



LESSON PLAN: Text Painting

INTRODUCTION

Text painting, also called word painting, is a device used by song composers to highlight the meaning of the lyrics through expressive devices such as dynamics, melody direction, and articulation.

Instrumental composers also employ text painting when they create program music based on a written text such as a poem or story. The three activities in this lesson can be used singly or as a set. They will introduce text painting, ask students to find examples of text painting in other musical works, and provide students to “paint” a text with sound.

Talk with language arts faculty for possible collaborations on text painting. They may be helpful when selecting interesting texts, applying the ideas from your music instruction to their language instruction, and making cross-curricular connections between music and language arts.

STANDARDS

Performing: Analyze

Analyze the structure and context of varied musical works and their implications for performance

Responding: Analyze

Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response

Creating: Imagine

Generate musical ideas for various purposes and contexts

A few definitions of text painting:

- Depicting a song text by means of expressive musical devices.
- Word **painting** (also known as tone **painting** or **text painting**) is the **musical** technique of composing **music** that reflects the literal meaning of a song's **lyrics**. For example, ascending scales would accompany **lyrics** about going up; slow, dark **music** would accompany **lyrics** about death.

LEARNING GOAL

Students will:

- Create their own definition of text painting by analyzing information and examples within *When I Sing*.
- Expand understanding by analyzing other musical works and identifying examples of text painting.
- Apply what they’ve learned by creating ideas for painting the text of short poems or simple songs.

RESOURCES

- Student scores for *When I Sing*
- Copies of Student Organizer for listening & responding to recorded examples
- Location of the suggest musical excerpts
- Poetry examples
- [“Text/Sound Connections”](#) Mini-lesson in Learning the Music section

PROCESS

DEFINE & SING EXAMPLES OF TEXT PAINTING

Students Will:

1. Read out loud these words from the board:

Text Painting

- Discuss their own ideas about what text painting might mean. Make it a brainstorming conversation without right or wrong answers.
2. Read out loud what Rosephanye Powell says about text painting in the program notes for *When I Sing*. (2nd paragraph and the end of the 3rd paragraph) Powell's notes are in the score or access them [here](#).
 3. Sing the measures she cites while actively thinking about text painting. (m. 12 and mm. 52, 53, 54)
 4. Work in a small group for a few minutes to write their own definition of text painting, one that expresses their thoughts and ideas.
 5. Shares their definitions and thoughts as an ensemble.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Students Will:

1. Listen to and analyze two or three more examples of text painting. This activity can be carried out as a full class, in small groups, or assigned as homework.
2. Document their thoughts about text painting excerpts as they listen, using the organizer included with the lesson. The three examples are:
 - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: [Requiem in D minor, K. 626, Dies Irae, "Quantus tremor"](#)
 - Justin Timberlake: ["What Goes Around, Comes Around"](#) (listen from 1:00 to 2:00)
 - Tenor Aria ["Ev'ry Valley Shall Be Exalted" \(excerpt\)](#) from Handel's *Messiah* (Wikipedia)
3. Share their responses in a small group or with the class.

HOW WOULD YOU "PAINT A TEXT?"

Students can apply what they've learned about text painting through an exercise that asks them to enhance the literal meaning of a text by applying musical ideas to the spoken words. Applying text painting concepts to short poems is similar to spoken word poetry. It can also become an important step in composing original songs.

Students will:

1. Select a short text from a poem or story to use as material for this activity. (See some suggested examples on the next page or choose other examples.) They will use the Organizer to document their ideas.
 - Read a poem slowly, analyzing the text and identifying key words.
 - Highlight the key words, those that suggest ideas about tempo, dynamics, articulation, rhythmic devices, etc.
 - Write the musically connected ideas next to the lines of text. These are the musical ideas that would make the poem more expressive in a spoken reading. Try ideas out loud to assess their effect.
 - Decide which ones to keep.
 - Rehearse the revised poem, speaking it until they can perform it.
2. Share their performances with another group or with the ensemble.

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS

- After establishing the basic concept of text painting, assess the ensemble's performance of the selected excerpts to measure their understanding of this musical device.
- In the second activity, use the student responses on their organizers to assess ability to apply concepts about text painting to other musical works.
- In the third activity, the student performance of their poem plus notes on the "Text Painting Planner" can provide evidence of their understanding of text painting.

EXTENSIONS

- Challenge students to find examples of text painting in other songs the choir is rehearsing/performing or contemporary songs they like to listen to.
- If song writing is part of your curriculum, emphasize text painting as another aspect that composers think about as they create new music.
- Transfer text painting concepts to a simple song; for example, how would they arrange a song such as "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," applying text painting concepts.
- Students could write songs for the text they investigated for the above spoken word activity.
- Find examples of text painting in instrumental music. For example, Ralph Vaughn Williams wrote a "Romance for Orchestra" called The Lark Ascending, based on a poem of the same name by George Meredith. The ascending solo violin melody paints the image of the text, "He rises and begins to round, He drops the silver chain of sound..."

Student Organizer: Listening & Responding to Examples of Text Painting

Listen and find the examples of text painting in these songs.

Example #1: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Requiem in D minor, K. 626, Dies Irae, "Quantus tremor"

http://dictionary.onmusic.org/terms/3957-word_painting

When the chorus sings...	Describe what the music does to "paint" the text
<i>Quantus tremor est futurus,</i> (translation: Great trembling there will be...)	

Example #2: Justin Timberlake, "What Goes Around, Comes Around" (listen from 1:00 to 2:00)

<http://sites.psu.edu/brookeevansmus005/2015/07/23/word-painting-in-popular-music/>

When they sing...	Describe what the music does to "paint" the text
"That's okay baby 'cause in time you will find What goes around comes all the way back around... " (4 times)	

Example #3: Tenor Aria (excerpt) from *Messiah*

(Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word_painting#/media/File:Every_Valley.jpg)

Tenor

and ev-ry moun-tain and hill made low; the crook-ed straight, and the rough plac-es plain, the crook-ed straight, the crook-ed straight, and rough plac-es plain, and the rough plac-es plain.

When the tenor sings....	Describe what the music is doing to enhance the text.
"...and ev-ry mountain and hill..."	
"...made low;"	
"the crooked straight,"	
"and the rough places plain, -----"	

Name(s) _____

Text Painting Planner

1. Select a short poetry **excerpt** from the examples on the next page. Or, if there is another text you want to use, check-in with your teacher.
2. Write text in the left column broken into sections. **You do not have to use** all the spaces.
3. Read each section slowly. Circle the words that seem important to you. They are the words that might suggest musical ideas.
4. Your “paint box” includes tempo, dynamics, articulation, rhythmic, tone color of your voice, and melody. Write your musical ideas for “painting the text” in the second column. They will make the words come alive when you speak them out loud.
5. Try out your ideas out loud to assess their effect. Decide which ones to keep.
6. Rehearse: Speak the words until you can speak smoothly using all your ideas for the text.
7. Read your text painted poem to another group or to the choir.

Write Your Text Here	Possible music ideas Tempo, dynamics, articulation, rhythm, tone color of your voice, rise & fall of your voice, etc.

Name(s) _____ Date _____



A Few Suggested Poems

Winter Moon

How thin and sharp is the moon tonight!
How thin and sharp and ghostly white
Is the slim curved crook of the moon
tonight!

--Langston Hughes

April Rain Song

Let the rain kiss you
Let the rain beat upon your head with
 silver liquid drops
Let the rain sing you a lullaby
The rain makes still pools on the
 sidewalk
The rain makes running pools in the gutter
The rain plays a little sleep song on our roof at
night

And I love the rain

--Langston Hughes

An Ancient Haiku

An old silent pond;
a frog jumps in —
the water splashes.

--Matsuo Bashô

Who Has Seen the Wind (excerpt)

Who has seen the wind?
Neither I nor you.
But when the leaves hand trembling,
The wind is passing through.

--Christina G. Rosetti

Fog

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
Over harbor and city
On silent haunches
And then moves on.

--Carl Sandburg

From To a Skylark

Up with me! Up with me into the clouds!
For thy song, Lark, is strong;
Up with me, up with me into the clouds!
Singing, singing,
With clouds and sky about thee ringing...

--William Wordsworth