

**Composition Unit (7 Days)**  
**Grade Level: Sixth Grade Beginning Band**  
**Teacher: Rachael Radkey**  
**School: Pulaski Community Middle School**

**Unit Objectives:**

- Students will learn strategies for composing through a sequential unit.
- Students will compose an 8 measure piece using strategies taught throughout the unit.
- Students will notate their compositions on Finale PrintMusic.

**Individual Lessons in this Unit**

- How to notate music
- Song endings
- Rhythm
- Play by ear
- Original composition
- Notate compositions on Finale PrintMusic
- Performance

**National Music Standards Addressed:**

4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.

**Materials:**

- Finale PrintMusic
- Composition Project worksheets
- SmartBoard

**Prior Knowledge:** Students have been playing their instruments for several months and can play the pitches A-G concert.

**1: How to notate music.**

**Objectives**

- Students will practice writing space and line notes
- Students will learn and practice writing notes with correct stem direction
- Neat work is essential for others to read handwritten compositions

**Activities**

- Opening activity – ask students if they have ever sounded something out on their instruments. Composers will write down the music they sound out. There are rules, just like in grammar, for writing down music.
- Students will complete the "Composition Assignment #1" worksheet (a.) as we go through a SmartBoard slide (b.). They will draw space notes for the first example and line notes for the second. Have student volunteers demonstrate correct line and space notes at the board.

- The second half of the assignment is to draw half notes and quarters with the correct stem direction. Ask for student volunteers to drag notes to appropriate lines and spaces on the SmartBoard. Remind students to put the stem on the correct side. It's helpful to clearly highlight the 3<sup>rd</sup> line that they may not go above or below.

## 2: Song Endings

### Objectives

- Students will learn strategies to select an appropriate song ending.
- Students will compose a two measure song ending.

### Activities

- Students will begin their composition packet (c.) by playing through four song endings. The group will play through the same six measures and jump to a different ending each time. Students will choose their favorite ending.
  - Ask yourself, "Does this piece sound finished? Do I like the sound of this ending?"
  - Take a poll afterwards to see which endings were the most popular.
- The next exercise requires students to complete a song by adding their own two measure song ending using given pitches and ending on concert B flat.
- Ask for student volunteers to play their endings for the class by having the class play the first six measures and the student playing their ending as a solo. Comment on the creativity and variety of the endings.

## 3: Rhythm

### Objectives

- Students will learn the function of rhythms and variety in a composition. Rhythm makes up an integral part of a piece.
- Students will compose a rhythmic variation of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.
- Students will compose a song using given rhythms.

### Activities

- Play through Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star. Ask students if they thought the piece was particularly interesting. Inform the class that this piece could sound very interesting and original if we varied the rhythm. Play an example for the class, using some rests.
- Challenge the class to come up with their own rhythmic variation without changing the pitches. Encourage students to use rests.
  - It's helpful to put a rhythm bank on the board and remind students how many beats each note receives.
  - Ask students to share their variations with the class.
- The next task asks students to assign pitches to set rhythms. Remind the class to use the required pitches and end on concert B flat.

## 4: Playing by Ear

### Objectives

- Students will sound out familiar melodies.
- Students will learn that playing by ear is beneficial when composing.

### Activities

- Ask students if they have ever sounded out a familiar song – perhaps from the radio or movies. Explain how this skill is possessed by most composers, except they are sounding out original melodies.
- Complete “Ode to Joy” on Composition Packet. Sing through the blank measures as a class and let them figure out the missing notes. Play through the piece when students are finished working and assess whether the group was successful or not.
- Use the remaining time for student work time on “Yankee Doodle.” The first two measures were given, but the remaining six are blank.

## **5: Original Composition**

### **Objective**

- Students will compose an 8 measure piece.

### **Activities**

- Students will use the strategies they have learned to complete an original 8 measure piece. They must follow the guidelines and use a variety of rhythms. Students will be given one class period to hand write and title their compositions. This composition is the rough draft before they use PrintMusic to notate it.

## **6: Notate Compositions on Finale PrintMusic**

### **Objective**

- Students will learn to use Finale PrintMusic to notate their compositions.

### **Activities**

- Students will notate their compositions on Finale PrintMusic.
  - Ask students to print or save to class drive. Please note if they would be comfortable with the teacher sharing the piece.
  - This assignment will be worth 10 points and uses the Composition Rubric (d.).

## **7: Composition Performance**

### **Objective**

- Celebrate students' compositions.

### **Activities**

- The teacher will take some of the top compositions and perform them for the class.
- Encourage students to continue composing and creating melodies on their own. They now have the skills necessary to write their own music.

## **Appendix:**

- a. Composition Assignment #1
- b. SmartBoard slide - aid to lesson 1.
- c. Composition Packet. (I labeled the composition activities by week because I will spend one class period a week on the composition project and the next class period on playing band lesson material.)
- d. Composition Rubric