Unit 2: Creating and Performing Improvised Solos

Content Area: **Music**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Marking Period 1**
Length: **ongoing**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

This unit focuses on the theoretical foundations and artistic expression involved in performing and composing their own improvised solos, with an emphasis on jazz. Students will study key musical concepts that inform improvisation, including scales (e.g., major, minor, modes, blues, pentatonic), chord-scale relationships, harmonic progressions (such as ii–V–I and blues changes), and form (e.g., 12-bar blues, AABA, modal structures).

Revised August 2025

Standards

ELD standards:https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wdmsiGOdCHlrjU-WPvAtENnEgi0EStZXo0uiFYv1Nu4/edit

1.3C.12acc.Cr1a	Compose and improvise ideas for arrangements, sections and short compositions for specific purposes that reflect characteristic(s) of music from a variety of historical periods or cultures studied in rehearsal.
1.3C.12acc.Cr2a	Select and develop arrangements, sections, and short compositions for specific purposes that demonstrate understanding of characteristic(s) of music from a variety of cultures studied in rehearsal.
1.3C.12acc.Cr3a	Evaluate and refine draft arrangements, sections, short compositions, and improvisations based on personally developed criteria, including the extent to which they address identified purposes.
1.3C.12acc.Cr3b	Share personally developed arrangements, sections and short compositions (individually or as an ensemble) that address identified purposes.
1.3C.12acc.Pr4a	Develop and apply criteria to select a varied repertoire to study and perform based on an understanding of theoretical and structural characteristics and expressive challenges in the music, the technical skill of the individual or ensemble, and the purpose and context of the performance.
1.3C.12acc.Pr4b	Document and demonstrate, using music reading skills (where appropriate), how compositional devices employed, and theoretical and structural aspects of musical works, may impact and inform prepared and improvised performances.
1.3C.12acc.Pr4c	Demonstrate how understanding the style, genre and context of a varied repertoire of music influences prepared and improvised performances as well as performers' technical skills to connect with the audience.

1.3C.12acc.Pr5a	Develop and apply appropriate rehearsal strategies to address individual and ensemble challenges in a varied repertoire of music and evaluate their success.
1.3C.12acc.Pr6a	Demonstrate mastery of the technical demands and an understanding of expressive qualities of the music in prepared and improvised performances of a varied repertoire representing diverse cultures, styles, genres, and historical periods.
1.3C.12acc.Pr6b	Demonstrate an understanding of intent as a means for connecting with an audience through prepared and improvised performances.
1.3B.12acc.Cn10a	Demonstrate how interests, knowledge and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing and responding to music.
1.3B.12acc.Cn11a	Demonstrate how interests, knowledge and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing and responding to music.

Transfer

Essential Questions

- • How do improvised solos function in jazz?
- • What do artists use as inspiration?
- • What is art and how is it created?
- What is the musical purpose of having improvised solos?

Essential Understandings

- • artistic expression can be predetermined or improvised.
- • improvised solos utilize common musical concepts such as rhythm, melody, scales, modes, chords, form, articulation, repetition, etc.
- • the musical interaction between performers is an essential element of performance.
- • the understanding of music theory is an essential part of creating improvised solos.
- • there is a difference between live and recorded music.
- solos allow a performer the opportunity to express their own musical ideas within a given framework.

Students Will Know

- • the theoretical and artistic elements that are used in creating unique solos.
- • the importance of improvised solos in jazz.
- • how you spell the chords used in jazz and how are they used in improvised solos.
- • how a soloist identifies chord changes in the rhythm section?
- • how common melodic compositional devices (fragmentation, inversion, augmentation, diminution, sequence, repetition, extension, truncation, transposition, retrograde, rhythmic adaptation, etc.) are used in jazz soloing.

- how musicians locate a chord tone or scale degree (root, third, fifth, ninth, thirteenth, etc.) and how can they be altered (flat, double flat, etc.)
- how to identify and develop musical thoughts and phrases.
- the basic language of jazz
- the listening responsibilities of the soloist and rhythm section during improvised solos.
- what a blues scale is and how is it used in improvised solos.
- what modes are and how are they are used in jazz soloing.

Students Will Be Skilled At

- Applying the appropriate scales to the harmony
- Creating rhythm appropriate to the style
- Performing their own improvised solos

Evidence/Performance Tasks

- analyze recorded examples of improvised solos.
- analyze transcriptions of famous solo artists.
- create and/or analyze improvised solos with application of the appropriate music theory
- create improvised solos using jazz “charts” within small and large group settings.
- evaluate and critique improvised solos from within the ensemble: written; verbal.
- improvise rhythms and melodies within a desired jazz classification.
- listen to and describe improvised solos in each of the major classifications of jazz music (ragtime, Dixieland, swing, bebop, cool jazz, hard bop, avant-garde, fusion, contemporary).
- participate in group discussions on the essential questions.
- perform improvised solos in private and public.

Learning Plan

- Analyze and perform appropriate examples of improvised solos.
- Analyze improvised solos—written; aural.
- Discuss and experience the essential questions and connect to learning throughout the unit
- Evaluate performances—written; aural.
- Expose students to chords and scales—learn formula, apply to various key signatures, use in rehearsal warm up, use in improvised solos.
- Introduce concepts of repetition, chromatic approach, ebb and flow, phrasing, varying range, etc.
- Introduce concepts of trading phrases, stop time, communication between performers.
- Perform improvised warm-ups.
- Perform in private and public.
- Provide technology (band-in-a-box, etc.) to aid students with improvisation.

- Provide the opportunity for each student to solo during open solo sections in musical literature.
- Quiz students on music theory.
- Record concerts—require each student improvise at least once.

Materials

- Music from various real books
- Smartboard
- Student instrument

Suggested Strategies for Modifications

Jazz Band QSAC Accommodations and Modifications

- Give different solos to students based on their current level.
- Have the students work on different sets of chords based on their level.
- Within a harmonic framework, require students to apply varied levels of improvisational technique to match their learning levels.