

The English Parish Church Primary Schools Pack

RE Lesson D: What can church music tell us?



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Schools Pack developed by Chris Hudson for the
Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture



RE Lessons and Worksheets

Lesson D: What can church music tell us?

Aims:

To explore how the use of music in church can reflect changes and developments in the values, beliefs and practices of Christian communities at different times in history.

Objectives:

Each child will:

- Experience different types of church music from the past, and have the opportunity to reflect on how it is meant to 'work' for the people using it.
- Take part in composing a new rendition of an old lyric used for centuries in Christian church worship

Resources Required:

- Audio-files and lyrics from the English Parish Church DVD-ROM,
- A range of pitched percussion instruments such as glockenspiels or xylophones,
- Recording equipment,
- A contrasting recording of

modern popular Christian church music.

You may wish to consider allocating extra time for this session using the part of your weekly timetable dedicated to Music.

Information for teachers:

Tudor music:

EXPLORE ▶ The Reformation and beyond ▶ Daily life and worship ▶ Music

Medieval music:

EXPLORE ▶ Anglo-Saxon England ▶ Daily life and sacraments ▶ Worship and sacraments ▶ Music for mass and office

Key teaching points for the lesson

- Church music is designed to draw people nearer to God
- It comes in a range of styles, many of them reflecting the popular music of its day.
- Church music is sometimes designed just for listening to, and sometimes for singing along with.

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Lesson Introduction

Explain that music can carry all sorts of feelings, even if you don't understand the words. It can set the tone of a place. Film-makers know this well, which is why they spend a lot of time and effort getting the music right – because it affects how people see the film.

Play an evocative piece of music from the DVD audio files. [RESOURCES](#) ▶ [GALLERY](#) ▶ [Audio](#)

Suggested examples:

Anglo-Saxon England:
Sequence: *Candida Contio*

Late Medieval England:
Requiem Aeternam (Introit)

The Reformation and Beyond:
O Quam Gloriosum

Before you play it, ask the children to imagine what kind of scene would be happening if this was the music in a film. Set them task of noting down their answers without talking to anybody – so no-one changes what they're thinking until they start discussing it.

Afterwards, get them to discuss their answers, and note any common themes.

Explain that this is just one example of Christian church music from the past – there are many types, and they were all written to help people think and feel their way towards worshipping God for themselves. Sometimes, people would just listen to the singing from a choir. At other times, they would join in, if they knew the words or could sing them from the pages of a book.



Class Activity

Listen to the following piece of Tudor worship music from Norfolk:

[RESOURCE CENTRE](#) ▶ [GALLERY](#) ▶ [Audio](#) ▶ [Section 4: The Reformation and Beyond](#) ▶ [Congregational Rendition of Psalm 29](#)

whilst following its words on screen.

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Say that this is what we think it sounded like – what do you notice? (Don't be surprised or fazed if there is laughter at the slowness of the singing or the way the singers harmonise...very...gradually....)

The words of the Psalm accompany the recording on the DVD-ROM:

Congregational rendition of Psalm 29

*His voice doth rule the warters
all
Even as him selfe doth please
He doth prepare the thunder
claps
And governe all the seas.
The lord was set above the
flood
Ruling the rageing sea
So shall he raigne as lord &
kinge
For ever and for aye.*

*The lord will give his people
pouer
In vertue to increase
The lord will blesse his chosen
flocke
With everlasting peace.*

Note in discussion afterwards:

- There are no musical instruments, it's all 'a cappella'.
- One person sings the line, then everybody repeats it using a

different tune, which they use each time.

- It's quite slow, with a simple tune, so everybody can keep together.
- Different spellings of words we use now: 'selfe', 'flood', 'pouer', 'raigne'...
- The message of the song, which is taken from Psalm 29, an ancient song from the Bible. What is this song saying about 'The Lord' God?
- Point out that it was written in a time when many people were remembering a terrible flood that struck Norfolk – it was sung every year on the anniversary.

Have a 'singing warm-up' session, using a song your class already know – then play the piece again, challenging the pupils to sing along with it.

Afterwards ask how successful they thought they were at singing a Tudor song. If they found it strange, point out that listening to music from the past is rather like visiting a foreign country or trying a new food – it can take time to appreciate it!

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Development - Music

Set the task:

- Listen to Kyrie (plainsong and organum) from (RESOURCE CENTRE ► GALLERY ► Audio ► Section 2: Anglo-Saxon England ► Kyrie).

Explain:

“This is one of the oldest songs ever used in Christian music, although the words have been set to very many different melodies. Kyrie prayers are still used in communion services now.”

After listening to it:

- Discuss whether this version was intended for listening to, or for people to join in with (Listening, probably.)
- It is often sung at a point when people are asking God for help with difficult things in their lives. (Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy). What would ‘mercy’ mean in our own words? (Help, support, forgiveness?)
- What is the prayer saying? (I’m in trouble, please help me, I don’t know what to do...?)



Group task:

Set pupils the task of working in twos or threes, putting the Latin words to a simpler new tune that people can sing along to, picking out the melody on an instrument such as a Glockenspiel with letters on the notes which can be noted down on paper. Each tune will have 3 parts, each of which is a line repeated 3 times. Suggest they make sure they notice the ‘beat’ of each word: ‘Ky -rie -e’ and ‘e-ley-son’ both have 3 syllables to them, while ‘Christ-e’ has two.

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Lesson D: What can church music tell us? (continued)

Points to consider when planning:

- How will they show extended notes and pauses on their paper? (That's for them to work out... or you might suggest some ways)
- The pupils shouldn't be expected to sing the words as they play, unless they want to – it's rather difficult!
- Set a time target for composition and rehearsal, then ask the children to play their new melodies for the rest of the class.
- These could be recorded on equipment too – and played back.
- Why not ask the class to sing along with the one they judge the best?

with others. Adult support should be directed towards helping those children who find it difficult to share ideas and arrive at group decisions.

Plenary:

Play some modern Christian music that the children are likely to enjoy, discussing it afterwards, but re-emphasising the key teaching points about church music.

- Church music is designed to draw people nearer to God
- It comes in a range of styles, many of them reflecting the popular music of its day.
- Church music is sometimes designed just for listening to, and sometimes for singing along with.

Differentiation

This is one session where **SEN** and **More Able** pupils should be paired up to support each other, whilst remembering that a child who is 'More Able' in Numeracy or Literacy is not necessarily 'More Able' in Music. Any children taking musical instrument lessons should therefore be encouraged to share their skills



Acknowledgments and further information

The **English Parish Church Primary Schools Pack** has been created for the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture at the University of York by **Chris Hudson** (Barnabas for Children team member, Bible Reading Fellowship). Chris is an experienced primary teacher, subject leader and educational author.

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The creation of this free downloadable resource has been made possible by a grant from the University of York.

Grateful thanks for trialling and feedback to the following RE advisors and teaching staff:

Jo Fageant, Sue Glover, Andrew Price, Rachel Manley, Eleanor Zuercher, Sara Bennett, Elizabeth Broadbent, Victoria Allman.

The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture:

The Centre was founded in 1999 to support teaching and research through books and international conferences, and the provision of cultural tools to help students engage with literature, history, art, architecture and music significantly influenced by Christian thought and spirituality.

The Centre has produced a range of resources, including two CD-ROMS ('Images of Salvation: the Story of the Bible through Medieval Art' and 'Pilgrims and Pilgrimage: journey, spirituality and daily life through the centuries') as well as 'The English Parish Church through the Centuries: daily life & spirituality, art & architecture, literature & music'. Grant funding means that these resources can be made available at very affordable prices. The books and interactive resources created by Christianity and Culture are now used worldwide in universities and schools and by a general audience.

Christianity and Culture also works with important historic churches to bring recent research to life through interpretation schemes which will help people of all ages and backgrounds understand and enjoy these remarkable buildings and the stories which they hold.

We welcome your feedback on this Schools Pack and would like to create a forum where teaching approaches, experiences and projects can be shared online.

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