

Firebird Magic - Teaching Guide

Introduction

This sensory story aims to support pupils with complex needs, including those with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD), to access and respond to two pieces from the BBC Ten Pieces canon: Igor Stravinsky's [Firebird Suite \(Finale\)](#) and [Judith Weir's Magic](#), a movement from her piece *Storm*. It is designed to be flexible and responsive to individual pupil profiles and the resources available in your school.

About the Music and Story

The Story

The story takes place on the night of a full moon. We journey with the Firebird to a magical island and make music inspired by the sounds of the coastline, the two pieces of repertoire, and our fellow musicians. It is a story about the importance of connection: to ourselves, nature and each other. It is experienced primarily through the senses, supported by simple language.

The Music

The story brings together two pieces that are steeped in magic. Stravinsky's Firebird Suite is one example of many traditional Russian folk tales about magical Firebirds that catalyse change and bring good fortune to human protagonists. Storm - Magic is inspired by *The Tempest*, one of Shakespeare's final plays, full of magical creatures and ideas of change and growth.



The two pieces have contrasting styles and feels, but both take us away from our everyday worlds and evoke mystery and majesty in equal measure. Building on this, the use of a sensory story aims to provide a multi-sensory context to support pupils to go deeper into the emotional world that the composers sought to create.

There are lots of additional resources available on the BBC Ten Pieces website:

[BBC Ten Pieces - *The Firebird*](#)

[BBC Ten Pieces - *Magic from Storm*](#)

The Resource

The resource consists of

- A PowerPoint presentation
- This teaching guide

The **PowerPoint** can be put on the classroom whiteboard. It contains title and ending slides plus 7 story slides, each of which has an accompanying musical excerpt and suggested sensory activities, including music-making.

This **teaching guide** contains

- How to use the resources and structure lessons
- An equipment list
- An outline of each slide and accompanying activity
- Details of each sensory activity
- How the Cosmo switches can be used for each activity
- Ideas for assessment/measuring progress using Sounds of Intent and the Engagement Model.

How to structure a lesson

There are two suggested ways that a lesson based on this story could be structured:

1. Story // Activities // Story

In this method, the teacher tells the story at the beginning of the lesson, using some or all of the 'short activities' from each of the slides. They then choose one or two of the longer activities (e.g. making an ocean drum, creating an ensemble) that would make up the main part of the lesson. They could finish the lesson by repeating part or all of the story. The benefit of this method is that there is a clearer narrative arc, and pupils can stay in the magical story space before moving out of it to undertake more involved activities.

2. One big story

In this method the story is told only once. The teacher can choose some of the longer activities - particularly the music-based ones - to have as part of the storytelling.

The story can be repeated for several lessons, allowing pupils to become familiar with the stories and activities and develop their responses over time.

Sinking into the Music

The main point of the sensory story is the music itself. Don't be afraid to let the music play a bit before introducing other stimuli, or to notice when additional stimuli would likely to distract from, rather than enhance, an individual's experience of the music. Model active listening, take it slow, and allow space for the magic to emerge!

Resource List

The below table details which part of the story each resource is for. All of the resources are suggested rather than mandatory and have been chosen to be as low-cost/do-it-yourself as possible. You can, of course, add your own ideas!

Music-making resources

All of these are suggestions - use whatever is accessible for your pupils.

- Cosmo switches
- Percussion - for example: frame drums, bar chimes, cabasas, thunder drum, bells, tone chimes, percussion frog.
- Open tuned ukuleles and guitars
- iPads with the Thumbjam app
- Handheld rocks (for banging together)
- Microphone with effects

Other resources

- Feathers (ideally orange or red)
- Giant parachute
- To create an ocean world feel: Seaweed, ocean essential oils, seashells, sand or pebbles, tray of (salty) water
- Torch/lamp
- Scarves
- Transparent materials (e.g. silk scarves)
- Blankets or heavy material for wrapping participants in
- A large red 'Firebird' cape

Story & Sensory Activity Outline

Slide	Story Text	Music	Short Activity	Equipment	Long Activity - See below for equipment	Activity with Cosmo
1	<i>Title Slide</i>					
2	<i>As the day slips away and the moon begins to rise</i>	Soundscape based on the Firebird	Lower the lights in the room. Bring focus to the music.	Closed blinds/dimmed lighting	Create soundscapes using long, resonant sounds, alongside the backing track	Improvise: Use an atmospheric synth sound on the Cosmo dots alongside backing track
3	<i>The flame-red Firebird takes flight over the sea</i>	First half of BBC Firebird performance	Enter the Firebird: Pupils explore the texture of feathers e.g. by brushing the feathers on pupils' cheeks. - Use giant parachute over pupils, in time with the music	- Feathers (ideally orange or red) - Giant parachute	Make a Firebird or Firebird headdress	

4	<p><i>She lands on an enchanted island beach with lapping waves.</i></p> <p><i>She explores the sounds around her, using water, rocks and wood to create sounds</i></p>	<p>Soundscape of lapping waves</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience the sea: smell/taste seaweed, sea breeze, shells, hands and feet in sandy water - Explore sounds with rocks: tap them together, drop pebbles onto an ocean drum or tray, or sand into water - Explore sounds with water: slapping, gurgling, splashing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seaweed, essential oils, seashells, sand or pebbles, tray of (salty) water - Instruments: percussion, iPads, etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make an ocean drum - Spend time moving from exploring sounds to organising sounds into music: develop pulse, create rhythms, explore different percussion instruments, build patterns. 	<p>Improvise: Use a variety of instrument sounds in an ensemble context with other instruments</p>
5	<p><i>From along the beach, a musical response!</i></p> <p><i>Children appear from along the beach, joining the music</i></p>	<p>First half of Storm - Magic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use adult-pupil touch to reinforce the pulse and rhythms within the music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scarves, tactile objects e.g. seashells 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As above, but playing along with the backing track 	<p>Improvisation: Solo over backing track</p>
6	<p><i>The moon shines through the Firebirds feathers. The children begin to sing.</i></p>	<p>Second half of Storm - Magic: 'Moonshine'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use a lamp or torch to simulate the moonlight through feathers and different materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Torch/lamp - Feathers, transparent materials (e.g. silk scarves) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use a microphone with effects to support singing/vocalisations along to the music 	<p>Improvisation: Solo over backing track</p>
7	<p><i>The Firebird embraces her new friends and sheds a happy goodbye tear</i></p>	<p>Soundscape based on the Firebird</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use blankets/thick materials to simulate a warm embrace - Use appropriate, responsive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blankets or heavy material 		<p>Improvise: Use an atmospheric synth sound on</p>

			touch to offer pupils a warm embrace - Use a pipette to drop a tear onto pupils' face			the Cosmooids alongside backing track
8	<i>The firebird stretches her wing and takes flight. Energised by music and connection, ready once again to enchant the world.</i>	Complete BBC Firebird performance	Watch the live performance on the screen	- Encourage movement along to the music	- Use scarves or light material to reinforce the rhythms within the music	
9	<i>End Slide</i>					

Details of Activities

The 'short' activities for each part of the story are self-explanatory. Details of each 'long' activity are below.

Slide 2 - Create soundscapes

The backing track provides a rich basis for open improvisation. There is a short (50 second) version in the PowerPoint, or a [longer \(3 min 20s\) version available here](#). Pupils can explore any instrument they like - Cosmo switches (see below), percussion, open tuned guitars, tone chimes, percussion, iPads. As an extension activity, the teacher can practice 'start and stop' with the various instruments, create a graphic score, and/or invite pupils to take solos.

Slide 3 - Create a Firebird headdress

There are several online resources to support making a Firebird headdress with your pupils.

1. [A simple Firebird headdress made from paper](#) - New York Historical Museum website

2. [An elaborate bird headgear](#) - Craft the Best YouTube channel
3. [A carnival style rainbow bird headdress](#) - Carnival Arts website

The finished headdress can be used by teaching staff to take on the role of the Firebird and interact with pupils throughout the story, or pupils can wear it themselves when taking solos or being the conductor within the music. It can even be augmented with a big orange/red cape to create a full Firebird costume!

Slide 4 - Make an Ocean Drum

A great 'how-to' video is available from [Berkshire Music Trust YouTube channel](#). Students can paint an ocean scene on the top.

Slide 5 & 6 - Make music with found sounds and instruments

In 'Storm - Magic', one of the instruments is two rocks being hit against each other. The 'short' activity in this slide invites pupils to explore the sounds that can be made by hitting/scraping rocks together, and the sound and feel of pebbles or sand being dropped into water.

The longer activity builds on this, exploring the idea of arranging the sounds into a piece. This can be done through conducting (as in Slide 2) with teachers or pupils starting and stopping various instruments. Alternatively, a graphic score can be created, creating a structure for different pupils to play at different times. A mixture of 'found object' sounds, traditional instruments and technology, including the Cosmo switches, can be used.

When pupils are ready, the backing track from Slide 6 can be used as a backing to pupils' music-making.

Note: You can choose to use the 'lapping waves' backing track for slide 5 or not. It may be useful not to have a backing track to support an understanding of the cause and effect of their own sound making.

Slide 7 - Use a microphone with effects to support singing/vocalisations

Using a microphone is a great way to encourage vocalisations. Any microphone will do, including the one-piece karaoke style ones that don't need to be plugged in, as well as traditional microphones with a speaker (and ideally an echo effect). Teaching staff can use the microphone to explore cause and effect (for example by tapping or scraping the microphone as well as vocalising into it), to sing pupils' names, and to encourage vocalisation over live accompaniment or one of the backing tracks within the story.

Slide 8 - Use touch to support the final performance.

The culmination of the piece is to listen to the full performance of the Firebird's Finale, a piece that represents the journey of the story. It may be that this, along with the accompanying performance video is enough sensory input for pupils. However, teaching staff could experiment with using scarves or other light materials to reinforce certain musical elements. For example, staff could move a scarf across the skin of a pupil (for example their upper arm) to the rhythm of the main melody. The movement could start lightly to represent the quiet nature of the music, then become increasingly firm as the music gets louder.

Using the Cosmo Switches as part of the Sensory Story

[Cosmo Switches](#) can be used as an instrument within the sensory story. The *Improvisation* activity allows the switches to be played like a piano, guitar, xylophone or flute. Each Cosmo 'dot' is assigned a different pitch.

The *Music Connect* activity allows the switches to be connected to GarageBand or Thumbjam iPad apps, offering many more instrument options. We recommend experimenting with long, resonant sounds (such as atmospheric synthesisers, cello sounds) for pupils who press the Cosmo dots only a few times, and shorter, more impactful sounds for those that like to play a lot.

The switches can be used in this way by pupils to improvise over the audio tracks in slides 2,5,6,7 and 8. A single pupil can have all the switches, or switches can be shared within a group of pupils



Ideas for assessment/measuring progress using Sounds of Intent and the Engagement Model

By repeating the story over several weeks, it is possible to identify areas of increased engagement and musicality within individual pupils. There are two suggested frameworks for this:

Sounds of Intent

The [Sounds of Intent Framework](#) has been designed specifically for pupils with complex needs, and offers a 'map' of musical engagement across three 'domains' of musical learning: playing music (the 'proactive' domain), reacting to music, and interacting with others through music. It defines six levels of musicality and offers different ways of assessing where pupils sit within the map and how they can progress.

For example, over 6 weeks of the sensory story being told once a week, pupils with complex needs may develop their ability to:

- Show a preference to play some instruments over others
- Make simple patterns in sound: Playing along to the pulse of the Firebird or creating repeated vocalisations that mimic the voices in Storm - Magic
- Play instruments in dialogue with others: taking turns to play; playing at the same time with a sensitivity to other instrumentalists.
- Demonstrate anticipation of different musical moments within the repertoire

If desired, teaching staff can then identify how many times each of these things happen in a lesson, or in how many different contexts they happen within a lesson, demonstrating progress over time. See the [Sound of Intent website](#) for more details.

The Engagement Model

The Engagement Model is a statutory assessment tool for pupils working below subject-specific level in England. It is based on five areas of engagement: exploration, realisation, anticipation, persistence and initiation. Teachers can use the sensory story to identify of progress within the Engagement Model. This table shows some examples for when a pupil is taking part in the music-making elements of the story:

Engagement Model Area	What to look for
Exploration	<p>The pupil builds on their initial reaction to their playing to explore further</p> <p>The pupil responds to different sounds in different ways, e.g. by playing some fast and some slow, or playing some sounds more than others</p>
Realisation	<p>The pupil understands the effect that their movements are having on creating or changing sound</p> <p>The pupil shows an awareness of the different preset sounds in the instrument, and/or displays preferences between sounds</p>
Anticipation	<p>The pupil shows excitement when the instrument is presented and/or a backing track begins to play, demonstrating an anticipation of the music or their participation in it.</p> <p>The pupil responds to visual prompts to start/stop, play slowly/quietly</p> <p>The pupil engages in turn taking or 'call and response' with an adult</p>
Persistence	<p>The pupil plays along to a backing track or live-accompaniment over a sustained period</p> <p>The pupil sustains engagement for longer periods over time</p> <p>The pupil uses movements that require determination and sustained effort</p>
Initiation	<p>The pupil attempts to control other aspects of the instrument, e.g. choosing a sound on Garageband</p> <p>The pupil plays the instrument without direction or prompts</p> <p>The pupil begins to play more musically, e.g. by playing to a regular pulse.</p>