

## Soundscapes

### Model Lesson: Layering Found Sounds into a Composition

#### Overview

In this strategy, students explore ways to create a soundscape. A soundscape, as defined by Murray Schafer (1977), is an acoustic environment that consists of events heard, rather than objects seen. In this model lesson, students use found sounds to play a soundscape to accompany a primary source photograph.

#### Materials

- ▶ found sound objects (see Preparation for ideas)
- ▶ chart paper
- ▶ *On the Streets in a New York Blizzard* (page 151)
- ▶ *Soundscape Planner* (page 152)
- ▶ *Elements of Music* (page 138)
- ▶ audio-recording device (*optional*)

#### Standards

##### Grades K–2

- ▶ Uses correct vocabulary associated with time and identifies examples of change
- ▶ Demonstrates and explains reasons for personal choices of musical ideas
- ▶ Conveys expressive intent for a specific purpose

##### Grades 3–5

- ▶ Uses correct vocabulary associated with time to identify examples of change and cause-and-effect relationships
- ▶ Explains selected and organized musical ideas
- ▶ Presents music and conveys connection to expressive intent

##### Grades 6–8

- ▶ Identifies and uses various sources for reconstructing the past, such as documents, letters, diaries, maps, and photos
- ▶ Explains how knowledge relates to personal choices and expressive intent when creating and performing music

##### Grades 9–12

- ▶ Compares and contrasts various sources for reconstructing the past, such as documents, letters, diaries, maps, and photos
- ▶ Demonstrates how sounds and musical ideas can represent concepts or texts

## Soundscapes (cont.)

### Preparation

Gather a collection of objects found around the classroom and in the natural environment that students can make sounds with, such as pencils, paper that can be crumpled, dried leaves, rocks, metal water bottles, or rulers. Additional suggestions are provided in the Specific Grade-Level Ideas.

### Procedure

1. Explore with students the objects you collected and experiment with how they make different sounds, such as banging a pencil against a water bottle to make a metallic clank, or rubbing two dried leaves together to make a swishing sound.
2. Introduce the idea of a music score as a means of visually documenting how the composition will be played. Explain that a soundscape is like a music score, except that it doesn't have to be written down and represents things that are heard, rather than seen.
3. Display or distribute the primary source photo *On the Streets in a New York Blizzard*. Tell students that one way to explore the meaning of an image is through sound and invite them to create a soundscape for the image.
4. Explain that this photo was taken in 1899 in New York City. As a class, examine the image for evidence of the past, comparing the image to things we see in a city in the present day. Examine the image for the presence of sounds (such as crunching feet in the snow, screeching of brakes, blowing of a train whistle, talking, stomping of horse hooves on the streets, rattling of carriages). Record students' ideas on chart paper.
5. As a class, brainstorm ideas for found sounds students could use to bring the image to life, similar to a soundtrack for a movie. Divide students into groups and tell them they will create soundscapes for the photo.
6. Have students consider the following when creating their soundscape:
  - when a sound is played
  - when a sound is repeated
  - which sounds are played at the same time
  - how loud or soft the sounds are played (dynamics)
  - how high or low the sounds are (pitch)
  - the timing of the sounds (rhythm and tempo)
7. Distribute the *Soundscape Planner*. Use the Planning Questions to help students generate ideas. As needed, demonstrate with each group the difference between organizing the playing of their sounds and playing all the sounds at the same time.
8. Have each group perform their soundscape. People listening should feel they are in the moment. If desired, record students' soundscapes using any audio-recording software available to you.
9. Using the Discussion Questions, explore with students how music helped them understand the content of the photograph.

A soundscape can be performed by small groups performing their section one right after the other.

## Soundscapes *(cont.)*

### Planning Questions

- ▶ How will you use what something sounds like (timbre) to create your composition?
- ▶ At what speed (tempo) will you play your found sounds?
- ▶ How loud (dynamics) will you play the found sounds and in what order?
- ▶ How might you layer the sounds (texture)?
- ▶ What is the mood or atmosphere of the environment you are re-creating?
- ▶ How will you re-create sounds in the most authentic way?
- ▶ How will you bring your audience into the environment you are re-creating as quickly as possible?
- ▶ Would you hear sounds in your chosen environment separately or together? Are the sounds continuous, or do they stop every so often?

### Discussion Questions

- ▶ In what ways did the soundscapes help you understand the image?
- ▶ In what ways did your soundscape help you understand the mood and atmosphere of the environment you re-created?
- ▶ What activities, objects, and events helped you create your soundscape?
- ▶ How did the creation of a soundscape bring each distinct environment to life?
- ▶ What choices did you make in re-creating the environment through sound?



## Soundscapes (cont.)

### Specific Grade-Level Ideas

#### Grades K–2

Students might create a soundscape for the poem “April Rain Song” by Langston Hughes.

Students also can re-create the sounds of an ancient city, rural town, urban city, or weather event or explore the sound in a text such as *Locomotive* by Brian Floca. To learn more about this text, read the review “Locomotive” by Ericka Thulin Dawes at *The Classroom Bookshelf* blog ([www.theclassroombookshelf.com/2013/09/2014-caldecott-award-winner-locomotive/](http://www.theclassroombookshelf.com/2013/09/2014-caldecott-award-winner-locomotive/)).

#### Grades 6–8

Locate primary source photographs or sketches about your chosen historical time period of study by visiting the Library of Congress website. Gather multiple photographs of the same historical moment in time and have groups choose a set of photographs to explore through sound.

Students also could build on the work from the previous lesson in which students created found sounds for Joy Harjo’s poem “Ah, Ah” by using those found sounds to create a soundscape.

#### Grades 3–5

Students can create soundscapes to understand how settlement patterns are influenced by the discovery and use of resources. For example, students could explore the sounds of Colorado mining towns as centers of settlement in the late 19th century. They also could investigate the growth of industry and cities along the fall line of the Appalachian Mountains starting in the 18th century. Soundscapes also help students understand differences in urban and rural children’s lives in the early and mid-19th centuries as they relate to industrialization.

Consider studying the photographs of Dorothea Lange, who documented the hardships of migrating families during the Great Depression, which are available through the Library of Congress website. If desired, play audio or video clips of Woody Guthrie, whose music was shaped by the hardships of the times. Many of these clips are available through the PBS website.

#### Grades 9–12

Invite students take a walk in a community to listen for sounds and then create a soundscape that reflects different areas of the community. Ask students to consider how sound can illuminate life, activity, and issues in the community. Ask students to consider, “How might soundscapes point to policies that need to exist or existing policies that need to be revised?” This might include the design of spaces, the way in which spaces are used by communities, and community resources and activities.

A musical composition is “the process of making or forming a piece of music by combining the parts, or elements of music.”

—Jon Brantingham (n.d., para. 42)

## On the Streets in a New York Blizzard



Photograph by Joseph Byron. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection, LC-DIG-det-4a09017.

## Soundscape Planner

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Look carefully at the photograph, sketch, painting, video clip, or other resource available to you. Think about the activities, objects, events, and sounds that might have been heard at the time. Then complete the chart to plan your soundscape.

Describe the primary source. Consider the activities, events, and/or objects represented.	What sounds might have been heard?	How will you re-create these sounds?