



# Lesson: Creating an Ostinato Accompaniment

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## OVERVIEW

The lyrics of Chen Yi's choral piece, *Thinking of My Home*, are a translation of an old and much loved Chinese poem, "A Quiet Night Thought," by Li Bai. It appears in many Chinese poetry anthologies and is often included in the curriculum of Chinese language schools. Many scholars have translated Li Bai's poem. Students will select one of these translations as the basis for a spoken work piece with accompanying ostinato performed on percussion instruments.

## LEARNING GOAL

Students will choose a translation of "A Quiet Night Thought," then create an ostinato accompaniment that captures and reflects the mood and spirit of the poem. Their performance will include recitation of the spoken text over the ostinato accompaniment in a choral reading.

## PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Students have rehearsed *Thinking of My Home* and have engaged in singing and listening activities to familiarize them with Chen Yi's musical style and sound. Students have prior experience creating simple melodies and rhythms on classroom percussion instruments. They know what an ostinato is and how it repeats in a continuous cycle within the music. (See these lessons in folders 1 and 2 of this guide)

## RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- [Texts](#) to various translations of "A Quiet Night Thought"
- Recordings of Chinese folk songs using authentic instruments
- Percussion instruments found in Chinese music: cymbals, small and large gongs, large drum, wind chimes, or Western instrument such as drums, tam-tam and small cymbals
- Copies of the checklist and the graphic organizer for each group

## PROCESS

1. Recall the function of an ostinato; what it is; what it does in the music; how it sounds. Recall pieces the students know with an ostinato accompaniment, or improvise one on the spot.
2. Provide a project overview and devise a plan for group work. A suggested approach might be to set up a rehearsal schedule for small groups to work in an adjacent practice room for a specific amount of time while the larger choir is rehearsing.
3. Divide the students into groups. Within each group, students should select one or more spoken word performers Each group should have a reader and one or more percussion players.

4. Summarize the process of how to do the project:

- Each group selects one person to take notes and another as facilitator/ timekeeper to help all remain on-task.
- Group reads the translations of Li Bai's "A Quiet Night Thought" and chooses one for their work.
- Together they also read through the process in the "Creating an Ostinato" organizer and clarify the steps by asking questions within their group.

5. After all groups have completed the project, make sure there is time for them to perform and offer feedback to each other.

### ASSESSMENT

Students work is documented in the notes they generated on the graphic organizer, their comments they make prior to the in-class performance, and the actual performance of the Spoken Word and Ostinato pieces for "A Quiet Night Thought." Assess student work using existing classroom rubrics.

### EXTENSIONS

- In the concert where *Thinking of My Home* is performed, include the some/all of the students' Spoken Word and Ostinato pieces as a demonstration of classroom learning experiences that expand the students' understanding of a musical work.
- Consider documenting parts of the process with video and showing it at the concert. Still photos of the students at work also help audience members understand the learning experience of creating the pieces.

### SUPPLEMENTARY VIDEOS

The following videos provide information for students about Chinese melodic and percussion instruments

- [Seven Chinese Instruments You Should Know](#)
- [Compilation of Chinese Instruments from Chinese Orchestra](#)

## CREATING AN OSTINTATO ACCOMPANIMENT & A SPOKEN WORD POEM

### PART ONE

1. **Choose a note taker** to keep track of your ideas and a **facilitator/timekeeper** to keep the group on task. Both the note taker and the facilitator will also perform.
2. **Select** a version of the poem from the four translations given.
  - **Read** the poem together more than once as a group to become familiar with the mood and flow of the words.
  - **Write** the four phrases of text in the four boxes on the first row of the organizer.
  - **Circle words** that seem important; those that convey the mood and setting.
3. **Brainstorm instruments** that your group thinks fit the words and the mood of the poem.
  - **Experiment** with the sounds; play some patterns; remember what you liked.
  - **Select** one or more instruments to used depending on the size of your group.
  - **Write** the instrument name or names in the next sections of the organizer.
4. **Choose readers** who will speak the text as the instruments play.

### PART TWO: Weave the poetry and the ostinato together

5. Make up a one measure ostinato (a repeating rhythm or rhythm & melody pattern) for the first instrument. Play it several times while another group member speaks lines from the poem at the same time. When you like how it sounds, have the note-taker write the rhythm pattern four times across the whole row. You can use musical notation, words, sketches or graphic notation to notate your rhythms. Figuring it out can be a group process!
6. Brainstorm other patterns to layer with the lead ostinato. Choose and organize sounds and rhythms that help you express the mood of the poem. List the instrument names. You can use musical notation, words, sketches or graphic notation to notate your rhythms.
7. Add dynamics where appropriate.
8. **Practice the piece** with the readers. Decide if you want an introduction or coda. A coda can be created from vocal sounds, your ostinato rhythm or something new.
9. **Perform your piece** for the choir.

**Graphic Organizer for Creating a Spoken Word Poem with an Instrumental Accompaniment for “A Quiet Night Thought” by Li Bai**

Take your notes in pencil so they can easily be erased and changed.

Write the text of your poem here	Line 1	Line 2	Line 3	Line 4
Instrument #1 (required)	Ostinato #1 (lead):			
Instrument #2 (optional)	Ostinato #2:			
Instrument #3 (optional)	Ostinato #3:			
Instrument #4 (optional)	Ostinato #4:			
Notes for Speakers				

Add other comments, notes, things you want to remember on the back of this page.

Group members: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_