

Earth Voices: Exploring Our Identity Through Choral Music Singing & Visual Art

Using the new BC Curriculum, incorporating First People's Principals of Learning

developed by

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These lesson plans are available as part of Choral Canada's Advocacy resources: choralcanada.org
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CORE COMPETENCIES: <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies>

- Positive Personal & Cultural Identity: relationships & cultural context; personal values & choices; personal strengths & abilities
- Personal Awareness & Responsibility: self determination; self regulation; well being
- Social responsibility: valuing diversity, building relationships; contributing to community
- Creative & Critical Thinking: developing ideas; analyze & critique
- Communication: connecting and engaging with others; recounting & reflecting on experiences and accomplishments

FIRST PEOPLE'S PRINCIPALS of LEARNING: <http://www.fnesc.ca/learningfirstpeoples/>

The BIG IDEAS:

- Exploring works of music exposes us to diverse values, knowledge, and perspectives.
- Singing choral music is a way to explore and share one's identity within a community.
- Singing together expands people's sense of identity and belonging.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- How are our stories and memories shared and told through song?
- How can we be individually represented as contributing parts of a meaningful whole?
- How can I learn that what I do in group music-making, MATTERS.
- How does our engagement in a community music-making process grow our connections?
- How can we incorporate First Peoples Principals of Learning into our practice?

CHORAL SCORES used:

- *Earth Voices* by Laura Hawley with text by Bliss Carmen
 - available from Rhythmic Trident Music Publishing
 - Unison treble voices (w/opt. 3 part section) and piano– RTCA-036
 - SAB voices and piano– RTCA-037
- *The Sun Is Mine* by Laura Hawley with text by Robert Hogg & Robert Priest
 - available from Rhythmic Trident Music Publishing
 - 2 part treble voices (w/opt. 3 part section) and piano– RTCA-033
 - SAB voices and piano– RTCA-034

Throughout this process we also explored a variety of folk songs from around the world; children's song games; songs in our repertoire and life experience. We put song titles on a world map to show approximate origins and time periods.

Day 1: A Gallery Walk of Boxes and Collections: what we hold dear

Materials Needed:

- Set up a curated “Gallery Walk” of various treasure boxes- the kind of miscellaneous trinket boxes that we all keep! Jars of shells; tiny tin boxes filled with foreign coins; shoe boxes with travel journals and photos; a tea set in a special box; a box of art supplies; a music box; beach glass or special stones; favorite recordings; etc. Curate the Gallery Walk by grouping boxes and collections by genre or theme into vignettes on tables/ centres/ stations. Be sure to include a few empty boxes, to symbolize future possibilities!
- Reflection sheets with “I wonder....” and “I notice.....” and pencils beside each collection of boxes. These reflections sheets should remain at the station when students move on to the next one.

A suggested process for leading the exploration through the Gallery Walk

- Demonstrate how to carefully look inside the boxes- how students may carefully take things out to examine them gently. “*Am I trusting you with my treasures?*” (Yes!) “*It’s like a mystery- you are invited to touch and look through the boxes, but be sure to put everything back again.*”
- Demonstrate how to talk to each other in smaller groups with quiet voices. Demonstrate how students can write reflections on the “I wonder....” and “I notice.....” sheets at each centre. Reflection sheets stay there, with the collection.
- Rotate groups through the various centres after 5-7 minutes in each one. Be sure to encourage students to write down their reflections at each station.
- After students have been through all the collections, you might ask them if they noticed any connections between boxes, or any themes.
- Students could write about /describe their *own* special treasure box that they might already have at home.

Day 2: Making Memory Strings with Buttons: songs as milestones

Materials Needed:

- Picture book *The Memory String* by Eve Bunting
- 40cm lengths of string: one for each student. Be sure the string will thread through the button holes.
- tubs of miscellaneous buttons or large wooden beads (available in bulk from craft stores)
- small tags so students can label their button strings

A suggested process

- Review the idea of peeking in other people’s treasure boxes during the Gallery Walk. “*Why do you think the person chose THOSE special objects for their memory box?*”
- Pose the question: “*What IS a memory?*”
- Read aloud the picture book *The Memory String* by Eve Bunting
- “*You will each get your own memory string, and you can string a button on for each year of your life. If you are 9 years old, how many buttons will you need to string?*”
- You could demonstrate various techniques for stringing the buttons: string through one hole and they become a stack; through two holes and buttons appear flat on the string; with knots between to space them out. We found that by making this invitation fairly open, students rationalized their button stringing choices in personal ways: “My buttons go from small to big to

show me getting bigger each year.” “I made my button string change from white to shades of purple to show me getting older because now purple is my favourite colour.”

- We found that most children didn't know how to tie a big 'ol knot, so you will probably need to demonstrate how to tie a knot at each end of the string!
- Attach the name tag on the strings with another knot.

Exploring our personal identity through the songs in our lives:

- *“Let's look at our memory string. Each button represents a year of your life. Think about the songs that you loved, during each of those years”:*
 - **What was your favourite song when you were a toddler?**
 - **What was the first song or album that you ever purchased?**
 - **What is your favourite song right now?**
 - **When did you first join a choir?**
 - For older students: **Is there a song that has changed your life? A song that represents a milestone, or special event in your life?**
- Use “Think, Pair, Share” strategy to encourage students to share with a buddy about their memory string, and the songs and memories represented on it.
- Use “Talking Circle” strategy to share with the big group, the title of a favourite song from toddler years. Jot these down; we found that many singers were eager and delighted to sing/ review/ share these memory songs. This in turn led to many more connections between singers as we sang these “old songs” and were reminded of others.
- **These song memories help to make up who we are-** each person will have different “songs on their memory string”. Don't forget to participate yourself! Students loved hearing stories about their teachers' childhood memories and songs. :)
- **We ended up singing (and playing) a variety of these shared songs and song games, inspired by our personal memory strings.** Students shared personal stories and memories associated with these songs. Students had opportunities to journal/draw/write about these memories with their classroom teachers.

Part 2: Examine and explore the poetry of Bliss Carmen's EARTH VOICES (you can find the full text online, or use the excerpt used in Laura Hawley's setting of this poem)

- *“What do you think is going on in this poem? Whose voice is speaking? How do you know?”*
- *“Why do you think Wind, Sun and Rain have such different perspectives? Can one exist without the other?” “How are these voices like our OWN voices and like our own choir?”*
- Examine the composition Earth Voices, without even hearing it, students were able to glean some key ideas by looking at the choral score: *“What do you immediately notice about the time signature of this piece?” “Do you see any patterns or repetition of ideas?” “When do you notice a lot of accidentals in the score? What's going on with the text there? Why would the composer do this, THERE?” “Where is the climax of this piece? How do you know this?”* Singers will be eager now to sing through, to check their thinking and ideas! :)
- When rehearsing, ask students who they are listening to- who their “secret guide” is, in the choir! You and your singers may be surprised at the answers!
- When you have a moment to reflect, ask singers to think about what unique gift/ intelligence/ strength THEY bring to the choir- what they offer to the group. We shared these in written reflections, and also interspersed throughout choir practice.
- Hopefully, singers are connecting the text of the poetry, to the act of singing in a choir, to their personal reflections about identity, community and diversity. The skill building we do in the music classes and choral work, helps us dig deeper into the “Big Ideas” and build those core competencies.

Days 3: Making An Artist Trading Card

Materials Needed:

- a variety of collage materials: papers, old music; magazines; gems; shells; burlap; buttons; ribbon and more. We limited the colour palette to influence the final outcome, since we planned to display more than 360 of these projects together.
- card stock: postcard sized pieces, 1 for each student
- glue sticks and scissors for each student
- Mod Podge (water based glue/ medium and sealant) to coat the finished creations

TIDY TIPS: keep collage supplies sorted in small containers on the tables; keep tidying as you circulate among artists. Cover workspaces with paper.

Keep the “specialty collage items” tucked away until the very last finishing touches are needed, to encourage layering.

A suggested process

- **Demonstrate how layering / collage technique works:** Plan what you want to definitely feature; decide on the background, the middle ground, the foreground. Think about overlapping items; layering. We further reinforced and practiced these ideas with sound and voices too: overlapping voices, background sounds, melody. We talked about “Papa Bear, Mama Bear and Baby Bear” sized pieces of paper, to layer different sizes.
- Demonstrate how *“using glue sticks allows us to change our minds and move things around”*. Gluing doesn’t need to be sturdy because it all will be coated with artist medium (Mod Podge).
- **Demonstrate composition techniques:** the “Golden Rule” of thirds and odd numbers; harmonizing versus contrasting colours.
- **We practiced collage composition techniques by making a large version of an artist trading card-** ours were postcard-sized cards.
- *“We are making a layered art card, using collage technique. How will these layered cards, be representative of YOU?”* Students made all kinds of connections here. Later on, these cards became representative of how in choral singing, we are all individual artists, but when put together, we create one big, complex and compelling wall—of visual art or of choral singing sound. This also reinforced the idea that we are all unique individuals with gifts that we each bring to the choir.
- When collaged cards are complete and dry, give them a coat of Mod Podge to add sheen and stability.

TIPS: Before beginning the actual art-making process, take a “mindful moment” to get grounded, and to “get in an artistic head space”. We asked students to work SILENTLY so that they could just focus on their own work. When students worked too closely in proximity, we found that they had difficulty creating their own unique pieces. It turned out to be important to mix students up- to have influential friends work at different tables. *“Make this a process about YOU: YOUR memories, YOUR artistic process. Pay attention to what YOU are doing. The chatty part of your brain will shut down your creative process.”*

DAY 4: Making a Memory Box

Materials Needed:

- a variety of collage materials: papers, old music; magazines; gems; shells; burlap; buttons; ribbon and more. We limited the colour palette to influence the final outcome, since we planned to display more than 360 of these projects together.
- small cardboard maché boxes: we ordered these in bulk through Creative Children <http://www.creativechildreneducational.com/PDFs/Craft99-109.pdf> for uniformity, because we were working with 360 students! You could also ask students to bring a very small shoe box for this project.
- glue sticks and scissors for each student
- Mod Podge (water based glue/ medium and sealant) to coat the finished creations

TIDY TIPS: keep collage supplies sorted in small containers on the tables; keep tidying as you circulate among artists. Cover workspaces with paper. We had inspiring words from magazines already pre-cut and available in bins for artists to use.

Keep the “specialty collage items” tucked away until the very last finishing touches are needed, to encourage layering.

A suggested process

- **Review how layering / collage technique works:** Show a few artist trading cards from Day 3: *“What do you think this person likes? What do you think this person is good at? How do you know?”*
- Start by having students write their names on the underside of both the lid and the box. Everything else will be covered by collage!
- Take another “mindful moment” to get in the artist zone. We asked students not to talk to each other for this memory box-making process.
- Collage all sides and top of the box. When dry, give everything a coat of Mod Podge to seal and add sheen- colours pop and tiny bits stay glued on, when Mod Podge is added.
- **Do a “Think, Pair, Share” strategy with partners, while memory boxes are drying:**
 - **What songs are in YOUR special memory box?**
 - **What songs do you know in languages other than English?**
 - **What kind of music or songs do your parents (or other family members) listen to?**
 - **Can you sing songs about where we live?**

Be sure to jot down these songs, so you can sing them, or learn them later on.

Wrap up: *“What was your “AHA!” moment in this process? If you agree, tap your head so we don’t repeat anything.”*

Make learning visible: *“We are going to display all of the art cards, memory boxes and button strings as a collaborative artwork. Just like in a choir where each individual singer contributes to the whole choir to perform the music, we’ll each contribute our artistry to create one large art piece.”* We interspersed these artworks with student writing and reflections about their collections and memories; we had the choir perform the songs that we’d explored.

If you create artwork inspired by a choral work, let the Choral Canada Advocacy Committee know!
Email photos to Diana Clark: moondancemusic@shaw.ca