

Composing: Start With An Image Using The Minor Pentatonic Scale

The activities used in this Lesson Strategy will engage students in creating music through visual-auditory associations. Students will choose an image, video, or poem ([located on the downloadable PDF](#)), and create a simple pentatonic composition that will represent their interpretation of their chosen media. While the jumping off point for this lesson strategy is this excerpt from *BANDED*, the available time in your curriculum will determine how much you incorporate from the following suggested activities and resources.

The clip below reflects this month's featured lesson, where Boston-based band Ghost Box Orchestra discusses an idea for a new work based on an image using a simple E minor pentatonic riff. Listen to the [full recording](#) to hear how they developed this simple riff into an extended composition called "Desert Lights".

Outcomes:

- Students will gain an understanding of the relationship between musical and visual expression by creating a minor pentatonic composition for a chosen piece of media.

Materials:

- *BANDED* film clip
- [PULSE pentatonic scale material](#)
- Silent film clip
- Image: Creative Commons Image
- Text: Shel Silverstein – *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, p.70-71

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY IDEAS

1. This lesson strategy will focus on the minor pentatonic scale. The pentatonic scale is widely used in many styles of popular music, and can provide students with a simple entry into improvisation and composition. For a review of the pentatonic scale, students can check out this short clip from the *PULSE video library* and can [download](#) PDF material from the *PULSE Study Room*.

2. After watching the *BANDED* film clip of the Ghost Box Orchestra, students will:

- Analyze the minor pentatonic riff used in *Desert Lights* as it relates to the E minor pentatonic scale and describe the various ways the ensemble collaborated to develop their composition based on that riff. *Listen to and view the E minor pentatonic scale and guitar riff below:*



(w/ delay) *f* E-7/G E-7/A E-7

TAB: 12 12 10 10 | 8 | 5 5 3 3 | 5 4

- Choose one of the provided media files (image, movie, or text), or a media file provided by the teacher, and describe their musical impression of the visual media (tempo, texture, instrumentation, form, dynamics, etc.). We have provided a sample movie clip and image, located below on the PULSE lesson page.

3. If you'd like to extend this lesson, here are a couple of ideas:

- Students can compose several 4-8 bar minor pentatonic patterns using a variety of rhythms for their composition

OR

- Students will compose a piece of music that represents their chosen media. The composition will have a minimum of four parts and will combine their minor pentatonic melodic patterns using additive layering.
 - If possible, students will perform their composition.

Lesson Closing

For further study of composition on PULSE, check out these materials on the PULSE website:

- Composition [Level 1](#), [Level 2](#), and [Level 3](#) with Berklee Composition Faculty member Marti Epstein
- Introduction to Melody Videos [Level 1](#), [Level 2](#), and [Level 3](#)