

AMAZING GRACE

Traditional / John Newton arr Owain Gethin Davies



ABOUT THIS SONG

'Amazing Grace' is one of the most recognisable Christian hymns. The text are by the English poet and Anglican clergyman John Newton. The words describe a merciful act of God.

THEMES/SUBJECTS

Religion/Christian/Pentatonic

CURRICULUM KEY LINKS

Languages, Literacy & Communication
Humanities

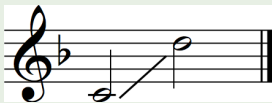
DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

Vocal range

A 9th

Vocal format

Unison/independent parts



Musical elements

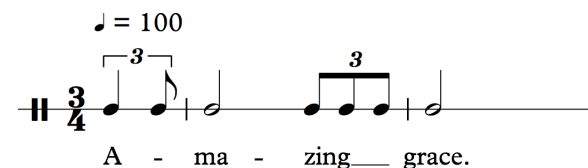
Texture and pitch

Musical characteristics

Different vocal textures, unison and three-part harmony, use of pentatonic scale.

Warm-up Exercises

- Stand with your back straight, feet slightly apart facing five minutes to one. Exhale out for four beats, breathe in for four beats and as you exhale sing the first note of the song (C) to 'Oo' for a count of 4 beats. Concentrate on the quality of the tone, repeat if necessary.
- Using your thumbs and fingers tap all over your forehead as fast as you can. Keep tapping and move over the top of your head and down towards the back of your neck. Do the same but start from your feet, move up to your legs and back up towards your neck.
- Then ask them to echo back the first phrase of the song sung by yourself on one note (C) using the same rhythm (see characteristic rhythm below). Gradually change to use a higher pitch and ensure that all learners give an accurate response.
- Demonstrate the characteristic rhythm of the song:



Suggested key links with other Areas, cross-cutting themes &/or local, national and international contexts

- Listen to a range of hymns. Do they recognise any of them?
- Look at the lyrics. Do they convey any messages?
- Are there similarities?
- Why are hymns sung? From where has the tradition arisen?
- Listen to and sing a range of hymns from Wales and beyond.

AMAZING GRACE

Traditional / John Newton arr Owain Gethin Davies



Teaching and learning

- 1 Begin by reading slowly through the lyrics of the first verse. Listen to a recording of the melody going over any words that are unfamiliar to learners or difficult to pronounce.
- 2 Listen with learners to the first verse of the recording. After listening once, ask learners to listen again, this time joining in by clapping and chanting the rhythm.
- 3 When learners are familiar with the words, start with the melody of the verse (Part 1) in unison. Sing or play the first phrase a number of times, preferably unaccompanied or using the CânSing backing track provided.
- 4 Attempt to work through the verse, make sure that all learners follow the part accurately and concentrate on the up beat entry point and the triplet rhythms.
- 5 Perform the first verse in unison with the recording and remind learners to sing through all the phrases and to sustain the long note at the end of each phrase.
- 6 When all learners are confident with the melody of the first verse introduce the new words in the second verse and sing in unison. If learners struggle with a specific phrase, ask them to listen to you or the track and then join in.
- 7 You may find that learning the melody is enough for one session and decide to tackle the second part of the second verse in the following session.
- 8 When all learners are confident with the melody in both verses, divide them into two equal groups. Give the Red group the melody (Part 1) and the Purple group the harmony (Part 2).
- 9 Introduce Part 2 of the second verse to the Purple Group a phrase at a time. The rhythm is the same as Part 1, the first note (B) is only a tone lower (2nd) from the first note of Part 1 and it is a challenge to ensure secure intonation.
- 10 After practicing both parts in unison thoroughly, try to perform in two parts with the recording.

Integral Skills

- This song has four verses and a third harmony part. Divide the group into three and read through the lyrics of verses 3 and 4. Practice with the recording, singing all the verses expressively.
- Try to vary the performance. For example, begin with a solo voice in Verse 1, two voices in Verse 2, and the whole class in verse 3 and 4. After experimenting with different vocal textures, try to vary the dynamics in different sections of the song. For example, begin with quiet dynamics in the first verse, crescendo (gradually getting louder) through the second verse, and singing forte (loud) in the third and fourth verse.
- Try to perform third and fourth verse in three parts without any accompaniment to encourage learners to listen carefully to the sound of the harmony. Words need to be very clear, with strong consonants and focused vowels.

GRADING: INTERMEDIATE

AMAZING GRACE

Traditional / John Newton arr Owain Gethin Davies



Statements of what matters:

- *Exploring the expressive arts is essential to developing artistic skills and knowledge and it enables learners to become curious and creative individual*
- *Creating combines skills and knowledge, drawing on the senses, inspiration and imagination*

- Encourage learners to improvise their own melodies using their voices or instruments over the backing track in verse one. Start with three notes of the Pentatonic scale (F, G and A) and increase the notes when learners build in confidence. The full pentatonic scale (CDFGA) could be used as an extended activity.
- A recording of this song was released in 2009 by the Welsh soprano Katherine Jenkins on her 'Living a Dream' album. Listen to and appraise this recording and discuss its main characteristics and features. Learners could also compare this version with a different arrangement of the song performed by a gospel choir.
- Divide learners into smaller groups and ask each group to compose its own gospel song. Limit the melody to the pentatonic scale (CDFGA), and encourage learners to create suitable lyrics and rhythm. Give them all an opportunity to perform to the other groups, and appraise each other's performances.

Assessment for Learning:

- *Responding and reflecting, both as artist and audience, is a fundamental part of learning in the expressive arts*

Questioning

Tool: Group responses

- What kind of atmosphere does this song create? How?
- What is the structure of this song? Explain your answer.
- How many beats are there in each bar? Does it change at all?

Feedback

Tool: How to improve

Show learners through target setting how to improve. A suitable target for some learners might be to come in quickly and confidently on the up beat in the verses. For others, it might be to focus on achieving crisp diction. You could demonstrate yourself or by playing a recording. After giving time to improve check that targets have been reached.

Self- and peer assessment

Tool: Learner-to-learner dialogue

Ask learners to take it in turns to be the teacher when discussing the performance and to ask questions. You may need to give them some suggestions of possible questions for example:

- Was this a hard or easy song to learn? Why?
- What do you like/dislike about this song?