

***Ben Somewhen* - Howard Skempton**

In this resource the children will take different aspects of *Ben Somewhen* as starting points for composing melodies. They will:

1. Compose a simple melody with accompaniment using chance procedures to generate the rhythm and melody
2. Compose a melody using intervals of 3rds and other specific intervals.

Page 1 – Programme Note

Ben Somewhen (2007) by Howard Skempton is inspired by ‘fifteen drawings... adorned with texts’ by the artist Ben Hartley. The drawings and words are humorous and lyrical observations of life, reflecting Hartley’s life in Devon in the 1960s. The *Ben Somewhen* images include short poem-like texts, with black and white line drawings that capture the world of nature and people. Howard Skempton selected 15 of the 104 drawings in the collection as a starting point for his music.

The 15 short contrasting musical episodes run without a break, the whole piece lasting just 12 minutes. The music is composed for flute, clarinet, harp, violin, viola, two cellos and double bass. The double bass has a central role in the piece and the composer groups the instruments around it in different ways throughout the music.

Page 2 – Description

In this activity the children will take different aspects of *Ben Somewhen* as starting points for composing melodies. They will:

1. Compose a simple melody with accompaniment using chance procedures to generate the rhythm and melody
2. Compose a melody using intervals of 3rds and other specific intervals.

Learning Objectives

- To learn how to compose simple rhythms and melodies using random procedures
- To learn about the interval of a 3rd and to use 3rds to compose a melody
- To understand how the same musical material can be used in different ways
- To be able to use visual images to change the character of music

Please listen to *Ben Somewhen* and read the Music Maze guidance before you begin.

Resources Needed

- Photocopies of Resource Sheets 1 and 2
- Music whiteboards or photocopied manuscript paper
- Coins or dice
- Pitched percussion and/or own musical instruments

Page 3 – Activity One: Composing a Rhythm

In this task pairs of children will compose a rhythm using single beat notes (crotchets) and two-beat notes (minims) using coin flips.

Click on the extract from *Ben Somewhen* to hear Howard Skempton’s version of a melody with single beat and two beat notes. Point out that the patterns are always shifting and are not predictable.

Explain that the children will now compose their own rhythm to play, using single and two beat notes. In Activity Two they will compose a melody for their rhythm.

Hand out Resource Sheet One. In groups of three or four, ask the children to flip a coin eight times to determine the length of each note for their rhythm. If it is heads they hold the note for one beat, if it is tails they hold the note for two beats.

Ask the children to fill in top row of the eight-box grid with their one and two beat notes. Some children might be able to notate this, e.g.

2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1
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Give time for the groups to practise clapping their rhythm followed by using their instruments on one pitch.

Page 4 – Activity Two: Composing a Melody

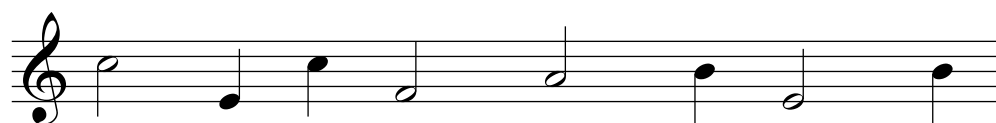
Using 4 or 5 pitches, e.g. C , E , F, B + (A) ask the children to add pitches to their rhythm from Activity One to create a melodic shape to play on their instruments. They can use dice throws, pick notes out of a hat, or find a melody by taking turns to choose notes.

Ask the children to write down the order of the note names in the pitch boxes on Resource Sheet 1, for example:

Rhythm	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1
Pitch	C	E	C	F	A	B	E	B

Encourage the children to count the beats carefully and to learn to play the melody and rhythm together bit by bit, only adding in the next note when they can comfortably play the notes so far. It may sound something like this:

Composed Melody



note:	C	E	C	F	A	B	E	B
beats:	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1

Page 5 - Activity Three: Hocketing

Hocketing means dividing a melody up between two or more players. Ask the pairs to make a new hocketed version of the melody. They need to decide which of them play which notes of their melody. E.g.

Hocketed Melody



Listen to the audio example played by the BCMG musicians.

Ask the pairs to mark on their sheet in different colours, who will play which notes.

Give the pairs time to practice their hocketed melodies so that the transitions between players are smooth and it still feels like one melody. Introduce the sketches of Ben Hartley (see images). Choosing one of the images, the pairs should think about the mood of the picture, and to list the things they can see i.e. characters etc. Using the picture, ask them to create a version of their hocketed melody that reflects the character/mood of their chosen sketch. They should add no extra notes but think about tempo, dynamics, articulations, playing techniques etc. Listen back to the hocketed melodies.

Page 6 – Activity Four: Adding a Chord

Ask each pair to compose a chord using two or three of their notes that sound nice together, e.g. C, E, (F) to accompany their melody. Later on the pairs will join together so that the pair who created melody continue to play their melody but the other pair(s) play



the chord they have chosen. (NB If children are using xylophones etc. suggest they create a roll or just a repeating pulse version to create a sustained version of the chord).

Now ask the pair to play the melody accompanied by their chord. They could either:

1. Use the original melody played solo or together (in unison)
2. Use the hocketed version of the melody
3. Alternatively, you could play the composed melody while the group plays the chord
- 4.

Discuss the balance between the melody and accompaniment. The children could create a second chord from their notes and indicate where the other children should change chords.

Now allow the groups some time to compose a longer piece that incorporates some of these different ideas to create a short piece - with or without the chords, solo, unison or hocketed melody. They must keep the character of their chosen sketch in mind as they do this.

Page 7 – Activity Five: Building a Melody using Intervals

Much of the distinctive sound of Howard Skempton's music comes from the distinctive intervals he uses in his melodies. This individual task explores composing a melodic idea using certain notes based around interval shapes.

With their own instrument ask the children to find as many thirds as they can. See Resource Sheet Two for an introduction to finding 3rds and 4ths.

With the children, listen to these melodies from *Ben Somewhen*. Ask the children to notice the thirds in the melody and the rests between notes.

Ask the children to compose their own melody for their own instrument using a combination of 3rds and rests.

Extension: listen to this melody from *Ben Somewhen* which uses 3rds and 4ths.

Ask the children to compose a new melody which uses 3rds and 4ths or other specific intervals of your choosing.

Introduce the sketches of Ben Hartley (see images). Ask the children to choose one of the images and think about its character then use it to create a version of their melody that reflects that character. They should add no extra notes but think about tempo, dynamics, articulations, playing techniques etc.