



PRIMARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN

English and music

*Inspired by*

***A Bao a Qu from Mason Bates' Anthology of Fantastic Zoology***

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For:

- Key Stage 2 in England and Wales
- Second Level, P5-P7 in Scotland
- Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2 in Northern Ireland

This is a write up of a workshop given for teachers with musicians from the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra. The following notes could make a series of 2 or 3 lessons or you could pull out ideas to make one lesson.

Background

A Bao A Qu (Bao rhymes with 'now' or 'cow' and Qu is like 'coo' not 'cue') is a piece of orchestral music by American composer Mason Bates.

A Bao A Qu is an imaginary animal that features in Jorge Luis Borge's '*Book of Imaginary Beings*'. It is a double-headed snake that lives in The Tower of Victory in India and slithers up and down the staircase, never quite reaching the top.

Learning outcomes

Learners will use their imagination and understanding of grammar to invent a creature and its characteristics and compose and perform a piece of music that describes the creature.

Learners will also:

- listen to and reflect on a work for orchestra
- perform as an ensemble

## Curriculum checklist (England & Wales)

### English

- increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including fairy stories, myths and legends, and retelling some of these orally
- use the grammatical terminology in English Appendix 2
  - Terminology: noun, adjective, adverb, verb, preposition, tense (past, present)
- using the present perfect form of verbs in contrast to the past tense
- choosing nouns or pronouns
- using conjunctions, adverbs and prepositions to express time and cause
- in narratives, describing settings, characters and atmosphere and integrating dialogue to convey character and advance the action

### Music

- play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes
- listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory

## Lesson 1

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Introduce the music to the class by [watching the performance of A Bao A Qu on the Ten Pieces website](#) and become familiar with the A Bao A Qu myth by [watching Lemn Sissay's instruction on the Ten Pieces website](#).

Ask the learners to:

- think of some **verbs** describing how the A Bao A Qu moves
- think of some **adverbs** for this movement
- think of some **adjectives** to describe what the A Bao A Qu looks like
- make a descriptive sentence that includes all of this.

How does the A Bao A Qu feel when it fails to reach the top of the tower?

### Create a rhythmic and melodic pattern

I took the idea of the creature's name and a verb describing its movement (slither) and from these I composed two rhythmic patterns to chant:

Sli - ther-ing, sli - ther-ing, sli - ther-ing, slow - ly

A Bao A Qu. A Bao A Qu. A Bao A Qu, A Bao A Qu.

Then we played these on instruments. For any pitched instruments we added two pitches – D & E for the ‘slithering’ rhythm and A & G for the A Bao A Qu rhythm. Pitches printed below are a guide, you can improvise the pitches to the rhythm.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. It contains three measures of music with the lyrics 'Sli - ther-ing, sli - ther-ing, sli - ther-ing' and a fourth measure with 'slow - ly'. The bottom staff is also in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. It contains three measures of music with the lyrics 'A Bao A Qu. A Bao A Qu. A Bao A Qu, A Bao A Qu.' and a fourth measure with 'A Bao A Qu.'. The time signature changes to 2/4 for the final measure of both staves.

We then invented a vocal sound: a gasp of despair (or possibly pleasure!). You can replicate this on instruments or keep it vocal or a mix of both.

A short structure to this initial piece was then:

- ‘Slithering’ chant (on voices and/or instruments)
- ‘A Bao A Qu’ chant joins (so both chants are playing)
- After the 4th (or 5th or 6th?) repetition the whole group makes the ‘gasp’ together, once

## Lesson 2

In this lesson we are going to invent our own imaginary animal and compose a piece of music inspired by it. You can get the class to work in small groups of 6-9 people. Each learner should have an instrument – either one they are learning or an instrument from the school’s supply. Do use pitched instruments (xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars, keyboards, relevant apps) as well as unpitched percussion (drums, shakers, tambourines).

- Start by asking each group to invent an animal. To do this, take two animals, cut their names up into syllables and mix them up (you don’t have to use every syllable):

*Por-cu-pine E-le-phant = E-cu-por-le-phant*

- think of a **verb** to describe how our Ecuporlephant moves
- add an **adverb** to this, try different tenses: cautiously crawling; cautiously crawled, cautiously crawls
- think of a **noun**, a place where the Ecuporlephant lives or where it is trying to get to; add an adjective to this if you want
- think of a **preposition** to describe where the A Bao A Qu is in relation to where it lives or is going to
- think of the noise the animal makes - can the group make that noise?
- finally, create a sentence that combines these:

*The animal adverb verb preposition the adjective noun. \*noise\**

*The Ecuporlephant cautiously crawled to the peaceful lake. \*yaaarrghh\**

(or, if you prefer, Cautiously, the Ecuporlephant crawled...etc!)

## Compose using these ideas

- get someone in the group to set a pulse on a drum or woodblock or by clapping.
- everyone chant the name of the animal rhythmically
- everyone chant the adverb and verb rhythmically (using different tenses for the verb)

I got this:

E - cu - por - le - phant! E - cu - por - le - phant!

Cau - tious - ly crawl - ling, cau - tious - ly crawled!

- divide the group into two and see if they can chant these together (it is optional to keep the time-keeping woodblock)
- as a separate task, invent a sound for your noun – it could be quite descriptive, making use of your adjective (mine was *peaceful lake* so I might get something soft and sustained)
- play this noun sound on the instruments.

## Structure a little piece

- Start animal chant, keep repeating
- Add verb chant
- After 4 (5?6?) repetitions, everyone stop and play the noun sound on their instruments

Write down what you did and who did what so you can pick up on this in the next lesson.

# Lesson 3

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In this lesson, we are going to write a melody, add instruments and finish our pieces. First though, you might want to quickly revise the little piece you ended up with after the previous lesson.

## Writing a melody

We are going to use a method called a **cryptogram**. Cryptograms have been used by many composers in the past including Bach and Shostakovich. For a cryptogram, we need to work out which letters of our animal's name correspond to musical notes:

**E C U P O R L E P H A N T = E C E A**

**ECEA** will make quite a good melody. However, some names may give you less than this in which case you can adapt our 'code' like this:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
H	I	J	K	L	M	N

So that H=A; I=B etc.

With this extended code, I now get this

**E C U P O R L E P H A N T      =      E C E E A A G**

Get the group to practice singing and playing this melody. You can invent a rhythm if you like or you can keep it simple and hold each note for two beats (sometimes, the last note will need to be held for four beats to keep the melody in time).

### Putting the ideas together

The group now needs to divide into three.

The 1<sup>st</sup> part will play the 'animal' rhythm on instruments or by chanting. If you are using pitched instruments introduce two pitches (D & E or two of your own choosing)

The 2<sup>nd</sup> part will play the 'verb' rhythm on instruments or by chanting. If you are using pitched instruments introduce two new pitches (G & A or two of your own choosing – get the group to decide which pitches sound best).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> part will play the melody on top of this.

Let the group practice this, always adding one part at a time.

### Composing our piece

- one person (or the group) speak the sentence out loud  
*“The Ecuporlephant cautiously crawled to the peaceful lake”*
- the group make the animal's noise vocally or on instruments:  
*\*yaaarrghh\**
- the 1<sup>st</sup> part (animal chant/rhythm) starts
- add in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part
- add in the melody (the group can decide the order of these and how many repetitions you make)
- everyone stops and plays the 'noun' sound
- optional ending – everyone adds the animal's sound (*\*yaaarrghh\**)

Practice a few times then perform your piece to the class or the rest of the school.

## Explore

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Explore the [other resources based on Mason Bates' A Bao A Qu](#) on the Ten Pieces website