

Blueprints for Creativity

A Composition Curriculum

Inspiring

Music by Kids for Kids™



Overview

What is this curriculum?

- A composition tutorial for teachers and students created under the auspices of the American Composers Forum.

Who is this curriculum for?

- Middle school and high school students.
- Beginning-level composers.
- Music educators looking to enrich classroom experiences.

How should this curriculum be used?

- In a classroom setting.
- As an independent study guide for individuals or small groups of students.

What materials are required?

- Computers equipped with music notation software. (The curriculum is optimally designed for use with Finale 2006.)

How long does it take to complete this curriculum?

- There are five units. Each unit takes six to eight class hours to complete.

What musical activities do students engage in?

- Reading, analyzing, describing, notating, listening to, improvising, composing, arranging, evaluating, playing, and singing music.

What do students produce?

- Five notated music scores designated for winds, brass, percussion, strings, and voices (see VISION on the next page).
- Five original compositions notated and playable as MIDI realizations (see VOICE on the next page).

The National Standards for Music Education

This curriculum has been carefully constructed to conform to the National Standards for Music Education promulgated by the National Association for Music Education. The nine content standards, adopted in 1994, can be found at <http://www.menc.org/publication/books/standards/htm>.

EACH UNIT HAS THREE MAIN PARTS: VISION, VOICE, and VIRTUOSITY

VISION

Reading, analyzing, describing, and notating music

The first part—VISION—presents a blueprint for musical creativity. In these sections it is important for the student to follow the directions closely, since many compositional strategies, principles, and terms are introduced. The goal is for the student to analyze and learn everything possible about the blueprint, including the process of turning it into a notated score.

VOICE

Improvising, playing, singing, composing, notating, listening to, and evaluating music

The second part—VOICE—guides the student in the creation of an original musical composition based on the blueprint. Students are encouraged to write pieces that can be performed by other students. Teachers may need to help students arrange (or transcribe) their pieces so that they are playable.

VIRTUOSITY

Reading, notating, listening to, analyzing, describing, playing, singing, composing, arranging, and evaluating music

The third part—VIRTUOSITY—contains additional information and exercises. It is highly recommended that a student complete all three parts of a unit whenever possible. In a classroom setting, where students may complete projects at different rates of speed, the VIRTUOSITY section can be reserved for more highly motivated students and those students who finish their composition projects ahead of schedule.

Table of Contents

Unit 1: Counterpoint

Goals: a) To compose melodic lines based on five-note scales; b) To create distinct, independent lines of counterpoint; c) To balance cohesion and variation; d) To generate a whole composition out of minimal raw material

Instrumental Focus: Woodwinds

Vision 1—Blueprint for Counterpoint

Voice 1—Compose a contrapuntal trio based on a five-note scale

Virtuosity 1—Construct a three-voice Canon

Assessment Worksheet 1

Unit 2: Melody

Goals: a) To compose a melody based on a keynote and a six-note scale; b) to identify motives and phrases; c) To harmonize a melody using diatonic three-note chords; d) To generate alternate harmonic rhythms using filtering techniques; e) To construct a harmonization by selecting from multiple possibilities —i.e., from an abundance of raw material

Instrumental Focus: Brass

Vision 2—Blueprint for Melody

Voice 2—Compose a melody and harmonization

Virtuosity 2—Construct a Theme and Variations form

Assessment Worksheet 2

Unit 3: Rhythm

Goals: a) To create interlocking rhythmic patterns on multiple staves; b) To design an architectural plan for an entire composition based solely on techniques for rhythmic development; c) To infuse rhythmic patterns with melodic ostinatos

Instrumental Focus: Percussion

Vision 3—Blueprint for Rhythm

Voice 3— Compose a percussion piece on three staves, using a preconceived rhythmic process

Virtuosity 3—Infuse rhythmic patterns with melodic ostinatos and substitute pitched for non-pitched percussion instruments
Assessment Worksheet 3

Unit 4: Harmony

Goals: a) To generate harmony based on a five-note scale; b) To create harmonic variations using chord re-voicing techniques; c) To generate melody from harmony; d) To construct an accompaniment pattern

Instrumental Focus: Strings

Vision 4—Blueprint for Harmony

Voice 4—Compose a piece by starting with harmonic phrases; repeat using an alternate voicing; then generate melody

Virtuosity 4—Construct an accompaniment pattern, infusing a harmonization with rhythmic energy

Assessment Worksheet 4

Unit 5: Musical Architecture

Goals: a) To compose a piece for SATB choir; b) To design a detailed blueprint that incorporates words of the text into two contrasting sections; c) To write within specific vocal ranges; d) To balance vertical and horizontal elements; e) To use appropriate voice-leading techniques, emphasizing step-wise motion and small intervals; f) To set the text so as to be 'singable', paying close attention to its metric placement

Choral Focus: SATB

Vision 5—Blueprint for Musical Architecture

Voice 5—Class Project: Each student selects and sets one stanza from the poem "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod," by Eugene Field, for SATB choir

Virtuosity 5—The stanzas are critiqued for 'singability', revised, and then collated and combined into one score, along with their refrains (located in the Performance Folder). The result should be a single, performable piece.

Assessment Worksheet 5

Using the Peer-Review Process in the Classroom

Asking students to think critically about each other's work builds confidence and self-esteem. It acknowledges that people differ in their musical hearing and understanding—no individual's experience is quite like anyone else's. For this reason, it is recommended that, at the conclusion of each unit, pieces be played aloud using MIDI realizations and assessed using the Peer-Review Process. Listening to the new compositions is the most important part of the learning process, bringing it back around to VISION. Everyone should participate in the process, with at least two students other than the composer reviewing each piece, along with the teacher.

Original compositions should be assessed using the Peer-Review Process in conjunction with the Assessment Worksheets found at the end of each unit. Pieces should be evaluated on the basis of the values and goals specified on each Worksheet. Each notated score should be viewed, listened to, and discussed by the class. Emphasis should be placed on 'awarding' points (not on 'deducting' points). Narrative feedback is strongly encouraged as well. This can be written on the back of the Worksheet and should consist mainly of descriptive praise—identifying those aspects of the piece that are most striking.

The notation assignments in the VISION and VIRTUOSITY sections assume that students follow the directions carefully to produce a notated score that matches the example. Since each step plays an important role in the learning process, students should be allowed to proceed through these steps at a comfortable pace. It's not a race to see who can finish first! Occasionally, happy accidents will occur, producing new (and delightful) 'mutations' of the example. These can be played aloud to show how the compositional process can take unexpected turns. Points should not be deducted for creative 'mistakes'. Additionally, one point per unit should be awarded to each student for participating in the peer review (see the next page).

MIDI vs. Real Instruments

In Units 1-4, MIDI realizations of student compositions need not conform to the unit's Instrumental Focus. Instead, students should experiment with a variety of combinations, choosing whatever sounds they like. Later, some of the pieces could be transcribed for real instruments and, if possible, played in concert settings.



Blueprints for Creativity

Grade Sheet

Name: _____

Unit 1

Counterpoint

- Vision (5 pts)
- Voice (10 pts)
- Virtuosity (5 pts)
- Peer Review (1 pt)

Total: _____

Unit 4

Harmony

- Vision (5 pts)
- Voice (10 pts)
- Virtuosity (5 pts)
- Peer Review (1 pt)

Total: _____

Unit 2

Melody

- Vision (5 pts)
- Voice (10 pts)
- Virtuosity (5 pts)
- Peer Review (1 pt)

Total: _____

Unit 5

Architecture

- Vision (5 pts)
- Voice (10 pts)
- Virtuosity (5 pts)
- Peer Review (1 pt)

Total: _____

Grand Total: _____

Unit 3

Rhythm

- Vision (5 pts)
- Voice (10 pts)
- Virtuosity (5 pts)
- Peer Review (1 pt)

Total: _____

100–105 pts = A+

93–99 pts = A

90–92 pts = A-

87–89 pts = B+

83–86 pts = B

80–82 pts = B-

77–79 pts = C+

73–76 pts = C

70–72 pts = C-