



## MONTGOMERY VARIATIONS BY MARGARET BONDS

PRIMARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN by Andrea Price

[WATCH THE FILM](#) | [LISTEN TO THE AUDIO](#)

For:

- National Curriculum in **ENGLAND** (KS2)
- Curriculum for **WALES**: Expressive Arts (Progression Step 3)
- **SCOTLAND** Curriculum for Excellence (Second Level)
- **NORTHERN IRELAND** Primary Curriculum (KS2)

### *Background*

**The composer:** MARGARET BONDS

- Margaret Bonds was encouraged to study music from a young age. Her mother was a musician, and her father was a physician and political activist.
- One of her teachers was the composer [Florence Price](#), who later became a good friend of Margaret Bonds.
- In 1933, at just 20 years old, she became the first Black soloist to perform with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.
- Margaret lived in the USA through a time of activism for social justice. As well as her music, she is remembered today for her commitment to supporting the careers of Black artists.
- Due to restrictions placed on women of colour in copyrighting and recording work, most of her music was thought to be lost. Thankfully, in 2013, several boxes of manuscripts were recovered.

**The music:** MONTGOMERY VARIATIONS

- 'March' and 'Dawn' are two movements which form parts of a larger piece of music, *Montgomery Variations*, which was written in 1964. The piece has seven movements in total and tells a story of struggle, strength in a community and a fight for equality in society.
- It is understood that Margaret Bonds began writing the piece after a visit to Montgomery, Alabama in 1963. This was where Rosa

Parks' actions sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott and remains one of the most well-remembered events in the civil rights history.

- As part of the boycott, members of the Black community walked to work rather than take the buses. The mass movement on foot is captured in the movement 'March'.
- The movement 'Dawn' refers to several of the southern States in America, including Alabama, realising that changes in society are coming.

### *Learning outcomes*

#### *Learners will:*

- Engage with a piece of orchestral music through listening, watching, moving, and discussing
- Create their own pieces of music using voices and instruments
- Perform as an [ensemble](#)
- Explore musical language and engage with Western musical notation

#### *Resources required:*

- A suitable space for movement; either in a classroom or a larger space
- [Tuned and Untuned classroom percussion instruments](#)

### *Curriculum checklist*

#### **National Curriculum in ENGLAND (KS2)**

- 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
- Appreciate and understand high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions
- Use and understand staff and other musical notations.

#### **SCOTLAND Curriculum for Excellence (Second Level)**

- Recognise a range of musical styles and identify some of the main instruments in the genre
- Use voice, instruments and technology to create music, experimenting with timbre.
- Express and communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings through musical activities.
- Perform on instruments, individually or as part of a group, to communicate the mood and character of a piece of music
- Explain, with supporting reasons, what works well and what could be improved in their own and others' work, using appropriate musical vocabulary.

### Curriculum for WALES: Expressive Arts (Progression Step 3)

- I can explore how creative work can represent, document, share and celebrate personal, social and cultural identities.
- I can explore and describe how artists and creative work communicate mood, feelings and ideas and the impact they have on an audience.
- I can give and consider constructive feedback about my own creative work and that of others, reflecting on it and making improvements where necessary.

### NORTHERN IRELAND Primary Curriculum (KS2)

- Sing and perform with simple instruments from memory, by ear or from notation to develop vocal and instrumental skills.
- Work creatively with sound by creating musical stories, pictures, patterns, conversations, accompaniments and by investigating ways of preserving the music they have created

#### *The lessons at a glance*

This scheme of work is plotted out over four lessons. You may wish to adapt it to suit your children and the time/resources you have available.

[For guidance on notation, please see here.](#)

#### LESSON 1:

Activities:           Active listening and discussion activities  
                              Music and movement activities

Learning  
intention:           Explore the music through listening and movement  
                              Understand and feel the difference between [3/4 and 4/4 time](#)  
                              Gain familiarity with woodwind instruments

#### LESSON 2:

Activities:           Improvise and compose a song for protest

Learning  
intention:           Learn the [melody](#) of the 'March' and use it as the starting point for your own protest song.  
                              Experiment with the [pentatonic scale](#) using voices and/or tuned classroom percussion

#### LESSON 3:

Activities:           Create an ensemble piece inspired by 'Dawn'

Learning intention: Develop your ability to perform as part of a group  
Explore [texture](#) by combining layers together

**LESSON 4:**

Activities: Musical stories – looking back and moving forwards

Learning intention: Active listening and discussion activities  
Gain deeper insight into the music and the story

# LESSON 1

Watching, listening, and moving!

## Learning intention

- Explore the music through listening and movement
- Gain familiarity with woodwind instruments
- Understand and feel the difference between 3/4 and 4/4 time signatures

### 1. Prepare your class

Explain to the class that you are going to begin a music project focusing on an important piece of music by Margaret Bonds, one of the first Black composers and performers to gain recognition in the United States. The piece is called *Montgomery Variations*, and we are going to listen to two variations: 'March' and 'Dawn'. Let's find out what makes this music so important.

2. [Watch the film](#) and have a discussion about it. This could tie in effectively with Black History Month or a range of PSHE / PSE topics about law, rights, and responsibilities.
3. [Watch the full orchestral performance](#) and talk about the instruments you have seen. Try to pick out the woodwind instruments. They are very important in this music, as they often have the melody. Look out for the bassoon and the cor anglais\* in the 'March', then the flute, oboe, and clarinet in 'Dawn'. How can we tell these instruments apart?

*\*the cor anglais (pronounced kaw-RONG-glai, or kaw-RAANG-glai) is like an oboe, but larger and slightly lower-pitched.*

### 4. Exploring movement activity – understanding 3/4 and 4/4 time signatures

This activity can be done in a classroom with limited space, or in a larger space such as the school hall. Try out some of the suggested movements along to the music. You can tailor the activity to the needs of your class and to the available space. If you have time, try exploring both 'March' and 'Dawn', either in the same session or in different sessions. [Full instructions for suggested movements can be found below.](#)

5. **Reflect on the movement activity** by [listening to a short clip from each variation](#) and discussing whether the music is in 3/4 time or 4/4 time. You could turn this into a quiz!
6. **Additional plenary – recapping woodwind instruments**  
Ask each child to choose one woodwind instrument (if time / resources allow, they could write its name or even draw a picture of it). [Listen to the music again.](#) They

should hold up their instrument (or raise their hand, or stand up) when their chosen instrument can be seen / heard.

Suggested movements to make during 'March' (4/4 time):

### Moving with your feet:

March in time to the music. March with heavy feet. Aim to feel the pressure of the ground through your heels. Whilst marching, count "1, 2, 3, 4" on each [beat](#). Try to make the heaviest step on beat 1 of each [bar](#).

If you are marching on the spot, turn to face a different direction every 8 beats (count to 8 and then change direction). If there are four beats in a bar, how many bars do 8 beats fit into?

If you are marching around the room in a larger space, change direction every 8 beats (count to 8 and then change direction). Take care not to crash into anyone else!

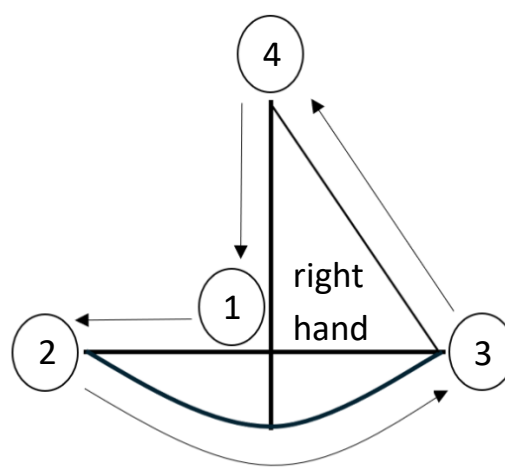
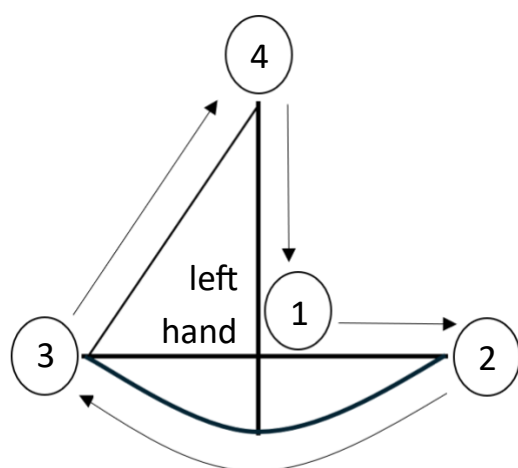
### Moving with your hands:

Show the strong and weak beats of the music by performing this pattern:

<b>1</b>	2	3	4	<b>1</b>	2	3	4
<b>knees</b>	clap	clap	clap	<b>chest</b>	clap	clap	clap

### Take the lead: can you be the conductor?

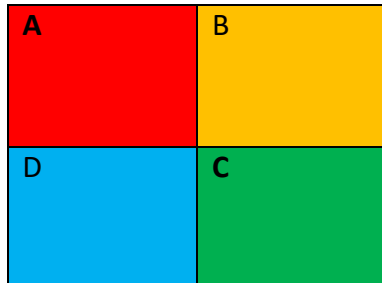
Draw sailing boats in the air in time to the music. Use one or both hands:



Suggested movements to make during 'Dawn' (3/4 time):

### Moving with your feet:

Create a "box step" with your feet. Aim to walk on your toes to show that this music is elegant and hopeful.



left	right	left	right	left	right
A	B	B	C	D	D

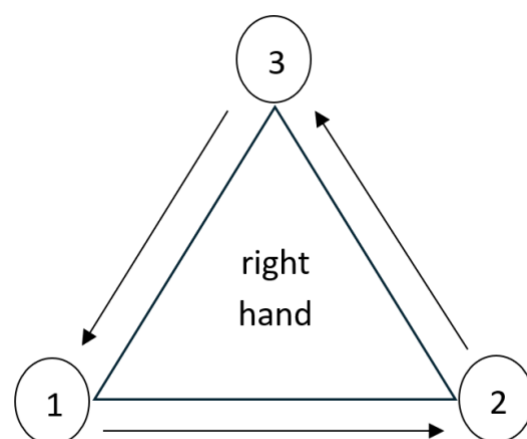
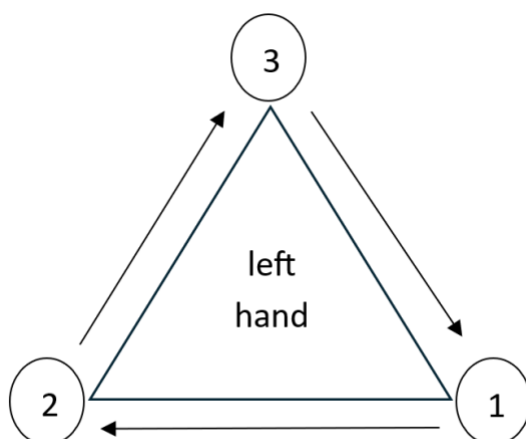
### Moving with your hands:

Show the strong and weak beats of the music by performing this pattern. Aim to keep the arms in motion (making gentle circles).

1	2	3	1	2	3
knees	clap	click	knees	clap	click

### Take the lead: can you be the conductor?

Draw triangles in the air in time to the music. Use one or both hands:



## 7. Optional Quiz

<b>What is a time signature?</b>	The number of beats in a bar
<b>What is an example of a time signature?</b>	3/4, 4/4
<b>What is a conductor?</b>	Someone who controls the music
<b>What are some examples of woodwind instruments?</b>	Flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, cor anglaise
<b>What are the names of the two variations listened to?</b>	'March' and 'Dawn'



## LESSON 2

### Create a song of protest

**Learning intention:** Learn the melody of the 'March' and use it as the starting point for your own protest song.  
Experiment with the pentatonic scale using voices and/or tuned classroom percussion

1. **Warm-up and recap** by [listening to the 'March'](#) and performing some of the movements from the previous lesson.
2. **Explain** that you are going to use the start of the melody from the 'March' to create your own protest song. Teach the class this short [phrase](#), then try to sing along each time it comes in. This can also be done while marching on the spot!



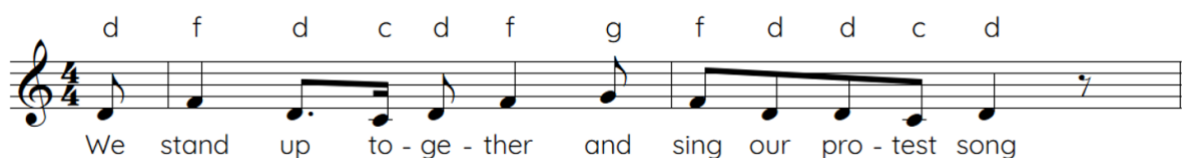
3. **Experiment with this melody** by adding your own ending! This can be spoken or sung, or performed using tuned classroom percussion.



- a) sing the first half and clap the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the pattern, ideally whilst marching or keeping time with your feet. This will help everyone to learn the rhythm.
- b) for a spoken version, choose 6 syllables that fit with the topic of protest and speak / shout them. Here is an example to try speaking / shouting:



- c) for a sung or played version, choose pitches from the pentatonic scale: C, **D**, F, G, A. The note D should be the note used most frequently. Here is an example to try singing and/or playing:



4. **In pairs, groups\*, or as a whole class\*\***, create your own protest song by combining phrases based on the starting points above. Give the groups some time to develop their ideas and practise. Children that are less confident at speaking / literacy may prefer to express themselves using tuned classroom percussion. Children that are less confident in singing may prefer to speak / shout. The most confident children might sing and perform their music at the same time! The performance will be most successful if the music has a strong sense of pulse. Encourage the children to march in time whilst singing / speaking / playing where possible. There is also an [accompanying worksheet](#) for children who would prefer to write or notate their ideas.

*\*Even numbers of phrases are more musically satisfying, therefore pairs, groups of four, eight etc. are ideal if every child is to take ownership of their own phrase.*

*\*\*If you are working on this as a whole-class activity, a call-and-response would work well, with the entire class singing “We stand up together”, and individual children taking it in turns to sing / speak / play a response.*

5. **Bring the class back together** and listen to each other’s work. Ask the rest of the class to listen carefully and give some feedback. Did the words fit well with the pulse? Did anyone manage to march along whilst speaking/singing/playing? Did the performance sound strong and proud? What could you say to help the group?
6. **Recap and warm down** by [listening to the ‘March’ again](#). Ask the class to listen carefully for ‘their’ melody, and see if they can identify which instrument is playing each time they hear it.

## 7. Optional Quiz

What is a musical phrase?	A group of bars that form a musical sentence, usually 2 or 4 bars.
What is the melody?	The tune of a piece of music
What is a scale?	A scale is a group of notes arranged by ascending or descending order of pitch
How many notes are in a pentatonic scale?	Five

## LESSON 3

Create an ensemble piece inspired by 'Dawn'

Learning intention: Develop your ability to perform as part of a group  
Explore texture by combining layers together

1. **Warm-up and recap** by [listening to 'Dawn'](#) and performing some of the movements from lesson 1. Focus on feeling the 3/4 time.
2. **Explain** that you are going to use the texture of 'Dawn' to create your own pieces in groups, using untuned and tuned classroom percussion. The music has three layers of texture; the melody, the bass, and the off-beats. This activity will also work well with other instruments such as keyboards, recorders, ukuleles, or children's own instruments.
3. **Recap the hand movements** without the music playing:

1	2	3	1	2	3
knees	clap	click	knees	clap	click

Explain that beats 2 and 3 are the off-beats (the weaker beats). The bass plays on beat 1 of each bar. Listen again and pick out these features, either without doing the movements or joining in quietly.

4. **Recap the melody** by listening and asking children to identify some of the woodwind instruments playing the tune. Can anyone remember the type of scale the melody is based on? A pentatonic scale, with five different pitches.
5. **In groups, create your own piece** using these three layers of texture. More than one person can perform each role. Use the same five notes: C, D, F, G, A.

Performance Grid:												
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Layer 1 - melody	Improvise a melody using the five notes of the pentatonic scale: C, D, F, G, A. If stuck, try some of the examples below.											
Layer 2 – off-beats		A F	A F		A F	A F		A F	A F		A F	A F
Layer 3 – bass line	D			C			A			C		



The [off-beats](#) and [bass line](#) can be performed using untuned percussion, in addition to or instead of tuned percussion. Ukuleles can perform the off-beat layer by playing a D minor chord.

6. **Give the groups some time** to develop their ideas and practise, then pause to briefly discuss structure and performance. Question prompts:
  - a. *How many times will your group play the performance grid?*
  - b. *Will everyone play all of the time? Are there more interesting ways that you can think of to use the different layers?*
  - c. *How will you begin and end your performance?*
7. **Bring the class back together** and listen to each other's work. Ask the rest of the class to listen carefully and give some feedback. Question prompts:
  - a. Can you tell me who performed which layer of texture in the performance?
  - b. How did the group begin and end their performance?
  - c. Could we feel the 3/4 time? Perhaps we could join in!
8. **Recap and warm down** by [listening to 'Dawn' again](#). Ask the class to listen carefully to 'their' part of the texture and see if they can identify which instruments are performing 'their' role.

#### 9. Optional Quiz

<b>What is texture in music?</b>	The layers of the music (e.g. melody, off-beats, bass line)
<b>What are some tuned instruments?</b>	Instruments with a defined pitch such as glockenspiel, xylophone, chime bars etc.
<b>What are some untuned instruments?</b>	Instruments without a defined pitch such as claves, castanets, shakers, hand drums etc.
<b>What is the bass line?</b>	The lowest part of the texture
<b>What is a beat?</b>	A beat is the underlying pulse of the music. There are strong beats and weak beats.
<b>What are off-beats?</b>	The weak beats in a bar of music.

## LESSON 4

Musical stories – looking back and moving forwards

Learning intention: Active listening and discussion activities  
Gain deeper insight into the music and the story

1. **Become a musical detective** by taking part in musical bingo! The children can create their own 3 x 3 grid, or cut out [one of templates provided](#). Children could play on their own or in pairs. Try the game for the first time before recapping the musical words. Ask these questions in any order to create the bingo game:
  - a. How many pitches make up the pentatonic scale? (*five*)
  - b. How many beats were in a bar in the 'March'? (*four*)
  - c. How many beats were in a bar in 'Dawn'? (*three*)
  - d. Which woodwind instrument is actually made of metal? (*flute*)
  - e. Which woodwind instrument has the lowest pitch? (*bassoon*)
  - f. What is the word for layers in music? (*texture*)
  - g. What is the musical word for a tune? (*melody*)
  - h. What is the musical word for weak beats? (*off-beats*)
  - i. What is the musical word for the lowest part of the texture? (*bass line*)
2. [Watch the orchestral performance](#) and ask the class to think about the boxes they are not sure about. At the end of the performance go through the answers before playing the game again. Answer prompts can be given to students who are struggling so that they can access the game.
3. [Watch the film](#) again and return to your discussion about the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the idea of protest. Play the orchestral performance of 'March' and ask the children to think of and / or write down something about the world that is unfair or unjust. Each child should march up with heavy feet and put their thought in the designated place (e.g. sticky notes stuck to the board, cards posted into a box, verbal response spoken to teacher).
4. [Play the orchestral performance of 'Dawn'](#) and ask the children to think of and / or write down something they hope for about the future. Each child should lightly move to the front to place their thought in the designated place (e.g. the other half of the board, cards posted into another box etc.).
5. **Final plenary – democracy in action!** Ask the class to vote for one final chance to explore something from earlier in the project. This could be the film, the movements to one of the variations, or even watching any recordings you have taken of their own pieces!

## TAKING IT FURTHER

### Cross-curricular activities

**HISTORY:** As a class, watch this [BBC Teach KS2 video on Rosa Parks](#) and in smaller groups, get children to consider the video questions (answers on video page): what was the date of Rosa Parks' actions? Where was Rosa Parks travelling? Where did Rosa Parks sit on the bus? What happened after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat? What does Rosa Parks say she was 'tired of'?

**HISTORY:** As a class, learn about the life of Mary Seacole following the [BBC Teach KS2 resources](#).

**ART:** After learning about the life & history of Mary Seacole, students can use colouring pencils to colour in the BBC Teach [outlines of The British Hotel](#), and [Mary Seacole figures](#).

## GLOSSARY OF MUSICAL TERMS USED

TERM	DEFINITION
3/4 time signature	Music with 3 beats in a bar (strong-weak-weak)
4/4 time signature	Music with 4 beats in a bar (strong-weak-weak-weak)
Bass line	The lowest part of the texture
Beat	A beat is the underlying pulse of the music. There are strong beats and weak beats.
Bar	Beats are organised together into bars. There will be a strong beat at the start of the bar.
Ensemble	A group of musicians
Melody	The tune of a piece of music
Off-beats	The weak beats in a bar of music.
Pentatonic scale	A five-note scale. We have used C, D, F, G, A in this project.
Phrase	A group of bars that form a musical sentence, usually 2 or 4 bars.
Texture	The layers of the music (e.g. melody, off-beats, bass line)
Tuned classroom percussion	Instruments with a defined pitch such as glockenspiel, xylophone, chime bars etc.
Untuned classroom percussion	Instruments without a defined pitch such as claves, castanets, shakers, hand drums etc.

## MUSICAL BINGO

Five	Bassoon	Texture
Melody	Four	Off-beats
Three	Flute	Bass line

Four	Five	Off-beats
Bass line	Texture	Three
Flute	Melody	Bassoon

Bass line	Flute	Five
Three	Melody	Off-beats
Bassoon	Texture	Four

Bassoon	Bass line	Five
Texture	Three	Four
Flute	Off-beats	Melody

Texture	Four	Bassoon
Five	Melody	Three
Bass line	Off-beats	Flute

Bass line	Melody	Four
Off-beats	Five	Texture
Three	Bassoon	Flute

Four	Flute	Bass line
Bassoon	Off-beats	Five
Melody	Three	Texture

Off-beats	Four	Three
Texture	Bassoon	Melody
Five	Flute	Bass line

Flute	Texture	Three
Four	Bass line	Bassoon
Off-beats	Five	Melody

Melody	Bassoon	Off-beats
Bass line	Texture	Flute
Three	Four	Five

Five	Off-beats	Bass line
Flute	Melody	Four
Texture	Three	Bassoon

Flute	Five	Melody
Three	Bass line	Texture
Bassoon	Four	Off-beats



Learning intention: Learn the melody of the 'March' and use it as the starting point for your own protest song  
Experiment with the pentatonic scale using voices and / or tuned classroom percussion

Here are some incomplete phrases of the protest song for you to fill in. You can add words to the rhythms below to complete your phrase, then try composing melodies using the notes of the pentatonic scale:



We stand up to - ge - ther .....

We stand up to - ge - ther .....

d f d c d f 
  
 We stand up to - ge - ther .....

d f d c d f 
  
 We stand up to - ge - ther .....