

Robin Romine
Beginning Strings Rote Song Assignment
Reflection

For my rote song assignment I chose “My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean,” a Scottish folk song. I chose it for several reasons. It is a widely known song which has withstood the test of time. It uses the appropriate range (with the added note of the low B) while having the unusual feature of spending very little time on the tonic. It is also in triple meter, which is less common for kids to have experience with. Most of all, I personally love the melody and believe the song holds much potential as a learning tool.

Once a class has learned the melody and basic bass line, there are many possibilities for activities. While most of the class plays the bass line, students could take turns playing the melody and experimenting with the dotted quarter rhythm (placing it in different spots) as a first step to improvising. The next step could be replacing chord tones within the melody with other chord tones or non-chord tones.

As a way to make the bass line more interesting, especially since the violins do not have an open C string, the part could be split up so that cellos play the downbeats and upper strings play beats 2 and 3 (violas would echo the same notes as cello but violins would substitute the C's with G's [the fifth in the IV chord]). This would create a bit of harmony in accompaniment as well as something of an oom-pah-pah effect over which soloists or a group play the melody.

Other variations can be done with the melody. Students who are bowing can try placing slurs in different spots and create a legato effect. Alternatively, playing staccato while arco could have cute-sounding results.

As students become more and more familiar with the song, the class could be split up with one section (not necessarily by instrument) playing bass notes, one section playing the melody, and a third section attempting a harmony part. This would be done all at once at first so that students can try their idea without the pressure of a spotlight on them. After doing this a few times, volunteers could each share their harmony part while everyone else plays the melody or bass. If it works, the student can teach the rest of the class the harmony and the sections take turns with the new part. New layers can be added in a similar way. First, experiment as a class; second, perform each new harmony idea individually with the class; third, teach the class the part altogether; fourth, each section switches off being melody, bass, or harmony.

Doing this last activity is especially important as it gives young players autonomy in their creativity and decision-making. Furthermore, students get practice being in a teacher role, if only for a couple minutes at a time. Not only does it build leadership skills, but confidence as well as the class *must* listen to that student in order to learn the part. Additionally, hearing a group of musicians play something that the student made up definitely provides an instant boost of confidence.

Even more freedom can be given to the arranging process as students gain more skills and can create more textures. Class time should also be given to playing the piece freely, on a loop, without the intention of creating specific parts to lock in, but simply to improvise, or get more comfortable with a certain part. This allows students to play what they personally need or want to work on or try the other parts they heard and liked. While this sounds like the previous activity of everyone playing their harmony at once, it is differentiated by the lack of a prescribed

goal. Some may want to simply master the melody to their own standards. This lets students *enjoy* playing at whatever level they happen to be.