

Teacher Guide: Musical Sketches

Year 6 · Unit 4

Introduction

This teacher guide identifies musical learning and presents **I can statements** to support assessment. The **I can statements** show what successful learning looks like for teachers and feels like for children. The guide provides an **overview** of the unit content, the resources needed to teach the unit and offers some **key teaching strategies** to support successful teaching and learning.

The online Charanga resources for the whole unit are in the **Teacher Guide Resources**. Using these resources and this **Teacher Guide**, teachers may confidently plan their own series of lessons. To support such a planning process, each **Teacher Guide** offers six week-by-week summaries of teaching and learning based on the resources listed.

Unit Lesson Plans

Creative Music Scheme units also include a thorough series of lesson plans in a single **Lesson Plans** document to support a flexible and engaging approach to teaching the unit. Lessons are presented in sets of 2 weeks, and each lesson plan suggests a range of activities to choose from to meet the learning objectives of the 2 weeks. Over a year, the activities collectively reflect an outstanding, creative and inclusive curriculum that teaches musical skills and musical knowledge in a way that children can understand.

Every school allocates its own timeframe for music teaching and learning; therefore, select the activities that best meet the children's learning needs and your teaching. A main activity does not have to be hurried; enjoy spending time creating a quality musical experience by working through fewer main activities thoroughly.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this unit, children will be able to:

1. Plan and compose 8 bars of music that demonstrate melodic and rhythmic interest, using creative musical ideas inspired by a historical or narrative context.
2. Notate and perform your composition, applying dynamic contrasts, ensemble awareness, and expressive techniques to communicate the intended musical character.

I Can Statements

- I can listen to music and identify its melodic, rhythmic, and dynamic features.
- I can create short musical sketches using Music Notepad.
- I can notate my musical ideas clearly to share with others.
- I can perform my composition confidently, using dynamics and appropriate articulations. (Staccato or Legato, for example).
- I can reflect on my own and others' work to improve my compositions.

Unit Overview

This unit focuses on planning, composing, and performing musical sketches inspired by the classic sea shanty **“Roll Alabama”**. Children explore melodic and rhythmic patterns, experimenting with chords, musical snippets, and dynamic contrasts. Using **Music Notepad** and **Yumu**, children develop their own 8-bar compositions, applying compositional decision-making and ensemble awareness. Activities incorporate listening, performing, composing, and reflecting, with cross-curricular links to maritime history, storytelling, and visual art. The unit culminates in a class performance that showcases creativity, technical skill, and musical interpretation.

Resources Needed

- Share **Music Notepad** (via **Yumu**) and **student logins**.
- Devices (laptops, tablets, or PCs)
- Instruments (glockenspiels, keyboards, drums, or other classroom instruments)
- Projector or interactive whiteboard to display **Music Notepad** and scores
- Optional: printouts of compositions for display

Weekly Suggestions

Week 1: Introduction to “Roll Alabama” and Music Notepad Basics

Children listen to **“Roll Alabama”** and explore the story of Alabama, identifying the instruments used. They focus on music using two flats, Bb and Eb, and a 4/4 time signature, revisiting four crotchet beats in each bar. Rests are also counted. Children rehearse choruses by speaking words and singing to practise their timing and ensemble coordination. They explore **Music Notepad** for basic note entry, experimenting with melody and rhythm in short snippets. Discussions link the musical story to maritime history and the imagery of the ship, encouraging creative thinking and setting a baseline for composition.

Week 2: Research and Composition Foundations

Children present research on the CSS Alabama and compare findings with the musical elements of the song. Using **Music Notepad**, they begin composing 4-bar sketches inspired by the ship, ocean, and journey. The lesson focuses on experimenting with chords, melodic ideas, and rhythmic interest. Children work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to generate creative musical snippets, practising listening, adjusting, and sharing ideas with peers. Rehearsal of the choruses continues, emphasising ensemble timing and dynamics.

Week 3: “Storm” and Extending Compositional Ideas

Listening to **“Storm”** by Benjamin Britten, children analyse dynamics, contrasting quiet and loud passages. They rehearse the first three verses of **“Roll Alabama”**, integrating call-and-response phrasing and ensemble balance. **Music Notepad** is used to develop the remaining four bars of their sketches, adding contrasting dynamics to enhance expression. Children share their melodic ideas, discussing emotional impact and imagery. Independent and paired work encourages experimentation and creative problem-solving, allowing children to refine simple composing techniques.

Week 4: Rehearsal and Instrumental Integration

Children continue learning verses 4–6, rehearsing from memory where possible. Compositions are played on instruments, experimenting with chord notes, melody, and ensemble coordination. Discussion focuses on how instrumentation affects musical colour, timbre, and expression. Children compare their work with Bellowhead's version, identifying differences in texture, speed, and atmosphere. Opportunities to alternate between instrumental and vocal lines reinforce ensemble awareness and listening skills.

Week 5: Structuring and Refining Musical Sketches

Children decide whether to retain their compositions as musical sketches or develop them into cohesive, short pieces. They experiment with structures that alternate between melodic and chordal sections. Rehearsals integrate instruments and **Music Notepad** output, blending individual compositions into ensemble arrangements. Children practise choruses 7–8 of "**Roll Alabama**", exploring performance elements such as staging, choreography, and spatial arrangement to enhance their presentation. Peer feedback supports refinement of dynamics, rhythm, and expressive delivery.

Week 6: Final Performance and Reflection

Children rehearse and present their compositions, as well as selected sections of "**Roll Alabama**," to the class or a wider audience. Emphasis is on confident ensemble performance, accuracy, dynamics, and expression. Children self-assess and provide peer feedback, reflecting on musical decisions, rhythm, and ensemble cohesion. Optional recordings are used to document achievements and evaluate progress. The session celebrates creative outcomes, ensemble skills, and the ability to translate compositional ideas into a polished performance.

Key Teaching Strategies for Success

- **Demonstrate and Model:** Clearly show Music Notepad functions, note entry, and ensemble techniques.
- **Scaffold Learning:** Progress from listening → speaking → singing → instrument playing → composition.
- **Encourage Collaboration:** Pair and group work support sharing ideas, balancing parts, and ensemble awareness.
- **Use Visual Supports:** Scores, Logbook pages, and Music Notepad screens help the children structure compositions.
- **Reflect and Refine:** Peer and self-assessment foster critical thinking, refinement, and confidence.
- **Integrate Cross-Curricular Links:** Connect music with history, storytelling, and visual imagery to enhance engagement.

Conclusion

By the end of this unit, children will have developed confidence in planning, composing, and performing their own musical sketches. They will have applied dynamic contrasts, melodic and rhythmic variety, and ensemble coordination to create expressive compositions inspired by the music of “**Roll Alabama**”. Children will gain experience in using **Music Notepad**, notating ideas, and blending instrumental and vocal textures. Reflection and peer feedback reinforce understanding, allowing learners to refine their musical ideas. The unit culminates in a polished performance, showcasing creativity, technical skill, and collaboration, while linking musical learning to historical context and narrative inspiration.