



The bebop ballad of Boudicca

Teaching and performance notes

Before teaching the song, why not play it as background music to other Celtic-related classroom activities, so that your class can become familiar with it?

1. Listen to and discuss 'The bebop ballad of Boudicca'

Listen to 'The bebop ballad of Boudicca', then ask the children to describe the general feel of the song (eg fast, slow, smooth, bouncy, soft, spiky). Ask what gives the song its mood. (The words, the tempo, the instruments, the melody and rhythm and how they all combine.) Listen again and ask the children to clap or beat along with the main rhythm. (Try to clap or beat on the second and fourth beats of the bar.)

2. Read and discuss the lyrics

Read the lyrics together. Discuss which aspects of Celtic history are described in each verse. (You could follow this with a fun quiz, with Celtic crosses for each historical fact recalled.)

3. Learn the introduction

Listen to the introduction (track 2). The instruments play for eight bars before the voices come in. This is equivalent to four lots of 'Buh – buh – buh, buh – Bou – di-cca'. Notice that the vocals are chanted rather than sung. All together, say the words slowly and in rhythm several times. Encourage the children to enjoy the rhythm of the words and articulate clearly. Gradually build up speed! Listen to the backing track (track 3). Practise chanting along with the track until everyone is confident.

4. Learn the first verse

Listen to the first verse (track 4). Read the words aloud together - slowly, clearly and in rhythm, as with the chorus. Emphasise the importance of clear articulation, especially when imparting tricky bits of information to an audience! (To help the children remember the lyrics, encourage them to visualise what they are describing.) Practise singing along with the track until everyone is confident.

5. Learn the middle section

This section comprises three simple chants; divide the class into three groups – two groups of Romans and one of Celts:

Group 1: 'Ro-man Ar-my'

Group 2: 'Emperor Claudius'

Group 3: 'Buh-buh-buh, buh-Boudicca'

Listen to the section (track 5). Encourage the children to focus on their part while listening, then ask them the order in which the phrases enter and how many times they are repeated. ('Ro-man Ar-my' – seven and a half; 'Emperor (clap clap clap) Claudius (clap clap clap)' – two and a half; 'Buh buh buh, buh-Boudicca' – three times, followed by 'What are the Romans? Rubbish'.) Encourage the Romans to look enraged by this impolite interruption to their chants! Everyone joins in the 'Wo-o-o-ah!' which lasts for 7 beats, building in volume and pitch. (Encourage the children to perform it as a battle cry – also remind them that the next verse comes in straight after, so not to get too carried away!) Sing along with the track several times until the class is confident.

6. Learn the second verse, add a repeat of the first verse

Listen to the next verse (track 6). Ask the children if they notice any difference in the pitch of the melody (it has risen by a tone). Read the words aloud together several times – slowly, clearly and in rhythm. Practise singing along with the track until everyone is confident. At the end of the verse, when the result of the battle is announced, the Celts shout 'Boo!' and the Romans 'Hooray!' As with the 'Wo-o-o-ah!', this should be done vigorously but quickly, as a repeat of the first verse follows immediately after. Practise this transition several times (track 7). Add a repeat of the first verse, without the 'Uh-oh!' at the end. Practise the two verses back to back several times until everyone can make the transition confidently and cleanly.

7. Add the coda

The coda is the same as the introduction, but with 'Bye bye Boudicca' at the end. (Children seem to have no problem remembering this, as it is after all the end of the song; they also enjoy following it with a spontaneous rock'n'roll 'yeah!' Practise several times (track 9) just in case!)

8. Practise singing the whole song

Sing along with the guide vocal track until everyone is confident (track 1).
Practise singing with the backing track (track 12).

9. Add untuned percussion

Before adding instruments, practise emphasising the up-beats (the second and fourth), instead of the down-beats (the first and third). To help the children get the hang of this, first establish a slow steady pulse with four beats to the bar by clapping, beating or clicking fingers. Ask the children to count aloud, whispering 'one', shouting 'TWO!', whispering 'three', shouting 'FOUR!' Repeat this as many times as necessary, gradually building up speed until everyone is confident. Repeat the exercise without counting aloud, and without the down-beats. Clap, beat or click along with the upbeats on the whole song (track 1).

Listen to the backing track. There are two main rhythms – the drum plays the downbeats, the tambourine the upbeats. In the middle section, the rhythm of each chant is mirrored by a percussion instrument.

Use the downloadable/photocopiables percussion parts and the untuned percussion practice track (track 11) to learn the parts. Practise beating or clapping each rhythm as a group. Practise playing the percussion parts along with the backing track (track 12).

10. Add tuned percussion

There is one tuned percussion part (for xylophone). It begins in the repeat of verse 1 and plays to the end. Use the tuned percussion practice track (track 10) and the downloadable/photocopiable tuned percussion part to learn the part and then practise playing it along with the backing track (track 12).

11. Add the second voice part

The second voice part begins at the repeat of the first verse (after one bar of the verse). It repeats the phrase 'Buh-buh-buh, buh-Boudicca' with the melody rising and falling in stepwise movements. Use track 7 to learn the part and then practice it with the guide vocal track (track 1). When this is secure, practise it with the backing track (track 12).

12. Prepare to perform

Decide on a plan for the performance, recording as much detail as possible, i.e.

Introduction	CD backing track/acoustic accompaniment + chanted vocals Side drum and tambourine
Verse 1	
Chant section	Details of who is going to be chanting which of the three parts Snare drum
Verse 2	Details of who is going to chanting 'boo' or 'hooray'
Repeat of verse 1	Details of who is singing the first part and who the second Xylophone part and snare drum second entry
Coda	

With your class, discuss non-musical factors that help make a good performance (eg enthusiasm, confidence, energy, clear articulation).

As a group, think about:

- when and where you will be performing the song
- dress code / costume

Decide how you will stage your performance (eg everyone standing in formal rows, or in group tableau) and rehearse in the performance space if possible.

13. Performance

Hold a dress rehearsal or final run-through, then discuss last minute improvements in a positive way!

Perform 'The Be-Bop Ballad of Boudicca' to a live audience.