

# Ortiz – Papalotes

## Listening

[Listen here ►](#)

## Context

Gabriela Ortiz (born 1964) is a composer from Mexico and she is a leading voice in contemporary classical music. In 2024 her music won three Grammy Awards, including for Best Orchestral Performance, with the famous conductor Dudamel conducting her composition *Revolución Diamantina*. You can read more about Ortiz on her website [here](#) and about Dudamel on his website [here](#).

Ortiz's composition *Papalotes* was written in 2012. The word *papalotes* is a word used in Mexican Spanish to mean kite.

Ortiz is the Philharmonia's Featured Composer for the 2025/26 season, so do stay tuned on YouTube to hear more from her over the course of the year.

## Short 5-minute task: Kites

Using an extract of the first few minutes of the piece, tell your class that the title of this piece is *Papalotes*, which means kites in Mexican Spanish.

In their view, how does the music match the title? Ask students to respond in any way they wish, preparing for a discussion.

### Stretch and Challenge

- Via questioning, asking students to justify their thoughts using musical vocabulary.

### Support and Scaffold

- Via questioning, supporting pupils via scaffolding to incorporate musical vocabulary into their responses.



## Medium 20-minute task: Kite Orchestra

The idea of this task is to understand how music can be used to describe and picture different actions – in this case, the actions of a kite. The task is to try and show musically three different kite moves. Students can work in groups or on their own to devise ideas for this task. Students will:

1. Choose three different kite actions – for example struggling to get airborne, the wind catching the kite, it crashing to the ground
2. Match these actions to a specific sound – this could be body percussion, vocally or using classroom instruments
3. Perform their three-part kite story to the class and ask the class to articulate what is happening from their music.

If your students are looking for inspiration, consider playing them a video of kites flying, perhaps on mute, allowing them to see what they should create music to. **This video might be useful ►**

### Stretch and Challenge

- Encourage adding dynamic changes, changes in tempo and layering (if working in a group – having 2 or more sounds at the same time)

### Support and Scaffold

- Use predefined kite actions to ensure time is spent creating music rather than devising the plot
- Give a sound menu – for example ‘use this instrument to represent the wind’.



# Longer 45-minute task: Creative Writing

This task looks for pupils to create a piece of extended descriptive writing using the idea of kites and Ortiz's music as inspiration. This might be a poem, a piece of descriptive writing, or linked to another subject area depending on your school situation. This might be a good task to link to English, following the way you teach creative writing in your school.

A possible outline that might be helpful to follow is below.

## Initial Thoughts

Using the video of kites above, ask pupils to imagine they are a kite flying in the sky.

### Prompting Questions

- What can you see from the sky?
- What do you feel as the wind carries you?
- What is around you?
- Who is holding the string to the kite?

## Building Vocabulary

Use this time to create some exemplar material as a class, using rich language – for example:

*The kite soared above the rooftops,  
its tail flickering like fire in the wind.*

*Below, the beach sank into a blur  
of sounds and colours...*

Remind the class about use of adjectives, similes, verbs and prepositions to help with their work

## 'The Story of the Kite'

Students then consider what perspective of the kite they wish to use:

1. As the kite (first person - 'I soared')
2. As the person flying the kite ('I felt my kite tugging on the end of its string')
3. As an observer (narrator watching the person and the kite, third person - 'He watched the kite climb')

From there they get to work writing their perspective on the kite – the student workbook helps students to think about this to set the scene, awaken the senses and to think about interesting words or phrases they wish to use. A suggested structure would be:

1. Beginning (take off)
2. Middle (adventure during flight)
3. End (the kite returns to the ground)

## Reflection

As students finish their ideas, ask them to share a sentence from their work they are proud of with the rest of the class.

## Stretch and Challenge

- Encourage use of metaphor and personification
- Encourage a twist in the story – what if it does not land?

## Support and Scaffold

- Create a word bank on the board
- Consider use of sentence starters
- Use visuals to support imaginative thinking
- Consider use of TA or scribe if available to support pupils

# Listening Guide

Timings based on the video link at the top of this section

Timings	Musical features to listen out for
0:00-2:06	Excited musical figures, repeated using changing rhythms – like the kite trying to get in to the air. Brass and woodwind interjections show the unpredictable nature of the kite; dynamics frequently change. The dynamics get louder and the melody gets higher in pitch as the kite gets higher in the sky.
2:06-4:10	Woodwind dominate the melody initially, and then the full orchestra adds further colour. There are strong elements of folk music here. It is hard to hear a regular beat. From 3:16 there is a drone in the bass with woodwind solos over the top showing the kites jostling about in the sky. This idea is then taken up by the strings. This section ends with a diminuendo (gradually getting quieter).
4:11-6:05	The solo bassoon opens this section with pizzicato (plucked) cellos and basses. The tempo picks up and the music becomes a bit more frantic before the strings again enter with folk-like melodies. Rhythmic shapes are repeated and from 5:45 opening ideas return.
6:06-end	Timpani rolls mark the start of a new section, again with repeating irregular rhythmic shapes. The melody gradually ascends before dying away again as the kite catches another gust of wind. From 7:40 the music feels more celebratory including trills before a final chord ends the piece.

## Links to other subjects

This piece can link well to these other areas of the school curriculum:

Subject	Links
English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The creative writing task naturally links to English, and combining these subjects here would be worthwhile.</li></ul>
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Understand more about Mexico. This could involve locating Mexico on a map, discussing the traditions of the country and linking to MFL if Spanish is an option within your setting.</li></ul>