class to think like composers and ask these key questions:

Why do I want to create a new piece of music?

How can I do this using sound?

Who am I creating it for?

I love the sound of the violin, I want to show off those beautiful sounds for other people to enjoy

I want to write music to warn people about climate change

I want to experiment with sounds to invent something that nobody has ever heard before

Sitting in the park on a warm, sunny day makes me feel really happy, I wonder if I can recreate that feeling using music?

I want to write a piece of music that tells the story of my culture and where I come from

COMPOSITION CHALLENGES



Each challenge consists of three simple steps:

1. **Watch the composition challenge film.** This will be your starting point for creative composition. It will introduce your students to how they can compose and invite them to listen, evaluate and discuss what they see and hear.
2. **Use this teacher resource** to help support practical composing in the classroom.
3. **Submit your students' compositions to the London Sinfonietta.** We will share their work on our website, perform it or perhaps showcase it in our annual Sound Out Schools Concert. We can also offer live, interactive sessions (online or in person) with our musicians who can give your students feedback on their compositions.

Submit your compositions to compositionchallenge@londonsinfonietta.org.uk

Curriculum learning

Each challenge will support KS2 and 3 curriculum learning as well as developing young people's wider creative and musical skills. Challenges are focused on composing but also include listening and performing activity. Young people will develop their skills;

- as composers working on their own and with others.
- to understand how music is created and communicated.
- to organise and manipulate ideas within musical structures (including pitch, duration, texture, structure and musical notation).

COMPOSITION CHALLENGE #3: WORDS AND MUSIC

SUITABLE FOR:
All ages and abilities
No instruments or
notation necessary

**Write your own song about a
place, community or people.**

**Choose or create your own lyrics and set them to music to help
tell the story.**

The **Words and Music challenge** is inspired by Leila Adu-Gilmore, a composer and singer/songwriter of New Zealand, Ghanaian and British heritage. Her piece **Ghost Lullaby From Freedom Suite** which she wrote in 2014 is for solo voice and small orchestra. It tells the story of the Native Americans who used to live on the site of her home in Princeton, America hundreds of years ago. Leila composed both the words and music at the piano, improvising and trying out ideas as she went. She later arranged it for small orchestra and the London Sinfonietta performed the piece in October 2020 as part of **Yet Unheard**, a concert celebrating the work of established and emerging Black composers.

Words and Music invites young people to compose lyrics and music to create a short song inspired by a place and the people who used to live there. There is no need to use any traditional notation in the compositions and the challenge encourages young people to be imaginative and inventive with their use of words and music as they compose their piece. Use your own local area, community or history as a basis for this musical storytelling. It will help make composing feel more tangible and can also provide opportunities to link to the English and history curriculum.

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London
Sinfonietta

CHALLENGE #3:

WORDS AND MUSIC

GET STARTED

Use our short film as a starting point for composing a piece inspired by *Words and Music*. We suggest you spend at least two or three sessions with your class, developing and trying out ideas before you create your final piece. Watch the film with your class. Pause it whenever you like to talk about what you are seeing and hearing and encourage observations and comments.

Discuss *Ghost Lullaby*

Listen to the words of the song? What do you think Leila was trying to communicate? What interesting or descriptive words does she use? What is the significance of the repeated words? How has she used the words to emphasise the message or emotion of the song? What instruments or musical features can you hear? Is it fast or slow, loud or soft? How does this help build the feel and mood of the song?

Ask your students to make decisions about their lyrics

Whose story do they want to tell? Which people or community local to you, past or present, have a story that might need to be told or is something we haven't heard before? There are political elements to Leila's story as she speaks for a group of people unable to speak for themselves. Encourage pupils to speak in different voices, and challenge the language they use to tell stories. How can they make words into lyrics using editing, repetition, strong descriptive language?

Encourage your class to think like composers

How can music strengthen or enhance your chosen lyrics and help tell the story? How can you create different moods or emotions by changing the tempo (speed), texture, pitch, rhythms or the instruments you choose to perform your song?

COMPOSITION



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CHALLENGE #3:

WORDS AND MUSIC

GET CREATIVE

This challenge allows you to write your own song, selecting or creating your own lyrics and then setting them to music. You can

- **use words that have already been written (a poem, something from a news article or a conversation)**
- **or you can create your own.**

You can edit or cut down your lyrics to make them flow and make them really descriptive so that the meaning or story of your song can be reflected in the music you create.

Get your class creating and composing using some of these practical exercises. The idea of this challenge is that anyone can compose their own lyrics and music to tell a story that is important to them.

Need some inspiration?

New York New York - composed by John Kander with lyrics by Fred Ebb this song was most famously sung by Frank Sinatra. The music conjures up the busy, positive and hopeful energy of New York City with its upbeat, jazzy swing rhythms and instrumentation. The lyrics describe the feel of the city and why you'd want to be there.

Notes about Now - four songs commissioned by London Sinfonietta from composers setting lyrics created by poets in collaboration with different communities during the pandemic.

We shall overcome - a gospel song which became a protest song and anthem of the American civil rights movement in the 1960s. It uses repetition of the lyrics to convey a clear message.

COMPOSITION



CHALLENGE #3:

WORDS AND MUSIC

FIND YOUR INSPIRATION

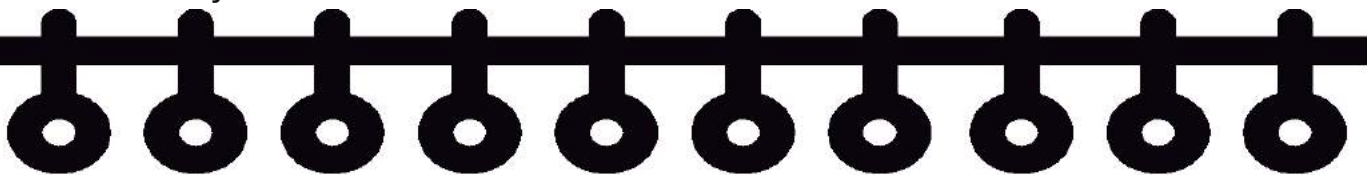
You can use any people or place as a starting point for your song but it's quite nice to tell a story that is local to you as it makes it more personal.

Investigate the communities that exist, or used to exist, around your school.

What jobs did they do? Where did they live? Are there particular local traditions that you could incorporate? Perhaps there is even a local person (they might even be famous!) who could provide inspiration for your song.

Once you have an idea or some inspiration for your song you need to create some lyrics. These need to clearly convey the story or message you want to share with your audience. You might want to borrow some words from something you found in your research –this could be a quote from somebody, a short phrase from a book or webpage that catches your attention or perhaps even some factual information about the people or place.

Remember, your lyrics must be short and descriptive. You can edit longer text to create interesting lyrics. For example, take a longer quote and highlight the most interesting bits to create shorter lyrics:



I was born 12th October 1931, and by Oct 1936 I was ready for school. My school was Spurling Road school. At that time it was a mixed infant, junior and senior girls school. 1939 war was declared and I was now old enough for the junior section. Two large brick built air raid shelters were built in the playground, although during the blitz my junior class mainly did lessons in the reinforced corridors next to our class. When I say 'lessons', during the heavy raids of the blitz with the noise of anti aircraft guns and bombs from throbbing German bombers, we mainly had games or sang songs very loudly. It was at this time that the teachers of Spurling Road, showed how brave and courageous they were. Our teacher, quite young herself never showed fear or panic to us kids, when the buzzer sounded to let her know a raid was approaching, we were told to stand up and she calmly led us out to the corridor. We were her class and she refused to allow or let anything to alarm or hurt us. I have many memories of that period in my school. And the courage of all the teachers in Spurling Road school is just one of them.

COMPOSITION



London
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CHALLENGE #3:

WORDS AND MUSIC

FIND YOUR INSPIRATION

Becomes...

Brick built air raid shelters, heavy raids

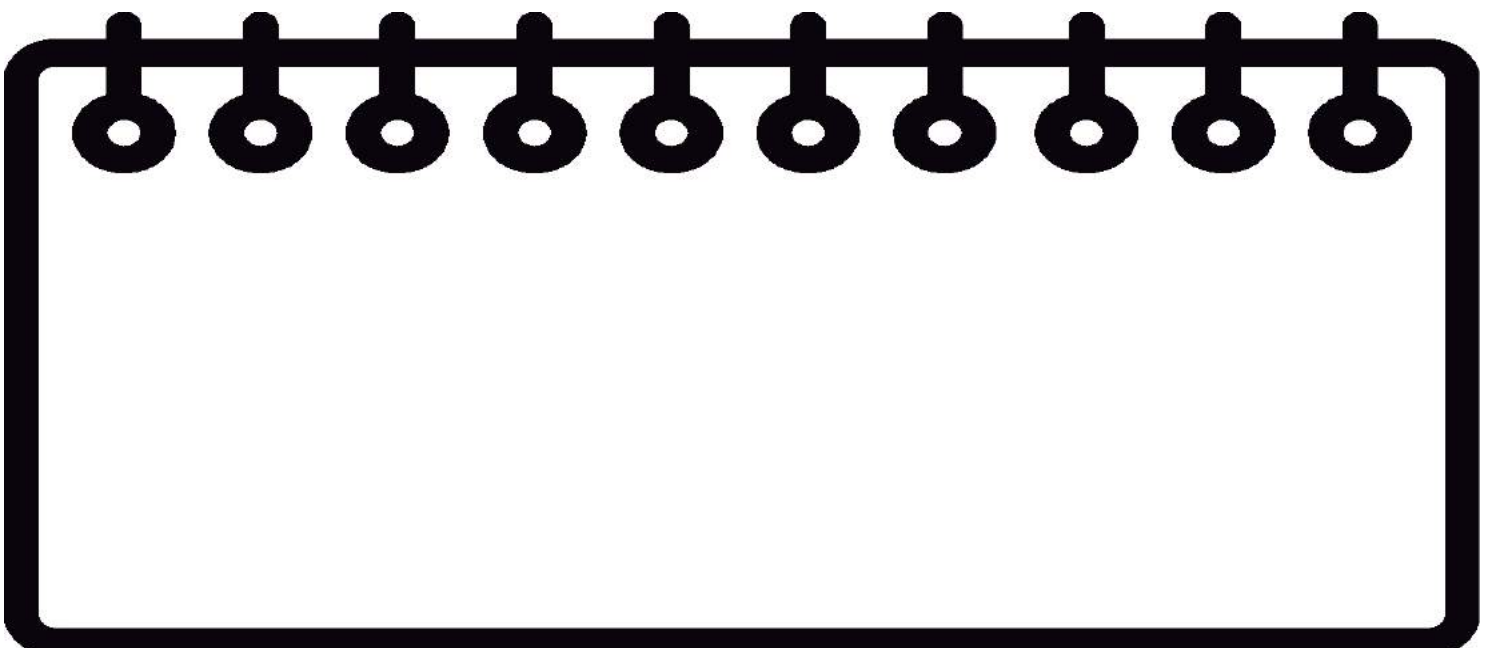
The teachers showed how brave and courageous they were

Never showed fear or panic

Refused to allow anything to alarm us

Or, you can write your own lyrics using exciting, descriptive language.

If everyone in the class writes one verse each about the same subject you could then come together to edit your final song lyrics as a group choosing the favourite lines from everyone's work.



COMPOSITION



CHALLENGE #3:

WORDS AND MUSIC

MUSICAL STORYTELLING


The musical sounds you choose and the way you use them has a powerful effect on the emotions and mood you convey. It might be useful to begin by writing out some ideas to describe how you want your song to sound

- **Set the mood** - should it be energetic and frenetic, calm and spacious, upbeat and bright, dark and unsettling...
- **Tempo** - fast or slow?
- **Pitch** –what direction does your melody move in? Does it move in small steps or big leaps?
- **Texture** –will it be thick and busy or sparse and spacious?
- **Dynamics** –can you map out where you might use diminuendos or crescendos or make more sudden changes between loud and soft?

Remember that the music can help emphasise important words , stretching, repeating or punctuating them with space or other sounds to help create a particular mood.

Brok  ken

No, no, no 

 Beauuuuuuuutiful! 

Try singing your words, maybe just on one note or incorporating some of the ideas you've already had about tempo, rhythm and pitch. How does it sound? What would you like to exaggerate or change?

Part of composing is trying things again and again and experimenting with different ideas to find what you are looking for. There are no right answers, so just use your ears and make choices that feel right for you.

Try recording yourself so you can listen back and will remember all your good ideas!

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CHALLENGE #3:

WORDS AND MUSIC

CREATE YOUR PIECE

Once you have chosen or created your lyrics and tried them out with some musical ideas to create your melody it's time to compose your song and write it down as a musical score.

Think about the **musical accompaniment** - are there particular instruments you can imagine accompanying your song?

- Imagine how it would sound played in different ways -using a full orchestra, a solo flute, a drum kit or anything else you can think of. What would sound best for your song? The mood and emotion of the song will be very different depending on what you choose.
- Listen to some other music for inspiration –are there particular styles or sounds you like and think would suit your song?
- If you or someone you know plays an instrument ask them to try out some of your ideas so you can hear what they sound like

Capture your ideas - Create a score

One of the easiest ways to help share your musical ideas is to write them down as a score - this means you can hand them over to other people to perform. There are different ways you could do this but it could be;

- a list or instructions with details of the instrument(s) you want to accompany your song and descriptive details of how you imagine it sounding.
- a copy of your lyrics annotated with lots of musical ideas,/shapes for each word or line (like you saw in the film)
- using musical notation as you would see in a traditional musical score

COMPOSITION

CHALLENGE #3:

GLOSSARY



Lyrics the words of a song

Orchestration taking the musical ideas and choosing which instruments, or groups of instruments will play certain moments

Composer someone who writes/imagines/creates music. In Latin, the word means 'one who puts together'.

Commission the act of inviting someone to compose a piece of music (and, at professional level, the act of paying the composer to write it).

Dynamics a term that relates to volume in music. We can use English words like loud or quiet. Traditionally, we use Italian words for these: forte and piano.

Texture this describes how dense or light a piece of music is. If there are many notes being heard at once, the texture is often described as dense. If the music has fewer instruments or perhaps the notes move more slowly, the texture can be described as lighter. There are many imaginative ways of describing texture in music as there are in visual art or even food.

Expressive marking in music, this is the 'how' not the 'what'. In traditional musical notation, pitch, volume etc are often absolute but the expressive marking will tell the performer what the mood or intention of the note is. Playwrights use this when they give an instruction prior to a line being spoken. Like many musical terms, musicians have traditionally used Italian words (i.e. dolce means 'gently') but in modern times, words in the language of the composer are very common.

Extended technique a technique of playing your instrument that is in some way unorthodox – using a different part of the instrument to generate the sound or creating a very different sound from what is expected. Lots of modern composers ask for extended techniques and many of them are now very common for instrumentalists to learn. A good example would be for a piano player to lean inside the piano and pluck the strings with their fingers.

Tempo is the speed that the music moves. This is most obviously heard in the pulse or beat of the music. A slower tempo is good for ritualistic music

Structure refers to the shape of the whole piece and the journey through the music. This can be heard really clearly in pop music where we refer to verse and chorus

Graphic notation is where we use other sorts of notation to capture the music we have composed so rather than using traditional musical notes on a staff, we use colours, shapes, lines, pictures and even written instructions to capture our composition.

COMPOSITION CHALLENGES

The London Sinfonietta is one of the world's leading contemporary music ensembles. We focus on performing works by living composers. We often commission composers to write music especially for us.

Composition Challenges is part of our Sound Out Schools Programme. For more information please contact us at compositionchallenge@londonsinfonietta.org.uk or visit our website www.londonsinfonietta.org.uk

