



CMP Teaching Plan

ELEMENTARY GENERAL

Hot Cross Buns • Simple Gifts • Beethoven: Ode to Joy

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ANALYSIS

Hot Cross Buns

Broad Description

Traditional children's nursery rhyme

Background

First published in 1798, but referenced in writing as early as 1733, this three-note English language nursery rhyme was likely first a street cry used to sell the spiced bread rolls of the same name, popular on Good Friday because of their cross design. Many stories and superstitions surround the actual food hot cross buns, but the song itself has remained fairly unchanged. Some include added words that extend the song, but the basic melodic and rhythmic content is the same.



Melody

It really is all about Mi-Re-Do. The middle section (m.3) develops the idea with a repeated Do, followed by Re and then leads to an exact repeat of the first measure. There are only 17 total notes and all of them are Mi, Re, and Do. Each measure is a phrase. There are no melodic skips within a phrase.

Rhythm

♪♪♪ makes up 75% of the piece, with the lone contrast being the “development section” (m.3), which is all eighth notes. But it is this measure of all eighth notes that makes the song so catchy. Without it, the song is just another ostinato.

Harmony

Typically the song is played or sung in unison, with only an implied harmony of alternating I and V chords. However the variety of possible harmonizations of this simple melody are nearly endless, as evidenced by its creative quotation in a variety of styles, especially jazz.

Form

The genius of this little song is in how it does not try to be something it is not.

It is simple: Buns are for sale. They are hot. They have a cross.

But in this unassuming little melody lies a brilliant formal structure: AABA.

Try leaving out measure 2 and singing only one “Hot Cross Buns” in the beginning. Or try adding a third repetition. Nope. Not as good.

The way that the melodically and rhythmically “interesting” measure happens after two measures and just before the final fourth measure places it right at the golden mean, and right in the most musically satisfying place. In a mere four measures, we have—in miniature—rounded binary, 32-bar song form, and the symphonic sonata allegro form with exposition (repeated), development, and recap!

HEART STATEMENT

The heart of Hot Cross Buns lies in our fascination with things that are complete, but in miniature; the form, melodic variation and symmetry that make a well crafted tune are all there in the most efficient possible way.

Simple Gifts

Broad Description

Traditional American song, with folk song status

Background

This Shaker song written in 1848 by Shaker Elder Joseph Brackett, but only became widely known when Aaron Copland used it in his 1944 ballet *Appalachian Spring*, and then again in his 1950 collection *Old American Songs*, for voice and piano (later orchestrated).

Many Shaker sources indicate that the song was originally a dance song, with the words “turning, turning” being dance instructions. The song has been used extensively quoted and covered by other musicians, as well as in popular culture.

Melody

The melodic movement spans an octave in all—from low sol₁ to sol. The melody unfolds in a mostly stepwise pattern and in a very organic way. Brackett claimed to have written the melody to imitate the sound of older folk songs and the melody definitely has the feel of a folksong. Whether or not people have formally studied the song, it has the sound of a song that is already known. This may be partially to do with its prevalence in popular culture, but I believe that it also has a lot to do with the predictable rise and fall of the melodic line. The melody does make a sudden leap up at the beginning of each phrase following this pattern: sol₁-do; sol₁-do; DO-SOL; sol₁-do. The 3rd large leap that moves up to Sol from Do gives the melody a renewed and fresh feeling.

Rhythm

The gentle, flowing motion of the eighth and quarter notes characterizes most of the piece. The few measures of dotted rhythms bring a little bit of suspense—almost a wait-for-it-feeling to the rocking eighth note-quarter notes movements. The biggest moment of rhythmic interest, however, is the one measure of all quarter notes (“gift to come down”). This measure seems to rhythmically demonstrate the idea of the song: Stop running from thing to thing and making life complicated. Enjoy the simple things—like four well-placed quarter notes in a sea of movement. 😊

Harmony

Again, though no harmonic accompaniment was originally given, the melody and folk song feel suggests an open styled accompaniment centered on the V and I chords. Much of the melody is triadic and outlining those tonic and dominant harmonies.

Texture & Timbre

Though originally an unaccompanied vocal line, there are many arrangements of this piece that attest to the power of this piece to inspire and spark imagination. It is a melody that plays well on a variety of instruments and is simple enough that there are many ways to arrange accompaniments in a variety of textures.

Form

The song is one verse with an A and a B section. Both sections end on the tonic and feel complete, but they do have separate melodic and harmonic material. The quarter, eighth/eighth, quarter idea continues through both the A and B sections, but the B section overall feel more expansive and open, with the added high range and the addition of half notes. It seems unusual that in its original form the song was just one verse with no repeat of the A section. With this form and brevity, it is like the notes are saying, “This is enough. I don’t have to say it another way.”

HEART

The heart of *Simple Gifts* is a melody that rises and falls in an easy, organic way, modeling beauty without excess.

Beethoven: Ode to Joy

Broad Description

A classic and well-known melody drawn from a Beethoven symphony.

Background

On top of a symphony that might be described—especially in its day—as large, ornate, and even “over-the-top,” Beethoven added a texted song and a choir to express the strongest exuberance.

The *Ode to Joy* was originally a poem by Friedrich Schiller written in 1785. Beethoven did not set all the words and reordered some, but it is his setting that has propelled the title “Ode to Joy” to worldwide fame. The tune that Beethoven used (though not the words) became the Anthem of Europe in 1972 and is currently the anthem of the European Union.

Like *Simple Gifts*, this tune has surpassed its original context and has become a part of popular culture. It may be one of the most universally recognized melodies. Though it is a part of a very active, busy, and decorated context in the Ninth Symphony, the tune itself has a straightforward, strong and solid feel.



Melody

The melody begins on MI, which I find significant. Beginning on the 3rd and not really settling on DO gives the melody a feeling of loftiness or rising above. The melody mostly stays within a fifth, with just a momentary departure to the low SOL. It is in a Classical period beautifully balanced AABA form.

Rhythm

It is hard to make a rhythm less eventful, which is precisely why it is remarkable. Amidst a busy texture, a simple, strong melody that consists largely of quarter notes comes in like an unflinching truth. The real question is why the melody has transcended its use in Beethoven's 9th symphony and is attractive apart from its more complex original context. I would argue that the solid predictability of the rhythm with just a couple unexpected syncopations and dotted rhythms give it the perfect balance of familiar and unexpected.

Harmony

Like *Simple Gifts*, the harmony could center on the tonic and dominant. In this case the harmony lends less of an open, simple feel and more of a sense of strength and support. The B part (3rd phrase) of the melody is built on a dominant pedal note which releases in a quick paced harmonic rhythm built on a sudden Circle of Fifths progression in minor. This sudden harmonic departure makes the return of the final A phrase all the more confident and reassuring.

Texture/Timbre

Of course the symphonic version has specific texture and timbre indications, but the melody alone, as part of popular culture, exists in countless versions for instrumentalists, vocalists and a wide variety of solo and ensemble productions.

There are not many beginning method books that do not include this piece. For young students, this piece has come to represent, "I can really play something on this instrument because I can play "Ode to Joy." The way the piece is used in such a wide variety of lesson books—with no full symphony context—suggests that there is an artistry and craft to this melody (even out of context!) that is worthy of study.

HEART

The heart of *Ode to Joy* is a simple, strong melody that rises out of a busy orchestral texture, hailing unity of purpose.

OUTCOMES

Skill Outcome

Students will demonstrate fluency in three modes: note name reading, solfège singing and instrumental response to written notation, to demonstrate an integrated understanding of pitch literacy.

Strategies

1. Opening Greeting—Literacy Challenge

Instead of only greeting the class with "Hello, Ms. Ostertag's class," substitute 5 quick literacy challenges from the combinations below. Have signs that read Solfege/Letter Names/Recorder/Write It, so students know how they are supposed to respond. Keep track of how many they get each day. (*How many challenges do you think you will need to be super readers?* Have them set personal goals.)

Begin by setting the context. (Do is G, I'm starting on B, etc...)

- I play---You sing solfege
- I play---You sing letter names
- I sing letter names—you play
- I sing letter names---you solfege
- I sing solfege—you play
- I sing solfege—you sing letter names
- I point to notation—you play
- I point to notation---You sing solfege
- I point to notation---You sing letter names
- I sing solfege—you write it
- I sing letter names—you write it
- I play—you write it

Variation: Have students lead the activity for 2-3 others in small groups, rotating who the leader is.

Interventions for reaching the struggling or gifted student:

For students that may not often understand this, have them collaborate on choosing a solfege/note/recorder pattern— whichever is their strength. Ask them what they want others to turn it into (solfege, letters, playing, writing). For advanced students, have them plan to lead for a day. They need to plan out what they are doing, as well as the expected response.

Related Assessment: Keep track of how many they get each day. (Ask: How many challenges do you think you will need to be super readers? Have them set personal goals and a class goal.)

2. Moment for Mystery Measure

Play, solfège or sing letter names for a measure somewhere in some piece. How quickly can students locate it? (When you find it, sit in lotus! When you find it, strike a tree pose! If you found it, sing it on the words after my count to 5! etc.)

As they become more proficient, students can select the mystery measure and sing/play it and have the class find it.

Related Assessment: Visually, this is regularly an informal assessment. Rather than giving a visual clue that they found it, a note card is placed under each chair and they write down the measure numbers. Collect them on the way out of class.

3. Literacy Lotto

Take a given passage—group of notes, measure, several measures—and have students draw out of a basket the way that they will read that passage: sing on words, sing on solfège, sing on letter names, play on recorder, can be regular choices. There can be additional options added for days where there are Orff instruments already set up or keyboards available.

As they become more proficient, students choose the passage, pick the mode and determine whether or not they read fluently!

Interventions for reaching the gifted student: There can be another basket with options like: Put it in Bass Clef; Transpose this melody up one whole step and sing letter names/play; change the solfège to minor. It is also more challenging if done individually or in a small group (which inspires some kids to want to get better, whether or not they had already mastered this skill!).

Related Assessment: Again, this strategy is naturally an informal assessment, but could be more formal with added note cards or individual white boards.

3. Puzzle Pieces

Each student (or small groups, depending on how many measures the piece has) has a measure of the piece. It might be written with just pitch letters, it might have solfège, it might have notation. As a class, they need to put the measures in order to complete the song (or phrase). Each person (or group) will perform their measure to see if the song was correctly assembled. Notation is played on recorder, letter names and solfège are sung.

This activity is highly collaborative and some students will naturally take leadership, but before anyone takes over or the action gets started, students should have 30 seconds or so to really imagine their card in their heads so they get a chance to process it.

There is naturally opportunities for advanced students to lead and for student that don't understand to have peer help in this strategy.

This is not a first week strategy. It should take place closer to class proficiency and when they are able to function with less guidance.

Related Assessment: The teacher should move throughout the class, observing. If there are issues or confusion, ask the student to sing/play what they have to see if the problems are literacy or understanding where things fit in a larger context.

Knowledge Outcome

Students will be able to describe the phrase and larger form construction of a piece by studying it visually or hearing it.

1. Color Code It

Have students identify like sections by marking them with a given color. These can be larger form related sections or simply patterns that repeat throughout. If it makes sense to code a whole piece, parts that do not repeat can have their own color. When the whole piece is covered, students can translate larger sections to letter names.

Variation: Name it

Sometimes, instead of colors, use names. Like Fred, Marge, Barnabas, etc.—anything to make them eager to figure out organizational structures!

2. Name It, Claim It

When starting different places (which is generally more useful than always starting at the beginning), refer to the section names. i.e. "Start in the 3rd measure of the B section"; "Is any one brave enough to play the development section on their own?" "Everyone begin at the measure where A comes back for a second time." Make "form talk" a regular part of the classroom vocabulary.

3. ABA Improvisation

To help students really listen (aurally) for the return of material that they have heard before, invent something that can easily be remembered or repeated, contrast it with something else and then come back to the repeated section. Students have poses that they assume A B and A so that they show they are tracking what the improviser is doing. The teacher can start by modeling this, but there will be students able to take the lead. The leader job is one level of understanding, but the listening and tracking understanding is also valuable. For this, it is less important to me that everyone improvises alone (though that also works) and more important that everyone listens and tracks.

4. Group ABA Composition

Students in small groups plan a short A melody, contrasting B and return to A that they perform together. Each group is responsible for writing down their idea and turning it in. Students indicate through assigned hand signs that they are listening and understanding the formal structure.

Assessment Strategy: Try It With a New Piece

Looking at a new melody or listening to a new piece, have the students write, pair share and /or share with the class ways that they would describe the form construction, including descriptions of melodies or rhythms that repeated, were new, were contrasts, etc... *For this study, Dvorak's New World Symphony will be introduced through this assessment.*

Additional Unit Knowledge Outcomes

For the demo of this plan, I will only include the knowledge outcome that is primarily applied to *Ode to Joy*. The *Ode to Joy* Outcome is one that has some relevance to these pieces, but works best with that piece. The *Simple Gifts* Outcome (below) is one that I also applied to *Ode to Joy*.

Knowledge (Hot Cross Buns)

Students will examine the idea of variation, including to what degree changes can be applied and still remain connected to the original material.

Knowledge (Simple Gifts)

Students will take notice of moments that deviate from the expected melodic and rhythmic shape, locate them visually within a score, and be able to articulate what they expected vs. what is in the composition.

Affective Outcome

Students will notice and reflect on both the simple and ornate, and how both can be appreciated for their aesthetic qualities. They will especially discover examples of the plain or simple in their own lives that could be considered beautiful.

1. Bring in the Beauty

Have students bring something in—a picture, an object (or describe, if it can't come in)—that they consider beautiful and articulate why they find it really beautiful. This is practice in getting students to dig deeper and answer the “why” question, rather than just relying on their immediate gut response. It is easiest for them to find words when it is an object they have brought in.

2. Visual Tour

Look at examples of ornate beauty and quickly pore over the reasons that people consider these things beautiful. Show a simple example—painting, object—and ask them whether this qualifies as beautiful. Why or why not? Question: Can simple things be beautiful?

3. Bring in the Beauty, pt 2

Focus on bringing in objects that are examples of simple beauty and explaining what makes them beautiful, even though they might be simple or plain.

Question: Is Hot Cross Buns beautiful? Why or why not?

4. Simple Gifts Breakdown

What is “simple” anyway? What are the pros of simple? What are the cons? How does this tie to our understanding of simple being beautiful?

Question: What do you think people appreciate more: Simple beauty or ornate beauty? Why?

Assessment 1: Choose one piece: Simple Gifts, Hot Cross Buns or Ode to Joy and discuss why you think that this piece, though simple is beautiful.

Assessment 2: Choose a piece of music or even a part of a larger piece of music that you feel is a great example of something very simple that is crafted in a way that shows beauty and reveal to me what you can see and understand about its beauty.

UNIT DESCRIPTION

For these pieces and more (not included in the demo), the unifying Skill Outcome was the students' really integrating the pieces of literacy that they already own (but may not have completely mastered) with the new skill of responding to notation with a wind instrument (recorder). It is really easy, especially when there is a set of literature that the students need to learn for a performance and their recorder skills are basically non-existent, to simply make recorder skills the one unifying element. However, I felt that the focus on *linking* the solfège, letter names, written notation and recorder skills together would help students enforce and build on previous knowledge and move forward with a new confidence in pitch understanding.

Though the skill link is quite important, it is also rather superficial and obvious. I really wanted my student to see more connection in their literature than simply the fact that all of these pieces can be read and played on the recorder or sung.

In analyzing Dvorak's New World Symphony, Stravinsky's Firebird Suite Finale, Simple Gifts (American Shaker Tune), Ode to Joy (from Beethoven's 9th), Sakura (Japanese Traditional), Ise Oluwa (Nigerian Traditional), Hot Cross Buns (English Street Cry and Nursery Rhyme) and Shalom Chaverim (Israeli Traditional), I found a collection of works whose thoughtful construction, well placed melodic arcs and overall loveliness came not from particularly varied melodies or complicated layers of polyphony, but from their plain simplicity.

This is essentially the message of *Simple Gifts*, which I decided could be an effective and accessible core to my unit. In a culture that is often focused on acquiring things—and often ever more complex or fancier things—I wanted students to not only appreciate the beauty of a single well placed melodic leap or a melodic phrase that comes back at just the right moment, but also the simple, and often free things that surround them that can be so easy to miss in an over-stimulated world.

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"If you can't explain it to a six year old, you don't understand it yourself."-Albert Einstein

"As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simpler;
solitude will not be solitude,
poverty will not be poverty,
nor weakness weakness."

Henry David Thoreau