



Lesson: Vocal Improvisation in a Group

OVERVIEW

Circle singing is a participatory form of improvisational singing by a group that promotes musical sensitivity, collaboration, and new skills for singers. It is also done just for fun.

Rosephanye Powell's *When I Sing*, includes a section of circle singing near the end of the piece where the choir engages in circle singing in as a part of their performance of the song. Developing skills beyond *When I Sing* is a worthwhile and inventive way to engage students in vocal improvisation, building both their singing skills and their courage to create music. This lesson offers a simple process, tips, and resources on circle singing for choral directors and others who lead vocal ensembles. Circle singing is a participatory form of improvisational singing by a group that promotes musical sensitivity, collaboration, and new skills within the singers. It is also done just for fun.

CORE MUSIC STANDARDS

Creating Music

- Imagine: Generate musical ideas for various purposes and contexts
- Plan & Make: Select and develop musical ideas for defined purposes and contexts
- Evaluate & Refine: Evaluate and refine selected musical ideas to create musical work that meets appropriate criteria

LEARNING GOAL

While engaged in circle singing, students will demonstrate their willingness and ability to freely sing improvised music, generate and develop new musical ideas, and evaluate and refine their songs within the process.

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- "Tips for Circle Singing" resource for teachers
- Selected readings and videos listed in the "Tips for Circle Singing"
- [Video of Circle Singing](#) with Rosephanye Powell and students at
- Space for gathering in a circle

PROCESS

It is helpful to have a process clearly in mind before directing students to improvise as a group. Review the "Tips for Circle Singing" or select another circle singing approach to clarify your process. Check the videos included in the "Tips" resource of Powell engaged in circle singing with the Auburn Elites.

1. Write the term 'circle singing' on the board. Ask students to define the term or speculate about what they think it is.
2. Watch the video of Rosephanye Powell and the Auburn Elites. Ask students to describe what they noticed and form some ideas and concepts of the process they observe. If you view the full video, you and your students will notice that the "song" improvisation process went through multiple variations. **NOTE:** For a first viewing, select a section if time is short. However, the full 15 minutes does present the many permutations through which a song might progress.
3. Go to the score of *When I Sing* and locate the section of improvised circle singing (starts at measure 72).
4. Gather in a circle and, using the simple process in "Tips for Circle Singing," improvise your first circle song.
5. Dedicate some time each week to circle singing as a way for students to bring their own musical ideas to life.

EXTENSIONS

- Create circle songs in smaller groups if you have multiple spaces for students to practice.
- Ask students if they are willing to do a demonstration of this improvisational musical form at the concert featuring *When I Sing*.

ASSESSMENT

- Record a circle song in your ensemble, then watch it together. Before viewing, pose specific questions to direct their assessment. For example:
 - Was everyone engaged in the song? How could you tell?
 - Were new ideas musical ideas presented?
 - Did the song evolve/change over time?
 - Did it look like singers were having fun?
 - What else did you notice?