

Shigihara – Grasswalk

Listening

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Context

Laura Shigihara is an American composer with heritage from both Japan and France, where her parents came from. She wrote the music for the game *Plants vs. Zombies* which was released in 2009. Shigihara has also composed music for several other video games, including *World of Warcraft*, as well as being a game developer herself.

Plants vs. Zombies involves a zombie apocalypse with the player needing to defend their home from

the zombies by planting plants which attack the zombies. If the zombies reach the house, the game is lost. The game is age rated 10+, so be aware of this when teaching this to your learners.

'Grasswalk' is the main theme of the game – it is fun, quirky and catchy. Its purpose is to accompany video game play, so therefore it is repetitive, using layers and some contrasts to match the action on screen.

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Short 5-minute task: Sound Detective

Using the first 16 seconds of the track, ask students to label the score in their workbook of the instruments they can hear playing the piece.

Guide:

- Opens with piano only (bars 1-2)
- Pizzicato strings in bar 3
- Low strings play the end of bar 4 to connect to the repeat
- Bar 5 repeats bar 1, now with sustained string chords
- Pizzicato strings in bar 7 (same as bar 3)
- Low strings play the end of bar 8 to connect to the repeat (same as bar 4)

Stretch and Challenge

- Encourage pupils to follow the score
- Encourage more able pupils to play the score on available instruments, if appropriate
- Consider if these are real instruments or sounds made using a computer

Support and Scaffold

- Some learners might not want to use the score, in which case ask them to identify instruments from a choice – e.g. 'does a piano or trumpet start the piece'

Medium 20-minute task: Rhythm Composition

The opening 4 bars of this piece contain some instantly recognisable rhythmic patterns. This task aims for groups to use one of these rhythms to create their own composition using unpitched instruments or body percussion. You can use any of the rhythms from the score in the previous task, or the example below which uses the rhythms from bar 1:

1 2 and 3 4 = walk, run-ning, walk, walk
crotchet, quaver quaver, crotchet, crotchet

Ask pupils to extend this bar to a 4-bar pattern, aiming to use a balance of repetition and contrast to keep the listener interested.

If you want to stretch your students, try introducing different rhythms like using a triplet (say the word 'gal-op-ing' in one beat) or even using semiquaver rhythms like the ones below (say 'run fast-er' in one beat):

Stretch and Challenge

- More able pupils can be encouraged to use syncopation (off beat rhythms) or to layer 2 rhythms on top of each other, creating a polyrhythm.

Support and Scaffold

- Use the structure of repeating the same bar 3 times, with one bar using a different rhythm (out of the 4 repetitions, make the 3rd bar the one with the different rhythm)

Longer 45-minute task: Build a Battle Scene!

In groups, ask students to choose 2-3 instruments or sounds to use for their composition and performance.

Students should create a short musical story based on a level of the game:

1. Start calm with the house and plants enjoying the sunshine
2. Add a middle section where the zombies appear
3. Add an ending – do the zombies reach the house, or do the plants win and save the day?

Students can use rhythmic ideas from the opening section of 'Grasswalk', or create their own ideas from scratch. They might decide to use rhythms only (unpitched), or for added challenge to add pitched melodic ideas.

Stretch and Challenge

- Use pitches to add melodic character to the rhythms
- Explore tempo changes
- Use ostinato and riff – repeated rhythm patterns usually lasting 1 bar – with new melodic ideas layered on top

Support and Scaffold

- Use unpitched rhythms initially
- Groups could work on one aspect of the story initially, then combining with other groups to perform the whole scene and break the task down

Listening Guide

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

Timings	Musical features to listen out for
0:00-0:58	Use of piano, pizzicato strings and low strings – these instruments are not acoustic (live) but made using computer software. The music has a cheeky and slightly creepy feeling owing to the use of strings. Lots of repetition features, with an oboe solo in the middle section and cymbal rolls for drama!
0:59-1:46	The accompaniment now switches to pizzicato strings alternating bass – chord, bass – chord on the beat. The melody is in the bass strings. More layers are added to the music on the repetition, including an oboe solo.
1:47-2:19	A new piano idea, containing 4 descending notes, is introduced with sustained strings – this reduces the musical temperature. The low strings enter later, gradually rising, along with the oboe and percussion – building tension.
2:20-4:39	Drum kit enters and the music from the opening repeats. At 3:18 the music from 0:59 repeats, complete with drum kit backing. At 4:06 the music from 1:47 repeats with drum backing.
4:40-end	A repeat of the opening with gradual fade out. 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
Computing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">If your pupils study coding or computing, there is a good link to video game production and sequencing music digitally using apps like GarageBand or BandLab.
Drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Students could act out their ideas for the composition to help visualise the movement.
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Consider researching the history of video games, right the way from the 1950s (not long after the Philharmonia was formed) to the present day.