

13.2 CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: HARMONIC CIRCLE

Suggested time: 10–15 minutes

This activity uses **cyclic harmonies** to provide students a stable platform for vocal improvisation and exploration of melodies, **consonance**, and **dissonance**. It also makes a great warm up activity for use at the start of class time to help students transition from the busy-ness of other classes to the creative space needed for collaboration.

PROCEDURE

1. Assemble the group in a comfortable and relaxed setting. You may wish to have students lie down in a circle with their heads towards the center, or have them close their eyes.
2. Allow the room to quiet and for students to enter a state of focused relaxation. You may wish to guide them through a relaxation sequence, in which major muscle groups are intentionally and systematically tightened and then relaxed. A sample relaxation sequence is listed below.
3. Once the group is relaxed, have students inhale slowly and deeply, breathing from deep in the belly. (Shoulders should not rise up towards the ears; bellies should swell on each inhale.)
4. Have students exhale slowly, making light and comfortable vocal sounds on an “ah” vowel.
5. Take several breaths in and out in this manner, encouraging students to use their full vocal range on the “ah,” including both head and chest voice. (“Head voice” refers to an individual’s upper register, or higher vocal range. “Chest voice” refers to the lower register, commonly used for daily speech.)
6. Begin playing a simple chord progression by improvising one on the piano, an autoharp, or guitar; you may also use one of the chord progressions or recordings indicated below.
7. As the progression repeats, encourage students to begin humming in connection with the progression, on whatever pitches or patterns come to them, but not necessarily the main notes they hear in the chord. This is called **harmonization**.
8. Continue repeating the chord progression. As students gain greater comfort in their harmonizing, ask them to open to an “oo,” then an “oh,” and then an “ah” vowel. Encourage students to extend their range by singing higher or lower.
9. Encourage students to create short patterns as they harmonize, and to listen to the harmonies created around the room. When possible, have them repeat patterns they hear, either exactly, through harmonization, or through transposition (by moving the pattern to another area of the voice).

10. If you are playing the chord progression on an instrument or improvising harmonies along with your students, pick out a pattern you hear from the group and emphasize that line the next time it comes up in the chord progression. If possible, modulate the progression upwards (change keys) and increase the volume.
11. As you continue the chord progression and student improvisation, gradually decrease the volume, bringing students back from an “ah” to an “oh” to an “oo,” and eventually back to a hum.
12. Slow the progression down and bring it to a close.
13. Have students take several deep breaths to relax and re-center their minds. Then discuss:
 - How did you gain confidence as the activity progressed?
 - How were you affected by the musical shifts in harmony of the chord progression?
 - How did the texture of our class’ harmonies shift throughout this activity?
 - Were there particularly successful, exciting, or inspiring moments in the music we created?
 - Did you notice rising action, increasing tension? Climactic moments?
 - How did this exercise make you feel?
 - Were there patterns (melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic) that could be useful later on in our compositional process?

Relaxation sequence:

1. Have students tense, hold for a count of three, and then relax muscle groups in the following order:
 1. Forehead
 2. Cheeks
 3. Mouth and chin
 4. Neck and ears
 5. Shoulders (pulled up to ears)
 6. Shoulders (squeezed together behind the back)
 7. Upper arms
 8. Lower arms
 9. Hands (fists first, then “jazz hands” with fingers fully extended)
 10. Thighs
 11. Calves
 12. Ankles (point and flex toes)
 13. Toes (scrunch and extend toes)
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Sample chord progressions:

2. *C C F C C Am Gsus G / C C F C Am F-G C C* (“Amazing Grace”)
3. *D G D D / D G D D / D D/C# Bm E A E A / D G D D G A Bm / A G A A D* (“We Shall Overcome”)
4. *C F C F C F G G / C F C Am C F G G / C F C F C F G G / F G C Am F G C C* (“Blowin’ in the Wind”)
5. Or use any hymn chord progression without the melody, or any folk song you can remember—they all work as foundations for vocal improvisation.

Recordings that can be substituted and used in this activity:

Instrumental

1. Elgar’s *Enigma Variations* (especially Variation IX, “Nimrod”)
2. Pachelbel’s *Canon in D*
3. Bach’s *Air on a G String*
4. Bach’s *Prelude No. 1 in C Major*

Vocal/Instrumental

- “No Woman, No Cry” by Bob Marley & the Wailers
- “For No One” and “Something” by The Beatles
- “Can’t Take My Eyes Off You” by Frankie Valli or by Lauryn Hill
- “Someone Like You” and “Rolling in the Deep” by Adele
- “Parachute” by Guster



EVALUATION

As students complete this activity, pay attention to students’ level of comfort and degree of harmonic experimentation.

Ask students:

1. Why do you think you increased your vocal intensity when the piano got louder?
2. Do you think you could have been able to do this exercise without your classmates? Why or why not?
3. If you had to do it all over again, what one point in the procedure would you change?

13.3 CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: SUNG SPEECH III

Suggested time: 10–20 minutes

This activity calls students' attention to the naturally musical patterns in every day speech. Have students heighten and amplify the natural highs and lows of the pitches in their vocal inflections to improvise brief melodic snippets as part of their normal interaction and banter at the start of class.

PROCEDURE

1. Using the Multiple Conversations activity in Step 3 as a guide, assemble students into pairs and have them improvise brief series of conversations, intentionally heightening their speech patterns into song.
2. “Freeze” the room occasionally, and ask the students to comment on the volume changes, pitch changes, and use of the voice they hear.
3. When the activity peaks emotionally, choose several groups and ask them to repeat their conversations.

EVALUATION

At the end of this activity, ask the following questions:

- What did you notice about the volume of the conversation as it progressed?
- What did you notice about the concentration or variety of pitches as the conversation progressed? Was the full vocal range used?
- Were there any particularly song-like melodies that came out in these conversations? Can you repeat them?
- How can this activity inform our work in composing music for our opera?

14.1 CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: MOOD AND MODE

Suggested time: 10–20 minutes

This activity explores the concept of musical **mode**, and helps students make decisions about how they want each piece to sound.

❖ PROCEDURE

1. Talk with students about everyday elements that affect their **mood**. How do they feel on a dark, stormy day? On a sunny day? What impact does the color of a room have on their mood? What colors seem the most cheerful or depressing to them?
2. Look at a variety of magazine pictures or advertisements. Describe the mood of each, and discuss how it was established through use of colors, brightness, color contrast, etc.
3. Return to the story selected for the class' opera. What is its main mood? How do the characters feel in their circumstances? Is the plot scary, happy, or adventurous? Are there different moods that come up as the plot unfolds? Create a list of the mood adjectives generated during this discussion.
4. Select a particular scene, aria, or chorus from your opera and review the text. Discuss the main idea of the text and the mood of the character(s) in the scene. Come up with keywords in the text that help determine the mood.
5. Determine whether or not the mood changes through the course of the selection. Is there a surprise in the text, or a shift in emotion?
6. Encourage students to improvise brief melodies or create **chords** or note clusters that embody the mood of the piece as they understand it. Use appropriate music terminology such as **major** and **minor** to describe the musical mode that emerges through this improvisation.

❖ EVALUATION

As students complete this activity, pay attention to student acquisition and use of music vocabulary.