

20 Sweep away

RESOURCES ► CD track

Information

'Sweep away', or 'The turtle will talk it seems', is a North American folk song about dreams. In some cultures, the turtle represents the planet earth and being aware of all the things around us. If you watch them, turtles seem to look at everything. They don't appear to make a lot of sound (actually, some do, from hissing, guiro-type sounds to squawking, but the perception is that they don't); they open their mouths, but we don't often hear what they have to say. This song has a beautiful tune, with lovely stretched phrases alternating with a gentle percussion 'turtle/secret conversation'. The addition of a simple descant, sandblocks, and a rainstick make this piece thoughtful and atmospheric, and the 'conversation' can be a great start for developing the imagination and extending listening skills.

Teaching and rehearsing

- If you can, start with the piano accompaniment (or play the recording). Have your group close their eyes and listen to the music. Ask them how it makes them feel. What does it sound like? Sad, happy, playful, sleepy, awake? Try this a couple of times, keeping the group calm and focused.
- With your group echoing, speak the poem quietly in rhythm. What might a turtle say? It might be a secret. What kind of a secret?
- Say the poem together, whispering, but in rhythm.
- Introduce the tune, and sing it all the way through first before echoing by phrase. The suggested breathing places are marked with a ✓. There is one optional breath where the phrase may initially be too long, but it's something to work towards.
- Add the 'turtle/secret conversation' next. This is like talking in a secret code which is completely improvised, using body percussion. Don't try to make this a rhythmic exercise. At first you ask the questions, and they make up an answer. Explore all the sounds palms together can make—clapping quietly, sliding, long slides, rhythmic slides, etc.—but reinforce that these are quiet sounds. The freer form will feel more magical (and promote listening skills). I've included a rhythmic percussion bridge for these 'conversations' which works well as a transition between the secret conversations and repeat of the tune.

Ideas

- When you're ready, transfer the 'conversation' to percussion instruments. Sandblocks have a quiet, crisp sound and almost a whisper quality. If you don't have sandblocks, use palms of hands sliding across each other.
- Try xylophones or metallophones. You could start by using only one note for each 'speaker', and then work up to a pentatonic scale or even a full octave as they become more accustomed to having 'musical conversations'. Gradually add more sound options—not too many at first.

Listen out

- This is a great opportunity to reinforce expressive speech. When saying the poem, explore whispering. A quiet and true whisper can be heard only by someone nearby, but a stage whisper can be heard throughout a room, especially when there is clear diction. Try both. Also, speaking in unison is a skill, and if not done carefully can sound monotone and unexpressive.
- When singing, keep the style legato and smooth. As this tune is quite challenging, with more than an octave range, take the time to work on each phrase carefully and quietly. Quiet singing will help your group to begin listening to one another and reinforce matching pitch.

Performing

This works well as a performance piece. There are several options:

- Just sing the song, adding the sandblocks and descant on the repeat.
- To extend a performance:
 - Start with a rainstick.
 - Add the poem, whispered.
 - Sing the song with the optional descant.
 - Add a 'conversation'.
 - Repeat the song, and end with just the rainstick.

20 Sweep away

Trad. American
arr. Jo McNally

Gently ♩ = 96

con Ped.

5 *p*

Sweep, sweep, sweep a - way, Sweep the road of dreams. Peo-ple say that in the

10

night, The tur-tle will talk it seems, The tur-tle will talk it seems.

Riffs

Descant recorder

Sandblocks

'Secret conversation' bridge

(play very quietly)

Sandblocks

Guiro