

Musical experiment (Primary)

This activity uses the **Untold Stories** from the SS St. Louis <http://education.hmd.org.uk/case-studies/the-ss-st-louis/read> as the inspiration for students to create a musical soundscape and perform it for an audience.

Using the case study as a guide, **share** the story of the refugee passengers with the students. Try to **tell** the story in your own words. You might find the script in our primary assembly <http://education.hmd.org.uk/resources/hmd-2011-primary-assembly> or the St Louis presentation <http://education.hmd.org.uk/resources/hmd-2011-primary-assembly-presentation> helpful.

Challenge the students to recreate **Untold Stories** from the ship in a soundscape which uses pictures and music. **Talk** through some of the scenes in the story and **ask** everyone to think about the sounds which might have been heard (eg when the St Louis was in Hamburg harbour we might have heard seagulls crying or the sound of luggage being dragged over stones. When the ship reached Cuba we might have heard the hooters of smaller boats. When the ship was turned away we might have heard a passenger crying, when asylum is offered there may have been a cheer). **List** all the possible sounds on the board.

Direct the students to work in groups of between three and six. **Divide** the sounds between the groups. Each group should work on up to three sounds. **Give** each group three blank A5 sized cards. **Explain** that they are going to design a set of pictures to match their sounds. Each sound picture can be either a drawing of what made the original sound eg the ship's bell or groups can invent a new symbol to represent the sound.

Allow the groups to experiment with classroom instruments to try to represent the sounds. They may use up to three instruments to recreate individual sounds.

Remind everyone that a voice counts as an instrument. They could find more ways to represent the sounds by playing an instrument in an unusual way eg strumming the strings inside a piano rather than using the keyboard.

When each group has created their sounds **bring** all the groups together to **revisit** the **Untold Story**. **Explain** that you need to put the pictures and sounds together in the right order. **Ask** each group to hold up their cards. **Write** a sentence on the board to tell the part of the story the picture and sound represents. This will form a narrator's speech and you will need it for the final performance. **Ask** if some sounds happen more than once in the story? If the answer is yes then you will need to **make** extra copies of the sound picture which represents that particular sound. You could **use** a photocopier or **scan** and **print** them.

Ask two students to hold each end of a piece of string. Using clothes pegs **hang** each picture on the string. Now the class orchestra can put the sounds together, using the pictures to help them play their piece of music or soundscape for the first time.

Select one student to be the conductor and **give** them a conductor's baton, or a pointer and **ask** them to point to each picture. When the baton points to their sound picture the group which created that sound should play it. **Ask** the conductor to experiment by pointing to some pictures for longer periods than others. The orchestra must keep making the sound for as long as the conductor points to their picture.

Change conductors and string holders and **experiment** with different ways of moving through the soundscape. Perhaps the conductor could point to a sound more than once so that it has to be repeated or could point the baton towards the ceiling to represent silence.

Try playing the story backwards or **ask** the conductor to point to the pictures in random order. **Try** playing very quickly and very slowly. Should some sounds be louder than others?

Decide together which version of the soundscape everyone likes. **Ask** how many times everyone thinks it should be played and whether certain parts of the composition need to be repeated before moving on to the next sound?

Choose a narrator or a group of narrators and try to **fit** the words to the soundscape.

Share the composition with others, perhaps in a special assembly. **Tell** everyone that it is dedicated to the refugee passengers from the SS St Louis and that it is called **Untold Stories**.