

Finlandia by Jean Sibelius

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

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Background

The composer: **Jean SIBELIUS (1865 - 1957)**

- Finnish composer
- Best known for writing pieces inspired by the Finnish landscape and its legends
- Is still very, very famous and beloved in Finland

The music: **‘Finlandia’**

- Written in 1899
- Describes a difficult time in Finland – the country is under threat from Russia
- Sibelius’s music urges the Finnish people to be positive and fight back. The hymn-like tune towards the end became an important national song.

Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- listen and reflect on a piece of orchestral music
- create their own rhythmic ostinatos and structure them into a piece
- write a simple song
- perform as an ensemble
- begin to learn simple staff notation
- learn musical language appropriate to the task

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
- listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
- use and understand staff and other musical notations

Glossary of music terms used

Beat	the steady ' pulse ' underlying much music, made up of notes of the same length (like a ticking clock)
Black notes	the sharps and flats, always black in colour (on a piano) along the top row of the piano keyboard
Ostinato	a repeating (often rhythmic) pattern
Pitched percussion	percussion instruments that can play different pitches ('notes') – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars etc.
Pulse	another (better) word for beat
Unpitched percussion	percussion instruments that can only make a limited number of sounds – drums, shakers, woodblocks, tambourine etc.
White notes	the longest, nearest row of notes on the piano keyboard. Coloured white on a piano, called C, D, E, F, G, A, B

Resources required

- A4 paper and pens
- Classroom percussion instruments and any other instruments your children might be learning

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:	Watch the film and discuss Listen and describe a piece of music
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 Develop an understanding of the history of music

Lesson 2

Activities:	Learn and perform a rhythmic pattern to a pulse Orchestrate this pattern and follow the musical notation
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

Lesson 3

Activities:	Learn to play a pulse Invent rhythmic ostinatos to fit a pulse Layer ostinatos together
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 4

Activities:	Structure ideas into a march Play with dynamics Join two pieces together into a bigger structure
Curriculum link:	Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music Play and perform in solo

and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 5

Activities: Invent lyrics Invent a melody for the lyrics and sing it Notate and read the melody using simple (diagrammatic) notation

Curriculum link: Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 6

Activities: Structure all ideas into a piece
Perform the piece to an audience
Use technical terminology where appropriate

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 I

Watching and listening

1. Prepare your class

Explain to your class that you are going to begin a 6-week music project focusing on an important piece of music by a composer called Sibelius

Explain further that Sibelius was from Finland and was famous for writing music about his country and all the things he loved about it. Have a discussion about this. Ask your children what they love about their country. If they were to write music or stories about it, what would they write?

You might also like to do a bit of research with the children about Finland and look online at its amazing landscapes, forests and lakes. (There are some amazing pictures on the internet if you just type in 'Finland landscape' in a search engine).

2. Watch the film

Watch the [Sibelius Ten Pieces film](#) and afterwards have a class discussion about what you have just seen. You might like to ask the following questions –

- Did you like the film?
- What was your favourite part?
- What do you like about where you live?
- Put yourself in Sibelius's shoes - how would you feel if this country was suddenly under threat of invasion?

3. Listening task

Give out A4 sheets of paper to everyone and ask them to place them landscape on their desks. Ask them to gently fold the paper to create three roughly even columns and write 1, 2, 3 at the top of each column. Like this –

1	2	3

To save time, you might want to prepare this ahead of the lesson!

Explain that you are going to listen to Sibelius's piece in full. You can either watch the [video clip of the full performance](#) of the piece or listen to the [audio by downloading the mp3](#). The piece divides into three sections and you will indicate when each new section begins. The children's job is to write down how the music makes them feel or what they can hear in each column as you go along.

You can adapt this task to suit your children. i.e. if they are learning about adjectives and nouns you could ask them to write, for example, two adjectives and two nouns in each column. They could use smiley and sad faces for emotions. Sometimes children struggle with what music 'feels' like, if so ask them to draw what they think is being described – i.e. a large tree, a train, a church. You are not looking for 'correct' answers, the most important thing is that they listen well and use their imagination

Play a recording of Finlandia in full. It's better if there are no images to look at now (you can download the mp3 [here](#)), we just want them to listen and respond. The three sections are roughly, depending on the recording, as follows -

Section 1: 0'00 – 3'00
 Section 2: 3'00 – 5'20
 Section 3: 5'20 – end

You might like to pause the recording after each section to let the children catch up, or play the recording several times over.

4. **Discuss** their findings and perhaps write some of their suggestions up on the board.
5. **FINALLY** – listen to Finlandia one more time and this time point out what Sibelius is actually describing during each section, as follows:

Section 1:	0'00 – 3'00	Russia has invaded. People are scared	Dark, gloomy, sad
Section 2:	3'00 – 5'20	The struggle of the Finnish people to overcome this threat. A fight back!	Rousing, exciting
Section 3:	5'20 – end	A hymn to the country. Final triumph	Gentle, beautiful

LESSON 2

Composing Finlandia: Dark chords

I. Warm-up

Clear the classroom and ask your children to stand in a circle. To wake them up, pass a quick clap around the circle.

Remind them about the work you did with Finlandia and tell them that you are going to spend a few lessons creating your own version of Sibelius's piece. As they might remember, the music begins with the dark threat of invasion, so you are going to begin by making some dark sounds.

Perform the following pattern and ask your children to copy you -

SAY:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DO:	Rumble on knees - - - - - CLAP							

It is important that they begin on the '1', so counting out loud will really help. When they can do this confidently, challenge them to perform it on their own, without copying you, three times around. Can they do it without counting out loud?

Tell your class that you need one extra sound on the end, like a full stop on the end of a sentence. Can they suggest a sound? *Ideally you want a short sound like a stamp or another clap*

Add this onto the end of your pattern and perform together one last time.

Tell your class that they have just performed a new version of the dark chords at the beginning of Finlandia and perhaps show them what it would look like if it were written down -

x3

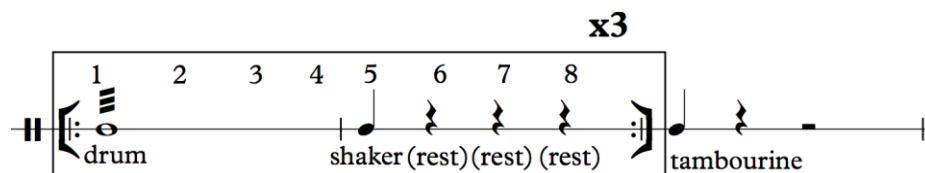
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

rumble clap (rest) (rest) (rest) stamp

2. On instruments

Put a selection of percussion instruments in the middle of the circle. At this stage you only need the **unpitched** ones – so no xylophones or glocks etc.

Explain that you need two contrasting sounds. Something to replace the **rumble**, and something for the **clap**. Ask children to come forward and select sounds until you all agree on the choice. The pattern might now look and sound like this –



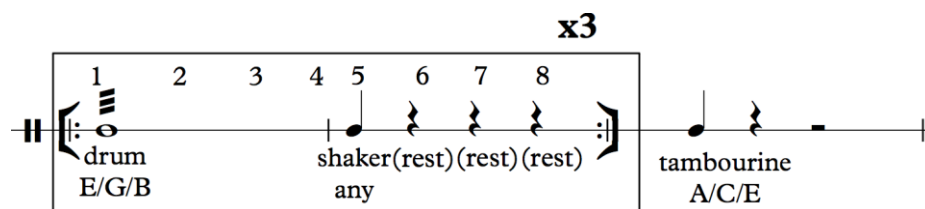
Moving on to **pitched** instruments, explain that the first chord is made up of any combination of three specific notes, E, G and B. Ask three children to come forward, find these notes and add them into the pattern.

As you work through these explanations, keep giving out instruments to children who suggest ideas. This way you gradually build up your texture and distribute instruments. Children without instruments can carry on using body percussion/ voice

The shorter 'clap' sound can be played on any notes, or kept on **unpitched instruments**. Add this in.

The final 'full stop' sound can be on the notes A, C, E. Or left on unpitched instruments.

So, the full pattern looks like this –



... and will work with any combination of the above, or your own suggestions. If children are learning instruments, add them in at their own ability i.e. only playing the notes they know and leaving out the others.

3. Keep practicing and giving out instruments until everyone has a role, ideally everyone should have an instrument. If you are lacking in instruments body percussion and voices can be used too.

4. **FINALLY** - end the session with a full class performance. Ask the children to come up with a short name to remember this section by. Perhaps something like 'darkness'. Remember to keep a record of who is playing what and the instrument decisions you have made along the way.

LESSON 3

Composing Finlandia – March

1. Warm-up

Clear the classroom and ask your children to sit on the floor in a circle. For a really quick warm up, lead them in the ‘dark chords’ body percussion pattern from last lesson or a simply pass a clap around the circle

2. **Explain** that you are going to make a march today for the middle section of your piece. Explain further that musical marches often contain the sound of steady footsteps within them. Encourage your children to sit cross-legged and place one hand on each knee. Explain that you are going to tap some steady, even ‘footsteps’. Each hand represents one ‘step’. Tap each knee in turn to create these ‘footsteps’ and encourage your class to join in with you. The aim is to stay together, keeping a steady, even **beat**.

If this sounds messy, stop. Remind the class of the ‘rules’ and start again. You don’t need to count in, just start clearly when everyone is watching and trust that they will follow you.

If you notice one or more children can’t do this and keep rushing ahead or are going at a completely different speed, simply ignore them. We all find our sense of rhythm at a different stage - maybe they just haven’t found theirs yet. If it truly sounds messy, stop and try it with just one hand, at half speed, joining in the other hand when appropriate.

The technical term for these ‘footsteps’ is **pulse**

3. Over the top of this pulse you need some repeating rhythms – the technical term for repeating rhythmic patterns is **ostinato**. One of the best ways to create **ostinatos** with children is to use words. Here is a simple method –
 - a. Ask your class a simple question such as ‘what did you have for breakfast*?’. Encourage your children to think their answer or whisper it to a friend.
 - b. Play a steady pulse on a drum or woodblock or ask a confident child to do so
 - c. Ask your class to speak their ‘breakfasts’ on top of the pulse, trying to make the words fit and repeating then round and around. *This will sound really messy but you will probably spot someone with a good pattern within the noise*
 - d. Stop, and demonstrate your own ‘breakfast’ pattern and show the children how you can move it from words to body percussion by clapping every syllable.
 - e. Encourage your class to try clapping their breakfast patterns on top of the pulse.

When this is achieved, hear some of the patterns and try clapping them as a full class. Use the words to keep everyone together and don't worry too much if it's too hard for some of your class - like everything else, children pick this up at different rates and that's fine!

Tell your class that they have just created their own **breakfast ostinatos!**

***Or you could pose a new question more relevant to the subject matter of Finlandia. I.e. 'what do you like about where you live?'*

4. **Give out the instruments** so that everyone is playing the same instrument as they used in the 'darkness' piece. Stay in your circle shape. As a full group choose about four ostinatos from the ones you've tried out and ask the children to work out which type of instrument or combination of instruments plays which pattern and crucially which instrument stays on the all important pulse.
5. **Practise** – give the children a bit of time to figure out how to play their ostinato on their instrument and to practice. It will help if children with the same pattern and instrument sit together for this. Pitched instruments should stick to just the **white notes**
6. Bring the class back together and hear each pattern with the pulse. Give feedback and perhaps neaten or simplify some of the more complicated patterns, challenge the easy ones.
7. **FINALLY** – end the session by laying up the patterns on top of each other. To do this, play a loud steady pulse and choose a child to signal when each group starts and stops. Don't worry if this sounds messy at this stage but do remember to keep a record of what you've done, especially who plays what

To remember rhythms, simply write down the words they used to create them and don't worry too much if they are a bit different next time. You might like to invent a system of notation with your class that maybe underlines the more important/ longer syllables or indicates any gaps or counts. If your children are familiar with staff notation use that but be careful because often these sorts of rhythms are very complicated to read!

LESSON 4

Composing Finlandia – March 2

This midpoint session is a chance to recap and fix what you have created so far.

1. **Warm up**

Begin in a circle again and lead a quick warm-up such as pass the clap. Ask the class to remember what you did during the last session and perhaps clap some of the ostinatos. Also remind them of the 'darkness' pattern from lesson 2.

2. **Give** out the instruments again and give them about two minutes* to remember both their 'marching ostinato' and the darkness pattern.

**When working on musical activities in groups, don't allow too long for each task. If time is restricted children must get on with it and with each other! There is less opportunity to chat/ argue/ over-think etc.*

3. **Bring the class back together** and hear each marching ostinato with the pulse. Ask the class how to put all these patterns together to make one big march. Try out several ideas (there is no wrong answer!) and decide as a full group which is the best.

To help with this structuring, you might want to talk about what is going on in your march. Are you marching towards something (i.e. getting louder?) or away (getting softer?). What emotion are you feeling? – refer the children back to the story of Finlandia that they are copying.

When this is fixed practice it until it is neat and name it 'march' (or an even better title suggested by the children!)

4. Now, try to put the 'darkness' piece back together. When this is done, ask your children if they can remember which section of music comes first in Sibelius's piece. (The darkness comes before the 'march'). Do they want to stick to the same order or change it?
5. **FINALLY** – finish the session by performing both pieces (in whatever order they suggest) back to back and as usual, keep a record of what you have done

LESSON 5

Finlandia Hymn – a singing task

1. Warm-up

Once again begin the session with an empty classroom and with the children sitting in a circle on the floor. This lesson involves singing so here is a fun vocal warm-up –

Most children know the nursery rhyme 'The Grand Old Duke of York'. If your children don't, simply adapt this task using a song that they do know

- Remind your class of 'The Grand Old Duke of York' and lead them singing it loud and proud!
- Add some simple gestures such as a salute at the beginning, pointing up on 'up' and down on 'down' etc. The gestures will be more fun if they come from the children rather than being suggested by you
- Sing the song again, loud and proud and with gestures!
- Now challenge the children to sing again taking out the words 'up' and 'down' but leaving in the actions
- What should they do next? Take their suggestions as to how to perform the song for a 4th time and do them. (i.e. switch 'up' for 'down' but keep the gestures the same, just switch the gestures, only sing 'up' and 'down')

Singing is one of the best ways to warm up the voice and by singing the same song over and over with fun challenges, this makes for an easy to remember warm up!

2. **Remind** your children about the end of Finlandia – the hymn. You might like to play them the recording starting at about 5'20 and playing for about 40 seconds. (You can also find many sung versions of this on the internet if you search for *Finlandia Hymn*).
3. **Explain** to your class that you are going to finish your Finlandia composition by creating a new hymn. Sibelius doesn't just many pitches for his tune so you are going to use just four: C, D, E, F*
4. **Split** your class into four groups ensuring that, when you give out the instruments from last time you will have a nice mix of sounds in each group. Ask each group to invent a short sentence to answer the question 'What do you like about your country?' Float between the groups and make sure that the sentences are all different and not too long or complicated

- Now, ask the children to get out their instruments – they should still be using the same instruments from the other tasks. Make sure that each group has at least one instrument with C, D, E, F* on it. The task is to create a short melody for their sentence using these notes. They must be able to play and sing this melody confidently back to the rest of the class, so it must be exactly the same every time.

Or choose four pitches that suit your resources better. For example, if you have a lot of beginner violinists, G, A, D, E might be a better choice. If you don't have enough use G, A, B, C as well. Avoid the **black notes (#, b) if possible or only use them*

- Bring** the class back together and hear their melodies. As you go through, write the words and notes on the board. For example:

Notes:	E	E	E	D	C	D	C
Words:	I	love the street			I	live on	

- Decide** as a class which order these lines should go in and then practice going from group to group until everyone can join in singing the whole song through.
- FINALLY** – decide how many times you want to sing through your four lines and end the session by performing your finished song

LESSON 6

Putting it all together

1. **Warm-up**

As usual, begin with a quick focusing warm-up. This can be as simple as a clap around the circle, a fun reminder of some of the rhythms you have created during the last few lessons or a quick sing through of your song.

2. **Recap**

Ask the children to remind you of the three sections of music that they have created*

**If you don't manage to create all three, don't worry, you can still make a piece using any combination of the lessons above*

Hopefully they will say the following:

- i. The darkness chords
- ii. The march
- iii. The hymn

3. **Get out the instruments** and allow for a minute or two of chaos as everyone remembers their ideas. Then, put each section back together as a full class.
4. **Structure** – remind the class of your order you decided in Lesson 4 for the darkness piece and the march and practice playing that too. Ask the class where the hymn should go. Remind them that Sibelius places his hymn at the end, but they can put it wherever they like. As usual try out a few suggestions before deciding on the best and then quickly write up the order of events of the final choice on the board.

Your final piece might look something like this:

Darkness – March – Hymn

5. **FINALLY** – record your finished piece or perform it to another class

Taking it further

Cross-curricular activities

- **ART:** Use Sibelius's music to inspire artwork. Draw the Finnish landscape (with its threat) whilst listening to the piece
- **LITERACY:** Write words to fit Sibelius's tune or a poem based on this story
- **LITERACY/ ART:** Google 'Finnish Legends' and read about the many, many characters and stories that inspired Sibelius. Use some of these for artwork or new stories