

CREATING AND USING IMAGERY

Ellen Sargen

Word bank written by Andrew Smith

These exercises are designed for students who find it helpful to use imagery to help them make decisions about rhythm, pitch, harmony, texture, dynamics etc.

In these exercises students will create word banks, which students can then use to help them build a strong image for their composition (for example by choosing and combining words from the bank). Of course, imagery doesn't have to be created through words and students could use many things around them for inspiration - myths and stories, paintings and art, environment and landscapes are used by composers all the time to help them make decisions about their music.

Creating wordbanks

You can create word banks in a number of ways. Why not try:

- Listening to one of the pieces of key repertoire and writing down a list of words that describe the characteristics of the piece.
- Listening to one of the pieces of key repertoire and discuss what it could be about. Give the piece a new title based on your discussion, then write down as many words you can think of that relate to this title.

Expand your word banks as far as you can by writing as many associated words you can think of, or write down contrasting words.

Here's an example of a word bank we created from the title 'Alone':

dark scary shadow alone one friend helpless cry sleep empty
quiet cold peaceful heart calm time echo inside frightened shy
awkward old cage blind haunting waiting ice bewildered asleep shiver
hole night creep blue apart crime weep silver stage clock sky

Choosing and combining words

Now your students can combine words to give them some strong imagery for their compositions. Your students could even choose some words (no less than 4, no more than 9) and combining them into sentences (which they could use to create rhythms for their melodies, later).

Applications for word bank imagery

Your students can use this imagery throughout the project to help them make decisions about their melodies, harmonies, textures and structure.

Here's some ideas:

MELODY

- Create sentences from your word banks, then use them to create rhythms for your melodies
- When you start adding pitch to your rhythm to create a melody, you could identify the important words in your sentence and use these words to guide where you should change pitch. Start by playing your whole rhythm on one note, then change pitch on an important word. Continue finding important words and changing these pitches until you have a melody you are happy with.

HARMONY

- When experimenting with harmony, consider which harmonies are most appropriate for your chosen words or sentence. You can ask this question whether you're writing a drone, or chords.
- When writing harmonic progressions (e.g. deciding where to change chord), you could use your sentence to decide where to make these changes. Only make changes on the important words.

STRUCTURE AND FORM

- If you want to create a new contrasting section in your music, why not revisit your word bank and choose new combinations of words or a new sentence to help you get started with a new idea. Choose contrasting words to combine or make into sentences, helping to characterise your new section.