

## Anthology of Fantastic Zoology – Sprite; A Bao A Qu By Mason Bates

### PRIMARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN

For:

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

*Written by Rachel Leach*

#### *Background*

**The composer: Mason BATES (born 1977)**

- American composer
- Is becoming famous for mixing different styles of music together, for example – DJ-ing and orchestral music, jazz mixed with techno

**The music: ‘A Bao A Qu’ and ‘Sprite’ from ‘Anthology of Fantastic Zoology’**

- Written in 2015
- Inspired by Jorge Luis Borges’s ‘Book of Imaginary Beings’ (1957)
- ‘A Bao A Qu’ is an imaginary breed of snake that slithers up and down the staircase of a famous tower in India
- A ‘sprite’ is a fairy-like creature or elf that flies and flickers across water. This one jumps across the orchestra too!

*Pronunciation:*

A Bao a Qu (referring to Mason Bates’ piece)

**aa BOW aa KOO**

-aa as in father

-ow as in now

-k as in king

-suggestion, this reflects the original Spanish pronunciation

## *Learning outcomes*

Learners will

- Create art-work, poetry and music inspired by a piece of orchestral music
- Listen and reflect on a work for orchestra
- perform as an ensemble

## *Curriculum checklist*

- play and perform in ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music

## *Glossary of music terms used*

<b>Motif</b>	a very short musical 'idea' – often just a small group of notes or a rhythm.
<b>Palindrome</b>	something that is the same forwards as it is backwards
<b>Pitched percussion</b>	percussion instruments that can play different pitches ('notes') – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars etc.
<b>Retrograde</b>	a 'posh' word for backwards, often used in music
<b>Unpitched percussion</b>	percussion instruments that make sounds that don't have a specific pitch (or 'note') – drums, shakers, woodblocks, tambourine etc.

## *Resources required*

- Art materials such as big paper and pens
- Musical instruments of any (every!) kind

*This scheme of work is plotted out over six lessons. Feel free to adapt it to suit your children and the resources you have available.*

## **The six lessons at a glance**

### **Lesson 1:**

- Activities: Listen to a piece of music and create art-work to describe it  
Watch the film and discuss
- Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians

### **Lesson 2:**

- Activities: Manipulate words to create new words  
Invent and draw animals
- Curriculum link: N/A – this is not a music session but could work for art/literacy

### **Lesson 3:**

- Activities: Invent a poem based on a stimulus
- Curriculum link: N/A – this is not a music session but could work for literacy

### **Lesson 4:**

- Activities: Create musical motifs for an imaginary animal  
Select appropriate instruments  
Structure ideas into a piece
- Curriculum link: 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 using the interrelated dimensions of music

### **Lesson 5:**

Activities: Create a musical palindrome

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
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 using the interrelated dimensions of music

## **Lesson 6:**

Activities: Structure pieces into a concert  
Perform in front of an audience

Curriculum link: 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 using the interrelated dimensions of music

# **LESSON 1**

## Watching and listening

### 1. **Prepare your class**

Explain to your class that you are going to begin a 6-week music project focusing on fantastic music by a living American composer called Mason Bates but at this stage, don't tell them anything else!

### 2. **Listen**

[Listen to a recording of 'A Bao A Qu'](#) without images and ask your children to close their eyes as they listen. Afterwards, ask them 'what was that music describing?'

After taking a few of their suggestions, tell them that it described an imaginary animal.

### 3. **Give out paper, pencils and coloured pens.** As you listen again, ask your children to draw the animal they think is being portrayed by the music. Remind them that it is an imaginary animal so they are free to invent something new however, the 'A Bao A Qu' is based on a real animal.... Can they guess which one?

### 4. **Listen once again** and this time challenge your children to finish their picture and give their animal a name. They should write this name on their picture along with what the animal is doing -

i.e. 'the cat-snake eats a strawberry'

### 5. **Have a look at the artwork** and encourage a few volunteers to come forward and share their pictures and ideas with the class

*If you have time, you might like to repeat this activity with the ['Sprite' recording](#). The 'Sprite' is like a small fairy flying across the orchestra*

### 6. **FINALLY** – end your lesson by watching the [Mason Bates Ten Pieces film](#) which reveals what the animal is and its actions. Afterwards have a quick class discussion about what you have just seen. Ask the following questions –

- Did you like the film?
- Did anyone guess that the animal is a kind of snake slithering up and down a tower?

## LESSON 2

## Imaginary animals

*For this task you will need some art materials – big paper, coloured pens or crayons, or perhaps paint!*

1. **Prepare your class.** Give out paper and art materials to everyone and make sure you have lots of space to work in.
2. **Remind** them about Bates' piece and the A Bao A Qu – a snake-like creature who climbs up and down a tower. You can either [watch the video clip of the full performance](#) of the piece or listen to the [audio by downloading the mp3](#). This animal was invented by an Argentine writer called Jorge Luis Borges. He invented 120 animals and wrote all about them in his 'Book of Imaginary Beings'.

Today is all about inventing imaginary animals.

3. **Demonstrate the following method to your class –**
  - Ask them to think of a real animal. Take the first suggestion and write it on the board  
*E.g.: 'Tarantula'*
  - Ask them for a second, contrasting animal, write this on the board too  
*E.g.: 'Elephant'*
  - Divide these words up so that you can see the syllables –  
*TU-RAN-TU-LA EL-E-PHANT*
  - Ask your children to choose syllables from both words and put them together to make a new word  
*E.g.: 'TU-LA-PHANT'*
  - You have created a new animal - a cross between a tarantula and an elephant. Ask a volunteer to come forward and draw this amazing creature on the board and have a quick chat about what the tulaphant does and eats, where does she live etc.?
4. **Challenge** your children to make their own imaginary animals using the same method and then to draw them. This can be done individually or in groups of 3 (you will need to split into groups of 3 later in the project)

*A fun way to do this with children new to syllables is to write the words very large on a sheet of A4 with the letters spaced out. Then, cut the paper where the syllables change so that you have each*

*syllable on a different piece. The child can then physically arrange the syllables and try out lots of different options*

5. **FINALLY** – finish the session with an exploration of the new animals your children have invented. Perhaps place their artwork in the middle of the room and have everyone walk around and look at it as if in a gallery.

## LESSON 3

### Animal poems

1. **Prepare your class** – children should again work either individually or in groups of three for this activity.
2. **Remind** your class about the work they did on imaginary animals last lesson and give out their artwork and more paper and pens
3. **Explain that you would like to find out all about their imaginary animals.**  
Ask them to write down the following –
  - Three colours
  - Three things the animals does\*
  - Three sounds the animal makes\*
  - Three emotions the animal feels
  - Three things in the animal's world\* (i.e. his home, food, view)
  - Three other characteristics

\*These could be inspired by the 'real' animals used to make up the imaginary one -  
I.e. a tarantula creeps, an elephant 'trumpets'

*You don't have to do all of these and you could adapt them to fit with other areas you are studying. I.e. for a more literacy based task, ask for 3 nouns, 3 adjectives etc. You could also ask for words that rhyme*

4. **Challenge your children** to fashion these words into a three-line poem about their animal. To do this they must discard some of their words.

*You might like to give them a template for this such as:*

***The (animal) (verb) like a (noun)***  
***S/he is (colour)/has (emotion)***  
***(Adverb), the (animal) (sounds)***  
***The (animal) is (adjective)***

*You could ask for a particular poetry structure such as haiku, or technique such as alliteration, acrostic. You can make this task fit with whatever you are studying in literacy*



5. **If time permits**, ask your children to add their poem to their artwork in a clever way – i.e. can they make the words swirl around their picture or hide them within?
  
6. **FINALLY** – have a poetry recital. Ask volunteers to come forward and share their poetry with the class for feedback and discussion

## LESSON 4

### The three ideas - musical animal

For this lesson, you will need instruments – anything will do, **pitched, unpitched**, orchestra or even homemade! And your children should be split into groups of 3. If they haven't been in groups so far, ask them to pool the animals they have created and choose their favourite to work with from now onwards

1. **Warm-up.** Clear your classroom and sit the children in a circle on the floor. Begin with a fun focusing warm up.

If you have listened to Bates' other piece 'Sprite', you can quickly recreate it by passing a clap around the circle, then a short burst of claps and then other ideas suggested by your children - just as Bates passes musical ideas across the orchestra.

2. **Explain** that you are going to turn the imaginary animals into music.
3. **Demonstrate** the following method to the class using your own invented animal – e.g. the tulaphant from earlier.
  - i. Choose three things that the tulaphant does -
    1. *He blasts a trumpety sound*
    2. *He creeps*
    3. *He shakes his head*
  - ii. Invent a short musical sound (**motif**) for each of these things (choose three children to help you, one on each instrument/ sound)  
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    1. *A blast from a real trumpet*
    2. *Very soft footsteps on a drum*
    3. *A loud shake on a tambourine*
  - iii. Put these short sounds together to make a short piece that describes your animal, thinking carefully about the order

Mason Bates' piece features just three ideas too – a waltz rhythm (is the A Bao A Qu dancing?), upward sounds (The A Bao A Qu is climbing), a shaking sound (The A Bao A Qu sheds its skin)

4. **Split your class into groups of 3.** Ask them to create a short piece of music using this method and focusing on just one animal. Each child in the group plays one instrument and one **motif**

5. **FINALLY – hear your groups one by one.** To save time and energy, simply give the groups an order which circles around the room and ask them to play in turn without leaving a gap for applause. Groups should simply nod to each other when they are done. This will get through them quicker, give you a rest from having to think up feedback and keep the focus of the children as they wait their turn.

## LESSON 5

### Musical palindromes

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1. **Warm-up** – begin in a large circle with a quick focusing activity and reminder of what happened during the last session.
2. **Split** back into groups and get the instruments out. Allow the children to have a few minutes remembering their piece so far. Give them a short amount of time to do this to avoid too much confusion
3. **Listen to the recording of Bates' piece again, or watch the film.** Remind your children that his piece is a **palindrome** and what one is (i.e. the same forwards as backwards). **Ask your composing groups to** transform their musical animals into a palindrome too. To do this they must make sure the order of events is clear (maybe they could write this down), where the middle point is, and then figure out how to perform the ideas in reverse order

The musical term for 'going backwards' is **retrograde**

*There are several ways of going backwards in music. You can faithfully play everything backwards - rhythms, melodies and rests all therefore in a different order (as in Bates' piece). Or, much easier, you can just run the order of events backwards but leave the content of each event the same (so rhythms and melodies remain the same, it is just the order that they appear that is different)*

4. **When this is achieved** (don't worry if it takes the rest of the session to do this – it is a tricky task!), ask each group to invent a short motif, perhaps played by the full group, for the middle of their palindrome that describes what the animal is doing before s/he turns backwards. (In Mason's piece there is a long slithering sound as the A Bao A Qu sheds his skin). Your children may choose to select an idea from their poems or drawings that they haven't yet explored.
5. **FINALLY – again, finish the session** with a performance from all the groups and allow the rest of the class to give feedback, especially on the palindrome shapes. Also, begin to discuss the order of these pieces paying particular attention to the first one (who has a good beginning?) and the end (who has the best ending?)

## LESSON 6

### Create a musical zoo!

*This session is all about making a performance out of your pieces, art-work and poems. You may like to work in a large space for this such as the hall and do remember invite an audience!*

1. **Prepare your class.** Tell them that you are going to create a musical zoo from their pieces. It will feature their poetry, artwork and music
2. **Split back into groups** and give each team a short amount of time to remember and practice their piece from last lesson. They should also find a way of incorporating their poem – should this be read by one person or shared amongst the team? Should it come before, after or during the music?
3. **Hear all the pieces one by one** and discuss the order. Appoint team members to take charge of signaling the end of their piece to the following team (i.e. by pointing or nodding). Also spend some time organizing the children into a shape that is audience friendly. This is often a large semi-circle, but you might want to dot the groups around the space and have the audience wander amongst them like in a real zoo
4. **Think about the art-work.** Where should this go? Should it be held up before each musical piece as the name is announced, placed on the floor in front of your orchestra or pinned onto the wall behind them?
5. **FINALLY - end this project** with a performance of your musical zoo of imaginary creatures to an invited audience

# TAKING IT FURTHER

## Cross-curricular activities

- **ART:** Draw re-imaginings of your imaginary animals and/or design a programme for your final performance
- **MUSIC:** listen to the other sections of Bates' piece – there are 11 movements/animals in total. Or listen to some other musical animals – Malcolm Arnold and Camille Saint-Saëns both wrote 'Carnival of the Animals' pieces describing (mostly) real animals
- **RESEARCH:** Jorge Luis Borges's book features 250 creatures for you to draw, write poems about and make into music
- **SCHOOL JOURNEY:** visit some real animals and be even more inspired!

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