



**Muse Machine 2023 Summer Institute-Inspired Lesson Plan**

## **Songwriting Using Moment Work**

**Developed by Caleb Vanden Eynden**

**Edwin D. Smith Elementary**

**Dayton, OH**

### **Introduction:**

Elementary and secondary music teachers spend their days developing singers and musicians, but Caleb Vanden Eynden of Smith Elementary creates composers. By using Tectonic Theater Project's Moment Work process learned at Muse Machine's 2023 Summer Institute to introduce each musical and songwriting element, Caleb gives his sixth graders the opportunity to write original songs, one element at a time. Because students begin by composing rhythms, measures, and melodies before adding the given text, children must experiment, combine, and practice various musical elements within their group to create a short, agreed-upon score. Once the score is complete, students choose text from poems they are reading in Language Arts and produce a short song of their own. The freedom given in this creation requires deep understanding of each musical element, tenacious negotiating skills within the group, and an open arena for creativity and experimentation. Your students will love it.

# Muse Machine Lesson Plan – Summer Institute 2023

**Teacher:** Caleb Vanden Eynden, Edwin D. Smith Elementary

**Title:** Songwriting Using Moment Work

**Subject Area & Grade Level:** 6<sup>th</sup> Grade General Music

**Date of Implementation:** Fall 2023

**Inspiration:** Tectonic Theater Project's devising process, Moment Work

## OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

### *Summary:*

Students will create a song from scratch using classroom instruments, a selected poem for text (provided by their ELA teacher), and their previous knowledge of solfege and rhythm. We will start with a full-group session to identify the elements of a song (melody, text, bass line, instruments, performance practice, etc.) then break into small groups to focus on just one element at a time (similar to the process of Moment Work). We will then use several of these elements to create one song.

### *Standards:*

- **6.1CR** Improvise short rhythmic, melodic, or harmonic passages for individual instruments.
- **6.2CR** Compose rhythm patterns and simple melodies in a variety of meters using standard, or iconic, notation.
- **6.3CR** Compose extended pentatonic melodies in treble clef and bass clef in *do* or *la* pentatonic and diatonic scales.

### *Objectives/Outcomes:*

1. Students will compose several individual elements of music in small groups, using the process of Moment Work, to create a song that combines each element.
2. Students can use active listening to help them identify elements of a song in order to write/compose their own piece of music.
3. Students can vary their use of musical elements to create the desired message in their work.

### *Teaching Approach(es):*

Full group lecture/collaboration, small group work, informal performances, and student reflection

### *Assessment Tool(s):*

Teacher observation, formal recording/performance throughout the project, written sheet music of each element

# LESSON PREPARATION

### *Teacher Needs:*

#### Teacher Context & Research

- Read [\*Moment Work: Tectonic Theater Project's Process of Devising Theater\* by Moises Kaufman and Barbara Pitts McAdams](#) (pp. 34-106 in the Kindle edition)

#### Helpful Hints

1. Reach out to the ELA teacher for help selecting a poem that the students have studied.
2. We ended up recording our songs in GarageBand at the end of the project which was a huge success. Students really internalized the work they had done and gained a full appreciation of the songwriting process.
3. If you have a second teacher or a student teacher in the room, that would help a ton! Of course, that is probably unrealistic in most teaching environments, but in a large class it is difficult to make your way around to every group to help.
4. I divided the class into groups of about 7 students. They might have been more productive and more consistently engaged in groups of 4 or 5 instead. This project lasted a long time for my sixth graders, but they loved it! If I did it again, I might try to combine the experimentation portion with actually writing their song to ensure there's enough time for finishing touches.

### *Student Needs:*

#### Prior Knowledge

Knowledge of age-appropriate rhythms (4/4 meter) and solfege (pentatonic), basic music literacy skills, experience with classroom instruments

#### Student Voice

Students will have control over each element/moment they create and how it sounds (within the clear guidelines and parameters set by the teacher).

#### Vocabulary

- basic music literacy vocabulary (solfege, rhythm, instruments, tempo, etc.)
- *active listening*: conscious listening, focusing on one or specific elements at a time
- *melody*: a tune; a combination of pitch and rhythm
- *bass line/ostinato*: continually repeated musical phrase or rhythm
- *harmony*: combination of different pitches, most often accompanying the melody
- *moment*: Tectonic Theater Project's unit of theatrical time, expressed as "I begin... I end"

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### EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES

Students will apply their knowledge to a final product that will be performed for the class and in front of the teacher. This performance should demonstrate the skills learned throughout the project, specifically by showcasing each necessary element.

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

Students can recognize how changes in musical elements can portray and enhance a listening experience, an author’s intent, and an audience’s perception.

Students can apply these techniques when analyzing and appreciating music throughout their lives to better understand and appreciate the creations of others.

### LEARNING PLAN

**Essential Question:** How can Moment Work help students compose music?

#### Resources/Materials:

- [Slide Deck](#)
- Classroom instruments (xylophones, percussion, ukuleles, etc.)
- Blank sheet music
- Pencils
- Chromebooks/headphones (optional)
- Access to [GarageBand](#) (optional)

#### Hook:

Pick 3-4 songs in different styles to listen to as a full group (i.e. classical, pop, folk). As a class identify any/all elements of the song. Include some audio only, others with a video performance.

#### Main Lesson Narrative/Sequence:

This project will span the course of multiple days. Most of the first day will focus on full group exploration of song elements. Then, students will break into small groups and focus on composing one element at a time. After each element, students will perform that part for the class before moving on to the next element. The order of elements does not necessarily matter, but here is a suggestion:

Day 1: Start with full group work – Introduce Moment Work, identify elements of a song, engage in active listening to identify elements of different songs.

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Day 2: Begin small group work – Work in small groups to write/perform a 4-beat ostinato, then later a 4-measure rhythm chunk.

Day 3: Experiment with melodic improvisation on xylophones using a pentatonic scale, starting and ending the improvised melody on “do.”

Day 4: Read through selected poems, then choose 4 lines (or one stanza) from a poem to serve as lyrics/text for the song.

Day 5: Work on matching the text to a rhythm (i.e. one line of text = one measure of rhythm), then begin experimenting with a melody that fits the rhythm/text.

Day 6: Add any additional elements to the song and perform the final product for the class.

\*Note: This step took my classes several days to complete. We spent more time experimenting with different band/orchestra and classroom instruments. It took another few class periods to record everything in GarageBand. Creating the melody is really the foundation of this project and can be expanded upon as much as you’d like.

Other elements could include a bass line, harmony, additional percussive or melodic instruments, etc.

[Documentation of progress from my class](#)

### **Demonstration of Learning:**

After students have pieced together all elements of their song, they will perform in front of the class. Students will also perform elements individually throughout the project and explain their parts as they go. Then, the final performance will be a culmination of each element happening at the same time as a full song.

### **Final Review:**

I will know the students met the objectives of this lesson based on their participation in the creative process and the performance, as well as their success at layering each element into the final song.

Work samples from my class:

- [6th Grade Songs \(score\)](#)
- [I Am the Dragon \(.mp3\)](#)
- [Checker Berry \(.mp3\)](#)
- [One Dollar Bill \(.mp3\)](#)
- [Mother Doesn't Want a Dog \(.mp3\)](#)

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### LESSON REFLECTION

Students will debrief together as a class and discuss what they have learned, how things went, and what they would have done differently. An additional option is to collect individual data using a weekly check-in, Google Form, or exit ticket.

Written examples from my sixth graders:

“The song writing project was one of those ‘trust the process’ projects. At first, I didn't trust it because it did not sound like a song at all. Then we added the xylophone and rhythm and it started to go together. It was fun working together and recording our parts.”

“What I enjoyed about this project is that we had the chance to not only sing a poem but come up with and incorporate our own rhythms using instruments. I did learn and have a better understanding of how the song making progress played out - making the ostinato, and then adding a melody and playing it on instruments. It was a process that I may not have experienced if it was not for this project.”

“Well I have learned that it is fun to make songs and that it is very exciting. However it is very time consuming so now I feel like I can understand artists better now. I liked the recording but it was a little weird to record in front of everyone in my group. I will say that this is a fun project and I would recommend it for next year.”

“It has been a crazy time doing this songwriting project. I learned about many things that go into songwriting like ostinatos, choruses, harmony, melody, and more. I definitely gained appreciation for songwriting because of how hard and tedious it is, which I didn't expect. In the future, I would definitely try to have better cooperation, since that was the hardest part by far. Overall, I learned a lot and enjoyed this project.”

“I really liked how I got to play the kazoo” :)