

# Improvisation In the Elementary General Music Classroom

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Rain on the Green Grass

from Purposeful Pathways, Book 1

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## PATHWAY TO LITERACY: Discovering ♪

- Students pat the steady beat while singing the song. Point to icons as they sing.

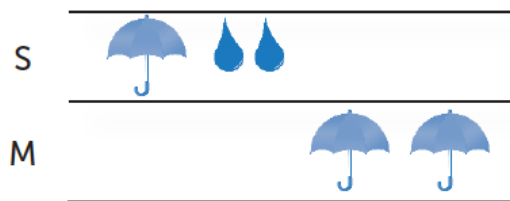


- Use questioning to support the children in discovering that when the umbrella appears there is one sound on the beat and when the raindrops appear there are two sounds on the beat.
- “What happens when the sun appears?” No sound at all!
- Label the beat with no sound as a rest -- ♪

## PATHWAY TO LITERACY: Decoding *so* and *mi*

- Students determine when the melody moves to *mi* and move the icons down one space. (All of the icon begin in the *so* space.)





- Convert the icons on the staff to rhythmic notation.
- Students sing in rhythm syllables.
- Students sing using solfa and hand signs.
- Students sing with text.

## Rain on the Green Grass

Traditional/arr. Sams

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### PATHWAY TO ENSEMBLE: Steady beat chord bordun with color parts by word cue

- Students pat the steady beat and sing song. Transfer to **chord bordun** on **BX/BM**.
- Clap on the rests. Students determine the pattern and join in. Transfer to triangle.
- Prepare guiro part by scraping arm with finger on cue words, "green grass" and "roof-top," then transfer to guiro.
- Put all parts together with song.

### PATHWAY TO RHYTHMIC IMPROVISATION: 4-beat patterns using ♩ ♪ ♫ ☞



- Speech followed by four beats of rest (2X).
- Fill in the rests with four ♩ (clapping).
- Fill in the rests with ♪
- Model improvisation using ♩, ♪, ♪, ♪
- Students improvise.
- Small groups of students transfer improvisation to triangles.
- Put together with song in ABA form.

### PATHWAY to Movement: Contrasting Movement in ABA Form

- Read the poem. Students determine it is ABA form

*Rain is falling down.  
Such a peaceful sound.  
Oh, so gently, rain is falling  
All around.*

*Rain is falling down.  
Thunderstorms abound!  
Lightning crashing, storm clouds thrashing,  
What a sound!*

*Rain is falling down.  
Such a peaceful sound.  
Oh, so gently, rain is falling  
All around.*

- Students perform smooth, flowing movement during the A Sections and stationary, angular shapes during the B Section.
- Add a soundscape accompaniment.
- Perform with the song and improvisation in a macro ABA form.

### Wee Willie Winkie

from Purposeful Pathways, Book 1  
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### PATHWAY to LITERACY: Rhythm detective game

- Lead 4-beat patterns (below). Students echo.
- Students identify which card matches the rhythm performed.
- End with ♩ ♪ ♪ ♩ to prepare the ostinato used later in the lesson.





PATHWAY to PARTWORK: Poem with ostinato

- Students read rhythm of poem.
- Add text.
- Students speak poem and pat steady beat.
- Performs BP ostinato (pat/clap). Ask the students to join in when ready.  
*(simultaneous imitation)*
- Divide class. Half performs rhyme. Half performs ostinato.
- Trade jobs.
  
- Transfer **BP** to drum/triangle. Pat=drum. Clap=triangle.
- Transfer rhythm of poem to woodblock.
- Students perform in ABA form with UTP ostinato.
  - A=Rhythmic Speech with ostinato
  - B=Woodblock with ostinato



# Wee Willie Winkie

Traditional/ arr. Sams

Wee Wil - li Win - kie runs through the town.

Time. Time for bed. Time. Time for bed.

Up - stairs and down - stairs in his night gown.

Time. Time for bed. Time. Time for bed.

Rap - ping at the win - dows. Cry - ing through the locks.

Time. Time for bed. Time. Time for bed.

"Are your child - ren in their beds? For now it's eight o' clock."

Time. Time for bed. Time. Time for bed.

List-en to Wil-lie go. Run-ning up and down.

Tap-ping rhy-thms ev'-ry where. All through the town.

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## PATHWAY to IMPROVISATION: 4-beat rhythm patterns

- Review above as needed.
- Transfer **BP** to rhythm sticks. Play the floor on the pat. Click the sticks together on the clap.
- Rote teaching of the following chant (B Section):









9

List-en to Wil-lie go. Run-ning up and down.

13

Tap-ping rhy-thms ev'-ry where. All through the town.

- Speak the chant (count to four during the four beats of rest).
- Play four  with rhythm sticks on the floor (like a drum) during the rest measures.
- Play four  during the rest measures.
- Model 4-beat improvisation using    
- Students improvise.
- ABA Form
- **Grand Rondo** for assessment. Each time you get to the B Section four students get a turn to improvise solo. This is a perfect opportunity for **formative assessment** of all the students in the class, while everyone is actively making music together.

Chick, Chick, Chatterman  
from Purposeful Pathways, Book 2  
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#### PATHWAY TO Pitch: *do re mi*

- Lead **solfa 4-beat echo patterns** using *mi* and *do*. Use the **solfa tone ladder** to visually reinforce the pitches and to heighten awareness of the space between the tones. Make sure that students are using hand signs when singing.

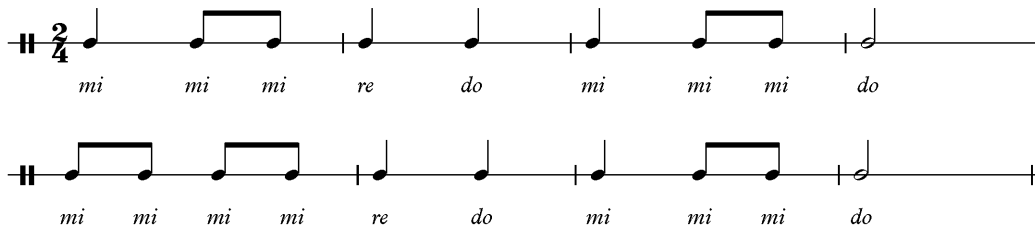
*mi*  
?  
*do*

- Review the pitch, *re*, and the appropriate hand sign. Add it to the **solfa tone ladder**.
- Lead **solfa 4-beat echo patterns** using *do re mi*. (Always remember to pull patterns from the song material you will be teaching in any given lesson.)

#### PATHWAY TO Literacy: *do re mi*

- Students read the rhythm.
- Students read the melody from stick notation, using **solfa** and hand signs.



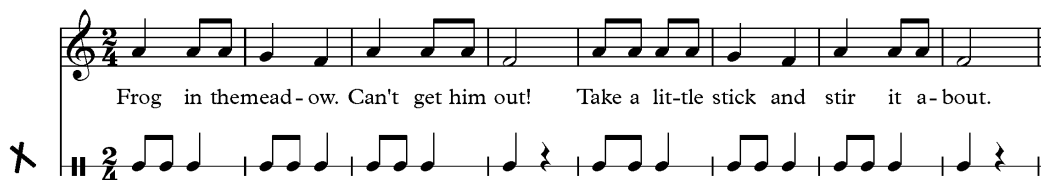


- Students read the melody from the staff, using **solfa** and hand signs.
- Add text and sing the song.



#### PATHWAY TO Ensemble: Singing with UTP ostinato

- Students read the stick notation for the rhythmic ostinato notated above, saying the rhythm syllables and clapping the pattern. NOTE: This is the rhythm they have just mastered with their feet during the quick reaction game. Point that fact out if they don't notice it on their own!
- Divide the class in half. Half sings the song. Half claps the **ostinato**. Trade jobs.



- Move a small number of students to rhythm sticks (or **UTP** of your choice) and have this group accompany the singing of "Frog in the Meadow." Repeat as needed to give all (or many) students an opportunity to play the **UTP**.

#### PATHWAY TO Ensemble: Broken bordun with UTP ostinato

- Prepare **BX ostinato** by patting. You have two choices for the sticking pattern.



Or:





- Transfer to **BX**. Give several children an opportunity to play.
- Put singing, rhythms sticks, and **BX** together.

## Frog in the Meadow

Traditional/arr. Sams

The musical score is written in 2/4 time and consists of two systems. Each system has three staves: a vocal melody staff in treble clef, a rhythm sticks staff (marked with an 'X' and a double bar line), and a barred instrument staff (marked with 'BX' and a treble clef). The lyrics are written below the vocal staff.

**System 1:**

- Vocal: Frog in the mead - ow. Can't get him out!
- Rhythm Sticks: Four measures of quarter notes, followed by a quarter rest in the fourth measure.
- BX: Four measures of quarter notes, followed by a quarter rest in the fourth measure.

**System 2:**

- Vocal: Take a lit - tle stick and stir it a - bout.
- Rhythm Sticks: Four measures of quarter notes, followed by a quarter rest in the fourth measure.
- BX: Four measures of quarter notes, followed by a quarter rest in the fourth measure.

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### PATHWAY TO Improvisation: *do re mi with do as tonic*

- Set the barred instruments: F=*do* G=*re* A=*mi*
- Acclimate the students with **4-beat echo patterns**, singing **solfa** and playing.



F is do do do do do do

G is re re re re re re

A is mi mi mi mi mi mi

mi re do do do re re do

- Make the last pattern the following pattern. Do it several times. Show the students the notation after they have learned to play the pattern.

- Play the pattern two times. Count to four during the rests.
- Improvise using *do re mi* during the rests. As always, you model first and then the students improvise, inspired by your model.
- Once the students are successful playing 4-beat melodic patterns, introduce the term **tonic**. **Tonic** is the home tone, the last pitch, the most important note. Tell the students that when they are improvising (or composing) there are three ways to make a particular pitch sound like the **tonic** of a song.
  1. Start with it.
  2. End with it.
  3. Play it a lot.

Chick, Chick, Chatterman  
from Purposeful Pathways, Book 2  
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PATHWAY TO Literacy: ♩ ♪ ♪ ♪

- Students read the rhythm of the rhyme, saying rhythm syllables.



Chick, chick, chat - ter man, how much are your geese?

Chick, chick, chat - ter - man, five cents a piece.

Chick, chick, chat - ter - man, that's too dear.

Chick, chick, chat - ter - man, get out of here!

- Add text.
- Study the text and notice that there is a conversation happening between a buyer and a seller at the market.

BUYER: Chick, chick, chatterman. How much are your geese?

SELLER: *Chick, chick, chatterman. Five cents a piece.*

BUYER: Chick, chick, chatterman. That's too dear.

SELLER: *Chick, chick, chatterman. Get out of here!*

- Divide the class in half. Half speaks the buyer's words. The other half speaks the seller's words. Trade parts.

#### PATHWAY TO Partwork: Rhyme over body percussion ostinato

- Perform the **BP ostinato**. Once you have established the **ostinato**, bring the students in, speaking the rhyme in two groups.
- Ask the students to join you on the **BP ostinato (simultaneous imitation)** and then you drop out once they have it. Perform the rhyme over top of their **BP ostinato**.
- Divide the class in half. Half performs the **BP ostinato**. The other half speaks the rhyme (both roles). Trade parts.
- Divide the class into thirds. The middle of the three groups begins the **BP ostinato**. The other two groups perform the rhyme in two parts. Rotate the students through all three groups.
- For an advanced challenge ask the students to perform the **BP ostinato** and the rhyme simultaneously.



## Chick, Chick, Chatterman

Traditional/arr. Sams

clap

4/4

Chick, chick, chat - ter man, how much are your geese?

snap

pat

stamp

clap

Chick, chick, chat - ter - man, five cents a piece.

snap

pat

stamp

clap

Chick, chick, chat - ter - man, that's too dear.

snap

pat

stamp

clap

Chick, chick, chat - ter - man, get out of here!

snap

pat

stamp

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### PATHWAY TO Improvisation: Question and Answer

- Speak the following chart (say “Question” for the Q and “Answer” for the A), while pointing the steady beat.

Q 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
 A 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
 Q 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
 A 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

- Repeat. This time you speak the questions and ask the students to speak the answers. Continue pointing to the steady beat.
- Say to the students, “I just got out of my rocket ship on your planet. I do not speak your planet’s language. You do not speak my planet’s language. We’re going to have a conversation. I ask you questions and you give me your answers. Each of us speaking our planet’s language.” Then model very silly rhythmic







“space talk” as you do the first question. The students will follow your lead.  
WARNNG: There will be laughter!

- Divide the class in half and experiment with different characters having rhythmic conversations such as farm animals, dogs and cats, baby talk, etc. Ask for student ideas. Trade which group gets to go first.
- Once the students have explored this rhythmic improvisation through vocal play, explain that this is called **Question and Answer Improvisation** and it can be performed in different media.
- Improvise clapping questions. The students improvise clapping answers.
- Divide the class in half for clapping improvisation. Trade parts.
- When the students have become comfortable with **Question and Answer Improvisation** in a large group (and this will likely be on a subsequent day working with this material), have them work on improvisation with a partner. Spread the pairs out around the room so they have their own little space for this practice. There will be lots of sound and it will appear a bit chaotic. That’s part of the process. You can almost count on this failing the first time. Don’t give up!
- Use the rhyme as a recurring A Section, giving students a lot of opportunity to practice **Question and Answer Improvisation** in contrasting sections of a **Grande Rondo**.
- Add the **BP ostinato** to your final performance.

Lil’ Liza Jane  
from Purposeful Pathways, Book 3  
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PATHWAY TO Literacy: 

- Lead **4-beat echo patterns**, making every second pattern 
- “What pattern am I using over and over again? Can you write it down?”  

- Sing the melody on “loo” and ask the students to listen for 
- Sing on “loo” again. Students clap the syncopated rhythm whenever they hear it.
- Students learn to sing the two syncopated patterns in **solfa**.

  
*la so mi so*

  
*mi mi re do*

- Sing the odd numbered measures in **solfa** and ask the students sing the even measures, alternating between their two patterns. (Don’t worry about the sixteenth notes. Just sing one eighth note instead of two sixteenths in the first measure.) Repeat this a couple of times so that the students get it in their ears.



- Students sing the entire song in **solfa**, as you point the pitches on the **solfa tone ladder**.
- Put the text on the board. Students learn the song with text through **echo imitation**.
- Students sing entire song with text.

Traditional/arr. Sams



I've got a house in Bal - ti - more, 'lil Li - za Jane.

Li - - - za, lit - tle Li - za Jane.

Brus - sels car - pet on the floor, 'lil Li - za Jane.

Li - - - za, Li - za Jane.

Oh E - li - za, 'lil Li - za Jane. Oh E - li - za, 'lil Li - za Jane.

Li - za, lit - tle Li - za Jane. Li - za, Li - za Jane.

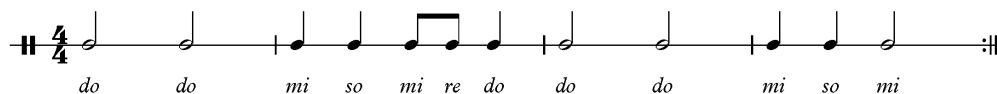
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## PATHWAY TO Partwork: Melody with melodic ostinato

- Students read the rhythm of the **melodic ostinato**.

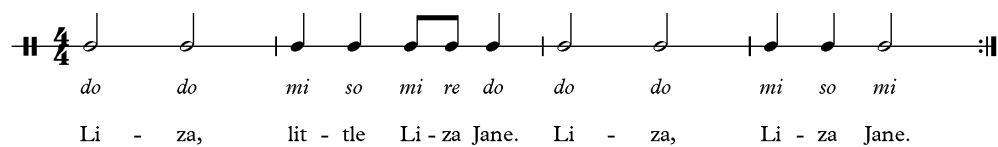


- Students read the pitches, using **solfa** with hand signs.




- Students sing the **melodic ostinato**, using **solfa** and hand signs, while you sing the melody.
- Students add text to the **melodic ostinato**.



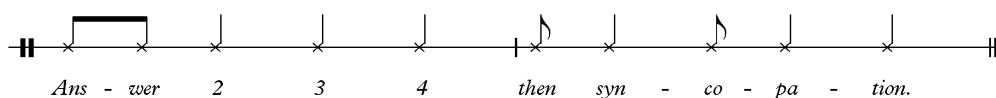
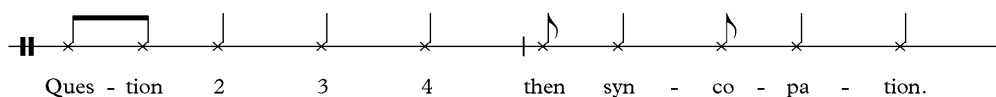
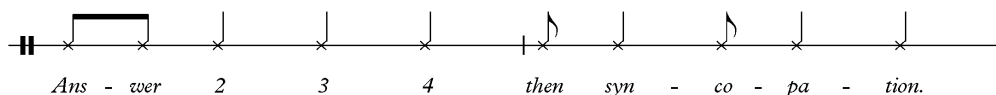
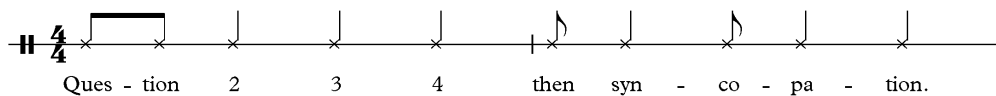


- Students sing the **melodic ostinato** with the text, while you sing the melody.
- Divide the class in half and sing in two parts. Trade parts.

## PATHWAY TO Improvisation: Question & Answer

- Do a phrase form analysis of the piece: a a' b b'
- Remind the students that this is Question and Answer form. Question and Answer form is especially useful when improvising. Notice that every phrase ends with  as the final motive. We going to do the same thing with our improvisation.
- Speak the questions and ask the students to speak the answers.

## Question and Answer Improvisation



- Improvise rhythmically using **BP** for the questions, making sure to end each phrase with a syncopated rhythm. Students answer with an improvisation, making sure to end each phrase with improvisation.
- Individual students improvise the questions.
- Break the students into pairs for paired improvisations. If possible, have two timbres working in each pair. For example, one hand drum and one pair of



rhythm sticks in each pair. Hand drums give the questions and rhythm sticks give the answers.

- Combine this Question and Answer improvisation with the song in a satisfying form as a culminating experience.
- **ADVANCED CHALLENGE:** Take this improvisation experience and move it to pentatonic improvisation on the barred instruments.