

The Stars are with the Voyager

Lesson plans for an exploration of choral and visual arts for students grades 2-7

An initiative of Choral Canada's Advocacy Committee

developed by

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General learning outcomes:

- To help students explore the similarities and differences between choral music and visual art
- To create a personal art piece that explores elements and principles of design in music and visual art
- To create a collaborative art piece that expresses and embodies students' interpretation of the ideas, forms and sounds of *The Stars are with the Voyager*, and to also demonstrate the collaborative nature of the art of choral singing.
- To encourage students to *value* Choral Music and Visual Art forms
- To nurture critical thinking skills in children

Example scripts to set up experiences, and questions that encourage critical thinking are italicized in these lesson plans. The intention is to demonstrate one possible approach to these explorations, and to inspire confidence with these strategies.

Key words: Form, Line, Melody, Texture, Colour, Mood, Repetition, Expansion, Flow, Harmony, Contrast

Day 1: Getting acquainted with *The Stars are with the Voyager* by Eleanor Daley through movement

Materials Needed:

- A recorded performance (or performers willing to perform the piece a number of times) of *The Stars are with the Voyager*, musical setting by Eleanor Daley (b. 1955), text by Thomas Hood (1799-1845)
- A choral score to match the performance voicing
 - *The Stars are with the Voyager* by Eleanor Daley is available from Rhythmic Trident Music Publishing as follows:
 - SATB– RTCA-004
 - SSAA– RTCA-005
 - SA– RTCA-006
 - TTBB– RTCA-003

Different performances will highlight different elements of the piece and will affect the visual art outcome, but this is also worth exploring if you have time to compare and contrast performances or vocal settings.

- Scarves approx. 40cm square or ribbons approx. 50cm long by 2-3 cm wide, or similar prop to enable students to respond kinesthetically to the music. Our scarves were cut from medium weight polyester stretch fabric that was shiny on one side – it had a weight to it, but still flowed, and the shiny side gave it a special mystique!

A suggested process for leading the exploration

*"We are going to explore a new piece of music, and these scarves will guide us on our journey through the music."
(show the scarves but don't hand them out just yet.)*

"First we need to get into our individual 'space bubble' so that we can explore the music safely."

TIP: Review that a 'space bubble' is about 1m x1m (or 3 squares of tile x 3 squares!) on the floor, not touching anyone or anything else but the floor. The 'space bubble' allows you to be able to move within it, but the bubble does not travel around the general space of the room. NON-LOCOMOTOR movement if you use dance terminology with students.

Once students are in their individual 'space bubbles', demo the scarves or ribbons:

"These scarves are connected to the choral music you will hear – the scarf never leaves your hand. (demo holding one by its corner) You may want to hold the scarf with two hands at times." (demo 'bullfighter' style)

Hand out the scarves. Students will immediately figure out ways of moving the scarves as you hand them out. As soon as possible, give some positive feedback on the manner in which children are moving the scarves: "ooh show that move to the class!" **Develop some student-created vocabulary to describe the manner in which the scarves are moving.**

"Now remember that your scarf is connected to the music – like a puppet on strings controlled by the music – when the music stops, you and your scarf... (stop) when the music soars your scarf... (soars). I wonder what the scarves will look like if the music is quiet? Or what will happen if the music changes mood? Let's let our scarves help us listen to the music to see what happens! Really try to focus on your own scarf so you feel the connection between it and the music."

Play or perform "The Stars are with the Voyager", and let students explore the piece silently in their space bubbles, using their scarves.

TIP: Some classes may prefer to have the lights dimmed low or off, to help students get deeper into their own experience.

Create a 'common language' from the vocabulary that is developing from responding to the music.

For example, our group came up with "rumble" to describe the opening low piano motive and the low wiggly scarf move that they responded with; "flow" to describe the first vocal melody and their corresponding scarf movement.

Discuss the mood of the piece.

"What do you hear? What do you think this piece is about? WHY do you think that? (critical thinking) What clues does the composer or poet give us?" (We spent another session examining the poetry. This first exploration focused on general musical elements)

Wrap up: *"What did the scarf teach us about this piece? What do you know for sure?"*

Day 2: Exploring *The Stars are with the Voyager* by creating an individual artwork

Materials Needed:

- A large print of *Pic Island 1924* by Lawren W. Harris (or another Canadian artwork that is similar in style, mood and line)
- 1-2 photographs of islands in water – full of realistic details!
- Chalk pastels (one box for two students works fine)
- Manila or construction paper in a neutral colour – we used light grey, 16"x24"
- Paper towel – one per student-artist for practicing technique with chalk pastel



- Tape a small sandwich baggie to the side of each desk and put a baby diaper wipe in it – this will be a very handy and no-fuss way for artists to clean their fingers while they work!
- Newsprint for desks and storing works

TIDY TIPS: When using chalk pastels, put down a sheet of newspaper on every desk. To clean up, gently tap the dust off the finished work onto the newsprint, then fold the newsprint to keep the chalk dust inside. Stack finished art works between sheets of clean newspaper to keep chalk from rubbing on other artworks. *We laminated the finished artworks so they could be displayed without worry of smudging. This also brought out the colours to great effect.

Part 1: Getting acquainted with *Pic Island 1924* by Lawren Harris

A suggested process for leading the exploration

(This was the first time the children had met Wendy, the visiting artist. She showed one of her first paintings from her childhood, to demonstrate that “everyone can try, everyone can make something.”)

Gather children to hear about The Group of Seven – how Lawren Harris bought a railcar and had it stationed in various places in the Canadian wilderness; how he and his artist friends would try to capture the essence of the vast Canadian wilderness in their painting.

Show a poster print of *Pic Island*.

Discussion & Critical Thinking

“What is unusual about this painting? If you had the same thought as someone else’s comment, do this (show tapping fingers gently to your head) to show that your brain is thinking the same thing.”

Children share what they see. They notice that there are no trees, no rock details, no sand, etc.

Show one or two photographs of islands in water – a similar scene, but the photographs capture the realistic details of the scene. *“The camera sees everything. But if you are a painter, you get to decide what to include, what time of day it is, what you want people to FEEL.”*

“Why do you think Lawren Harris did it this way?” (austere, monumental, spiritual?)

“Have you ever seen a purple island? Why do you think that Lawren Harris got rid of the small details?”

“What SOUNDS would you make to describe the mood of the painting? (Children offered that they would make peaceful sounds. One says he feels the waves, one says that she feels like the painter was alone.) “HOW DID THE ARTIST DO THAT?” Compare again to the detail of the photograph.

“How would you describe the ‘lines’ that he used?” (Lines and shapes move our eyes around the picture)

“The shapes: what do they remind you of? How would you describe them?”

“What would it look like for you to paint this?” (Children mimed using an imaginary brush in air)

*“That looked like some of your scarf words that you used to describe *The Stars are with the Voyager*.”*

“Show me your scarf words again: show a softee, show soar, show flow...”

*“If you imagined all these things as LINES, you could make a PICTURE. We’ll create that flow with big areas and small areas, just like in *Pic Island* and *The Stars are with the Voyager*.”*

Students go to their work spaces that have been set up with newsprint, paper towel, chalk pastel, etc. Point out the wet wipe in the baggie to keep fingers clean 😊

PRACTICE chalk pastel techniques on paper towel first:

Choose one colour from your box. DRAW A LINE on your paper towel with the tip of the chalk pastel.

*Use the side of your pastel to draw a FLOW. (use the descriptive words that **your** students came up with.)*

Try smudging your line with your finger tip or a Q-tip. (fingers work better)

Make cross hatching pattern ###. Experiment with smudging to soften the lines.

Make a few lines in horizontal direction; use another colour in a vertical direction – cross-hatched.

SMUDGE to blend colours and make new colours.

STIPPLE – with little dots: “Remember to look where you are working”. “What would your voice sound like if this was music?”

Hand out big construction paper in a neutral colour.

*“Think about what your scarf did when it was responding to The Stars are with the Voyager. Let’s draw that same movement across the width of our paper. **Choose one colour (NOT BLACK).** Use the descriptive words that **your** students used to describe the music. We ended up with, “Draw FLOW. Draw a softie, draw a rumble”. Papers might have a series of horizontal lines across them.*

Meet back in a discussion group. *“Think about the mood of the song. (You may want to play it again.) If this song had a colour, what might it be? Why do you think that?” (Students offer ideas.)*

“We’re going to colour our chalk drawing to show the mood of The Stars are with the Voyager.”

DEMONSTRATE some techniques: how to blend two colours with your finger, how to overlap colours. Show a colour wheel. “Think about if you want HARMONY (colours side by side on the colour wheel) or CONTRAST (colours that reach across the wheel to say “howdy!”)

Sample questions to ask as children are working: *“What part of the music are you showing there? You show me your favorite part of your artwork, then I’ll show you mine.”*

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

DAY 3: Exploring *The Stars are with the Voyager* by creating a collaborative artwork

Materials Needed: (the more recycled materials, the better!)

- Plastic mesh fencing – deer fencing or garden mesh suitable for weaving, available at home improvement stores such as Home Depot. \$30 buys a huge roll. Tape the edges where they may be sharp after you cut the mesh
- Recycled fabric roughly cut in 2-5cm wide strips. Old men’s ties work well for weaving too. Cut-up t-shirts and fleece blankets worked well.
- If you are adding avatar “voyagers” to the finished weaving, you need skin tone painted wooden beads and pipe cleaners
- Text of *The Stars are with the Voyager*, information about the poet, Thomas Hood, information about the composer, Eleanor Daley. (a Canadian composer who has written a ton of great choral music!)

Discussion & Critical Thinking – we worked on a large carpet for this part.

Exploring the text of *The Stars are with the Voyager*.

Provide copies of the poetry by Thomas Hood, or use the choral scores to read the text. We started with talking about the use of the pronoun “he” in the poetry... From there we analyzed the text.

“Does knowing the meaning of the poetry change the way we listen to this piece?”

“Do any colours or shapes come to mind? What about our Expansion and Flow? How is that in the text?”

Show weaving examples: including knitting, woven fabric. Have students examine their jeans for woven fabric examples.

“We are going to make 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. It’s going to be a weaving, so we can all weave our imaginations together.” ☺

"We will create an artwork that reflects the OBJECTS, colours and words of the text of The Stars are with the Voyager. Can you name some objects in the song? (stars, moon, sun, voyager, light, time, etc.)"

"What COLOURS come to mind?"

Use some fabric strips to create rough shapes of the objects named in the song, on the centre of the carpet – students gather around.

(Students decided that there should be a sun, a moon, and an earth. Your students might agree on other shapes drawn from the text of the song.)

"We need to connect these objects with our weaving. We need LINES to take us around, and make us look around the art work, like on a map."

Show Pic Island painting reproduction again. *"See how lines in the artwork make us look around so that we don't get stuck. We need to have some of these lines follow, follow... like the song says."*

Lay a few more fabric strips around in lines to swirl around and connect the objects roughed out on the floor. *"It doesn't have to look like real nature. It can be abstract, and use symbols to represent things."*

Show the plastic fencing material: caution about the sharp edges-tape them up but caution is still in order.

Plot out with masking tape on the fencing, where the main shapes will go. (We made tape outlines for the sun, the moon, and the stars.)

"We'll use recycled fabric strips to draw." You will need to demonstrate how to weave in and out in out of the fencing and how to do the circular weaving – "just like a cinnamon bun!"

"Make swoopy lines. Put your colour next to another similar colour, then follow, follow, follow – just like the song says."

Tips: Separate the recycled fabric strips into "warm" and "cool" colour piles. Designate some colours exclusively for your main shapes, so they stand out from the background. Have each artist work on a section of the canvas, and "follow, follow" along beside other lines – sometimes together moving in unison, sometimes moving away from each other. Have the artists stand back and be thoughtful about their work frequently: what is working well, what needs tweaking... just like a choral rehearsal!

It took us one afternoon to get the main shapes roughed in and the main lines woven. Another two afternoons in small groups filled in more of the background.

DAY 4: Creating personal "avatars" to attach to the collaborative weaving work

We examined and discussed Thomas Hood's poetry again and decided that we all are "Voyagers" in our own lives. Using pipe cleaners, big wooden beads, and recycled wire and scrap fabric, we made mini-figures to attach to the scene. Within a few moments of learning how to make the basic structure of the pipe cleaner figure, students added their own elements to their avatars, so that each one was unique. Students discussed where on the weaving their avatar would be, and why.

Further suggested extensions, voyages, and explorations

As we explored Eleanor Daley's composition, we immediately found ourselves wanting to explore other pathways on our journey of discovery! If we had the time to go deeper, we might go here:

Research the life, musical style, and artistic contributions of Canadian composer, Eleanor Daley.

Compare and contrast various performances of *The Stars are with the Voyager*: How do changes in tempo or voicing influence the mood of the piece?

Go hear a live performance of choral music in your community! Many arts organizations offer grants to see live professional performances, and most choral organizations will happily work with you to accommodate student audiences at dress rehearsals or performances.

Sing *The Stars are with the Voyager*. Our group of young students was only able to sing the melody or sing along to a recording, but having the choral notation in their hands and making the connection between symbol and sound was powerful.

Compose short vocal pieces inspired by lines of this poem. Work in collaborative learning groups, using graphic notation to symbolize the sounds. Perform these new pieces!

Choreograph *The Stars are with the Voyager* in collaborative learning groups, using the scarves.

Conduct *The Stars are with the Voyager*. Learn beat patterns for this piece (3/4 & 4/4). How might a conductor show "expansion" and "flow" to the choir with conducting gestures?

*If you create artwork inspired by a choral work, let the Choral Canada Advocacy Committee know!
Email photos to Diana@coastalsoundmusic.com*