



Exploring Form Using Minor and Major Pentatonic Scales

The activities in this lesson will build on the composition concepts introduced in the [Using The Minor Pentatonic Scale](#) lesson, and will lead students on a deeper exploration of pentatonic scales, this time examining the relationship between minor and major pentatonic scales using a variety of song forms to guide the composition process.

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 the minor and major pentatonic scales, and will develop compositions using song forms found in traditional and popular music.

Materials:

- **BANDED** film clip (* from 4:35-6:54 – GBO/Defining and Solidifying Form)
- [PULSE Pentatonic Scale handout](#)
- One or a mix of the following: Manuscript paper, Notation software, a DAW
- Preferred instrument

PULSE Connections ([create a PULSE account](#)):

- Form [Level 1](#), [Level 2](#), and [Level 3](#)
- Introduction to Melody Videos [Level 1](#), [Level 2](#), and [Level 3](#)

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY IDEAS

1. If needed, review material about the minor pentatonic scale and the ideas for writing melodies introduced in Lesson 1.

2. Introduce students to the major pentatonic scale. Compare the relative and parallel major and minor pentatonic scales.

E minor and G major pentatonic are considered to be "relative" scales because they contain the same notes. The difference is in which note is functioning as the root of the scale.

E Minor Pentatonic

1 b3 4 5 b7 1 b7 5 4 b3 1

E Minor Pentatonic Scale

Relative Major:

G Major Pentatonic

1 2 3 5 6 1 6 5 3 2 1

G Major Pentatonic Scale

Parallel Major:

E Major Pentatonic

1 2 3 5 6 1 6 5 3 2 1

E Major Pentatonic Scale

3. After exploring the above material, view the clip from **BANDED** that features the members of the Ghost Box Orchestra discussing their approach to developing the form of their composition with mentor teacher Prince Charles Alexander.

4. After viewing the clip, discuss the following:

a. Song forms are generally made up of a number of different sections that may or may not be repeated. How does the GBO describe the form of their song?

b. What kind of terminology do they use to describe the form of their composition?

5. Introduce students to common song forms found in traditional and popular music.

a. Typically, letters are assigned to different sections of a song, and repeated sections are assigned to the same letter. Some common song forms to discuss are as follows (links below require a [PULSE login](#)):

- [AB or Verse/Chorus Song Form](#)
- [Verse/Chorus/Bridge Song Form](#)
- [ABCD or Through-Composed Song Form](#)
- [12-Bar Song Form](#)
- [8-Bar Song Form](#)
- [16-Bar Song Form](#)
- [Hybrid/Compound Song Forms](#)

b. Have students listen to and analyze the form of [Lowdown](#) and [Aguasordido](#), two original PULSE grooves in contrasting styles made specifically for this lesson.

- For more tunes check out the [PULSE Song Library](#). If appropriate, students can also suggest songs for analysis.

Lesson Closing

6. View and discuss the goals for the composition project:

- a. Students will compose a piece of music in a specified form using minor and major pentatonic scales. The composition can be based on the relative or the parallel minor and major pentatonic scales. Students will be given a choice of forms to explore, to be determined by the teacher. In addition, teachers may suggest harmonic progressions for the students' compositions that are suitable for minor and major pentatonic melodies.
- b. Alone, in pairs, or small groups, students will compose minor pentatonic and major pentatonic melodic patterns for their composition. Students can use similar approaches to melodic writing explored in Lesson 1. A review of those approaches are as follows:
 - a. Compose several 4 or 8 bar rhythmic patterns that combine a variety of note lengths and rests. After composing the rhythmic patterns, add pitches from either the minor pentatonic scale or the major pentatonic

scale to the rhythmic patterns. The contour of the melodic patterns can take any shape (rising, falling, repeating).

- b. Use the rhythmic patterns created in the previous step, but when adding pitches from the minor pentatonic scale or the major pentatonic scale, restrict the pitches for different patterns (i.e., some patterns will only use two different pitches, some will use three, some will use four, and some will use all five pitches.)
 - c. Once some patterns have been composed, experiment with elongation by increasing the time that notes are held but keeping the same pitches. Conversely, experiment with truncation by decreasing the time that notes are held but keeping the same pitches.
 - d. Compose several minor pentatonic and major pentatonic melodic patterns of varying lengths (2-8 bars) that use a variety of note lengths and rests. Again, the contour of the melodic patterns can take any shape (rising, falling, repeating).
- c. Once the students have composed their minor and major pentatonic melodies, they can begin to develop their compositions using their chosen form.
- a. The composition should have a minimum of 4 parts, each part played by a different instrument (or sung by a different voice). The classroom setting will determine the types of instruments/voices the composition will be written for.
 - b. Decide which melodies will be used for each section of the composition.
 - c. Choose an instrument for each part of the composition.
 - d. Complete the composition.
 - e. Practice and perform the compositions for the class. In the case of using a DAW, have students share their compositions with the class.