



SOUND IDEAS



ELEMENTARY: BETTER TOGETHER—BLENDING THE APPROACHES

By Darla Meek

The following pages are resources provided by the author in extension of the February 2025 SOUTHWESTERN MUSICIAN issue Sound Ideas article.

“Funga Alafia”

Welcome Song

Adapted from *Journey Around the Globe with Recorder!*

by Darla Meek



OBJECTIVES:

- Students will aurally recognize, sing, and notate the pitch *high do* in a familiar song, using proper solfège syllables, hand signs, and standard musical notation.
- Students will use *high do* in combination with *do, re, mi, sol, and la* to create and notate a short melodic composition and play it on soprano recorder.
- Students will play soprano recorders, barred instruments, drums, and unpitched percussion using proper technique in an ensemble setting.
- Students will perform a Liberian dance using safe and artful movement.

MATERIALS:

- soprano recorders
- barred instruments
- PowerPoint (included in the resource)
- shaker
- conga or tubano drums
- two-toned bell (gankogui)

ABOUT THE SONG:

“Funga” is a folk etymology for “fanga,” a Vai (Liberian) word which means “power.” “Alafia” is a Yoruba blessing which means “good health” and “peace be with you.” “Ashe” [ah-shay] means “may it be so.” Some sources state that the words were set to a folk melody by American dancer LaRocque Bey, while other sources credit Nigerian drummer Babatunde Olatunji as the composer (Damm, 2015; Powell, 2019).

This song is often sung in the United States with gestures, touching the head and extending the arms, then the lips, then the heart and showing empty sleeves. These gestures symbolize greeting people with your thoughts, with your words, with your heart, and then assuring them that you have no tricks up your sleeve... that you have come in peace.

LESSON STEPS:

1. Introduction (Anticipatory Set/Motivation/Hook):

- “What are some ways you greet your family and friends when you see them?” (wave, shake hands, fist bump, say Hello, hug, etc.)
- Sing “Funga Alafia” for the students. “This is a phrase that means ‘Welcome! Peace be with you.’ The phrase is a combination of several West African languages.”
- Show slides from West Africa: foods, clothing, sites of interest, animals, etc. (Supplement the PowerPoint with additional information as desired.)
- Discuss similarities and differences between the images and the students’ own lifestyles.
- Display a map or globe. Approximate the distance from the students’ locality to that region.

PREPARATION THROUGH IMITATION AND EXPLORATION

2. Explore the tone set.

- Start with movement: use voice, a recorder, or a barred instrument to play C-pentatonic passages (*drm sl d'*) and invite the students to show the pitch levels with their bodies.
- Sing melodic fragments on a neutral syllable such as "loo" or "dah" that ascend to **high do** (e.g., sol-la-do' or mi-sol-la-do'), and invite students to echo.
- Challenge them to “translate” the neutral syllables to the solfège syllables they know. When they encounter *high do*, simply have them use the word “high” as a placeholder since they do not yet know the solfège syllable.

3. Teach the song.

- Play the song on soprano recorder or sing the song on a neutral syllable for the students, inviting them to pat the steady beat. Repeat, inviting them to sway to the macrobeat. Finally, have them perform both simultaneously.
- Invite the students to draw the melodic contour of the two phrases in the air as you sing.
- Guide the students to identify the form of the song. The rhythm repeats (a a) but the melody is slightly different (a b).
- Invite the students to perform the melody of the song using “body scale” or pitch levels. (Continue having them use the word “high” as a placeholder.)
- Echo-sing song with text phrase by phrase, then sing entire.

PRESENTATION/LABELING

4. Notate the song.

- Ask the students if the “high” note is a step, skip, or jump higher than *la*. (skip)
- Add *high do* to the class tone ladder.
- Show on the staff where *high do* is placed a skip above *la*. Show the students the Curwen hand sign for *high do*.

- Echo-sing four-beat melodic patterns including *high do*.

RELATED ACTIVITIES: accompaniment and movement

The musical score is for the song "Funga Alafia" in 4/4 time. It includes five staves:

- Vocal (V):** The melody line with lyrics: "Fun-ga a - la - fia a - shay a shay! Fun-ga a - la - fia a - shay a - shay!".
- SG (Soprano):** A line with whole notes and rests, corresponding to the vocal melody.
- AX (Alto):** A line with eighth notes and rests, corresponding to the vocal melody.
- Shaker:** A line with eighth notes, providing a steady rhythmic accompaniment.
- BX (Bass):** A line with whole notes, providing a harmonic accompaniment.

5. Teach the bass part.

- Have the children sing *do* on the macrobeat as you sing the song.
- Divide the students into two groups to sing the *do* ostinato and the melody. Switch.
- Have the children sing a *sol-la-sol-la* ostinato pattern on the steady beat as you sing the song. Divide the students into three groups to sing the two ostinati and the melody. Rotate through parts until solid.
- Display the barred instrument visual on the PowerPoint. Repeat the two previous tasks, this time "air-playing" with the visual and singing.

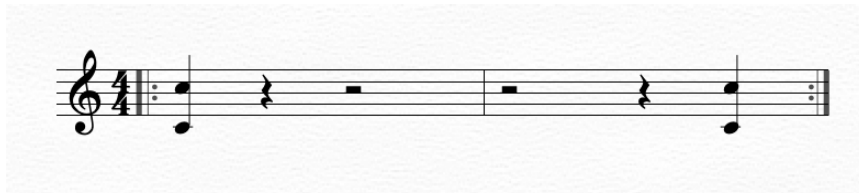


- Ask, "How many times will we repeat this ostinato in the time it takes to sing the song?" (8)
- Instruct students to go to the instruments and set up in *do pentatonic on C*.
- Model playing the steady beat on C and G. Students imitate. Then, begin playing a moving drone pattern (moving G to A). As the students continue the pattern, sing the song.
- Give students independent practice time as needed either individually or in partner sets.

- Have the students sing the song and play the accompaniment simultaneously. Repeat until solid. Have the students assess the class effort between each repetition.
- Ask students to self-evaluate using a number system with their fingers on their chests.
4 = I got it!
3 = I almost got it.
2 = I need more work.
1 = I bombed this time. Redo!

6. Teach soprano glockenspiel (color) part.

- Sing song, inserting snaps.
- Students repeat until it is secure.
- Snaps transfer to octave C's on the barred instruments.



- When the students are ready, divide into two groups to play the two instrument parts. Switch.
- Ask students to self-evaluate using a number system with their fingers on their chests.
4 = I got it!
3 = I almost got it.
2 = I need more work.
1 = I bombed this time. Redo!

7. Teach alto xylophone ostinato.

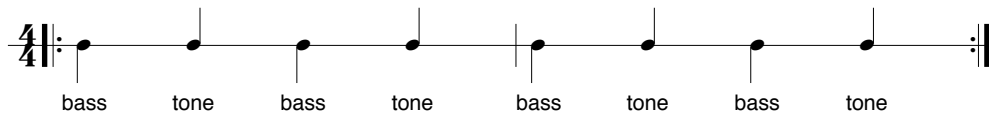
- Sing the following phrase: "I'll be your friend. May it never end!" (notated above)
- Instruct children to sing this ostinato as you sing the song. Switch parts.
- Divide children into groups as before to sing both parts simultaneously. Switch.
- Translate to solfège syllables (*do do do do', do la sol la do'*).
- Students pat the rhythm of the ostinato on their laps, alternating hands, while leader sings the song.
- Transfer to barred instruments.
- When the students can play without difficulty, divide the instrument parts as indicated above.

8. Teach the melody on recorder.

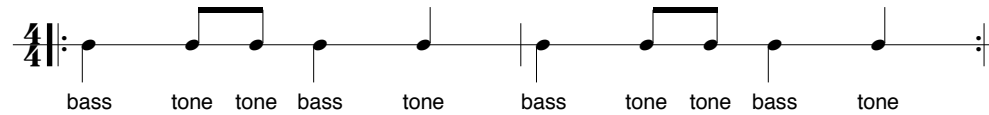
- Display the melodic cells. Have students sing each with hand signs. Sing entire melody with solfège and hand signs.
- In practice position, have students finger each melodic cell, one at a time.
- Play entire melody on recorder.

9. Teach the accompaniment for the B section.

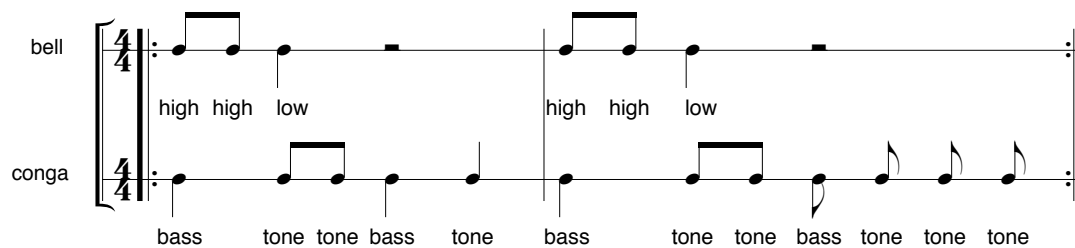
- Teach the unpitched percussion ostinato through body percussion. (clap clap, pat, hands out).
- Teach the drum part: pat the steady beat on laps, alternating hands.



- Modify the pattern, one beat at a time, until the ostinato is learned.



- Transfer to drums. Add the bell part.



10. Teach the text for the B section.

- Display text:

With my thoughts, I welcome you.
With my words, I welcome you.
With my heart I welcome you.
See, I have nothing up my sleeve.

- Have students decide how to speak the text, accompanied by the percussion. (Each phrase should take eight beats.) This is one idea:

With my thoughts I wel-come you. With my

words I wel-come you. With my heart I wel-come you.

See, I have noth - ing up my sleeve.

- Add simple movements to pantomime the text.

11. Teach the Liberian dance “Fanga.”

- The Kennedy Center provides the “Teaching Artists Present” collection. Play “Dancing Funga Alafia: A West African Welcome Dance with Nondi Wantanara” for the students <https://www.kennedy-center.org/video/education/dance-world/funga-alafia-with-nondi-wontanara/>
- Ask the students to decide how they would like to use the movements to accompany the song.

PRACTICE

12. Practice melodic patterns including high *do*.

- Display the following melodic cells.
- Have the students sing each using solfège, then note names.
- Ask students to place their recorders in *practice position* (on the chin), sing the note names and finger the notes.
- Ask the students to “choose their favorite cell and play four times, all together.” Repeat this several times until the children have played ALL the cells.



- Turn practice into a game! Ask one student to play his/her favorite cell. The other students will figure out which one it is. Repeat with other students.

CREATIVITY

13. Add another contrasting section for soprano recorder. (If desired, this can be accomplished with voices or barred instruments instead.)

- Guide the students to choose two cells to play immediately following each other (a and b). Instruct them to play their two cells in one of the elemental forms: abab, aaab, abba, aabb. (Demonstrate this with an example.)
- You may want to divide the students into partners to play their combinations for each other. Instruct the listening partner figure out which two cells were played and what form the player chose.
- If the students are ready, have them select THREE cells (a, b, and c) and pay them in an elemental form, such as abca, abcb, abbc, etc.
- Ask volunteers to play their compositions for the students to analyze. Have all students play each offering.

- If desired, you may want to have the students vote on one of the offerings to use as a contrasting section for everyone to play.
- Challenge the students to choose one or more beats of their composition to change to eighth notes. Continue to adapt the original “skeletal” composition bit by bit until the students are satisfied with the resultant melody/rhythm.

14. Invite the students to create an introduction and a coda for the piece.

- Remind students of ideas used on past projects. List several options.
- Try the various ideas and then discuss each.
- Use a democratic procedure to select the final choices.

15. Decide on a final form.

- Brainstorm ideas: add a section of improvisation, play the melody on barred instruments, play the rhythm of the melody on unpitched percussion, movement, solos, etc.
- Play and sing the entire arrangement with full accompaniment.

ASSESSMENT

Rubric for Music and Movement Objectives

Objective	Exemplary (4 points)	Proficient (3 points)	Approaching (2 points)	Needs Improvement (1 point)
Aural Recognition, Singing, and Notation of High Do	Student accurately recognizes, sings, and notates high do in familiar songs, demonstrating clear understanding of solfège, hand signs, and standard musical notation.	Student recognizes and sings high do with minor errors, and notates it with general accuracy, showing proper use of solfège and hand signs.	Student shows some ability to recognize or sing high do , but with noticeable errors in either pitch, hand signs, or notation.	Student struggles to recognize, sing, or notate high do , showing little understanding of solfège, hand signs, or notation.
Melodic Composition with High Do, Recorder Playing	Student creates a well-structured melody using high do, do, re, mi, sol , and la . Recorder performance is accurate in pitch and rhythm,	Student creates a melody using high do and other pitches with minor mistakes. Recorder playing is mostly accurate with a few errors in pitch or rhythm.	Student attempts to create a melody with some use of high do but has errors in pitch or rhythm. Recorder playing shows several mistakes.	Student is unable to create a melody using high do and has significant difficulty with pitch or rhythm in recorder playing.

Objective	Exemplary (4 points)	Proficient (3 points)	Approaching (2 points)	Needs Improvement (1 point)
Playing Barred Instruments, Drums, and Percussion in Ensemble	demonstrating strong technique.			
	Student demonstrates excellent technique on barred instruments, drums, and unpitched percussion, contributing strongly to the ensemble. Rhythm and coordination are accurate and consistent.	Student demonstrates good technique with occasional errors in ensemble playing. Rhythm and coordination are generally accurate.	Student has some difficulty with technique or ensemble playing. Rhythm and coordination are inconsistent.	Student shows minimal ability to play in an ensemble, with frequent errors in technique, rhythm, and coordination.
Performing Liberian Dance	Student performs the Liberian dance with full understanding of safe, artful movements, demonstrating excellent coordination and expression.	Student performs the Liberian dance with good coordination, showing awareness of safe movements but with some minor errors.	Student performs the dance with some difficulty in coordination or expression. Movements are occasionally unsafe or incorrect.	Student struggles to perform the dance, with frequent issues in coordination, expression, and safe movements.

Rubric generated by ChatGPT.

SOURCES:

- Damm, R. J. (2015). The origins of the Fanga dance. *Music Educators Journal*, 102(1), 75-81.
- Powell, A. (2019, April 28). *The REAL origin of the song "Funga Alafia" - Hint: It isn't a Liberian song, or a Nigerian song, or a traditional African song*. Pancocojams. <https://pancocojams.blogspot.com/2019/04/the-real-origin-of-song-funga-alafia.html>

Lesson from *Journey Around the Globe with Recorder!* by Darla Meek
© 2016 Sweet Pipes, Inc. Used with permission. All rights reserved.