



MUSIC FUNDAMENTALS: What is MELODY?

Age Range: Elementary

Learning Objective: Students will learn about melody by distinguishing it from beat and rhythm, and explore melodic contour by vocalizing and drawing their own melodic shapes.

ENGAGE students

- PLAY.** Start with a quick experiment! Have students find a small percussion instrument, like a shaker, a hand drum, or a found-object homemade instrument. (Homemade percussion instruments like [these mini tin can drums](#) or [this homemade tambourine work well](#).) Ask them, "Can you play 'Happy Birthday' with these instruments?" (*Give them some time to try.*) "No, because they can't play what are called 'melodies.' They don't have high notes and they don't have low notes."
- EXPLAIN.** "Music is made up of many different parts. Rhythm and beat are the parts of music that makes us want to move and dance. Melody is the part that we can sing. Melodies can go high and low. Any instrument that can make high and low notes can play a melody."
- REVIEW.** "Can a violin play a melody?" (*Wait for students to respond: yes!*) "Can a snare drum play a melody?" (*Wait for students to respond: no!*)

EXPLORE sounds

- SING or PLAY.** "Experiment with your voice. See how high your voice can go, then how low." If you have slide whistles or kazoos on hand, students can try it with that too!
- DRAW.** Using paper, have students draw a variety of lines with different shapes (see samples [here](#)).
- SING.** "Now, trace a finger in the air, following the shape of the line, moving from left to right. Try to use your voice to follow that line as well." Give students some time to try that out. If it's working well, say, "Now try it a few different ways:"
- "Repeat, varying the tempo, or speed."
 - "Repeat a shape two times in a row and notice that it's a pattern."
 - "Do two lines in a row, making a two-part melody."

EXTEND learning

Choose one or more activities to extend learning.

- EXPLAIN.** "Have you noticed that the shape of the melody can be really different? We call this contour (con-TOUR.) Here are a few common kinds of melodic contour:"
- "Stepwise: Notes move up and down in steps, like a staircase."
 - "Leaps: Notes jump around, from low to high."
 - "Ascending: starting lower and moving higher."
 - "Descending: starting higher and moving lower."



MUSIC FUNDAMENTALS: What is MELODY?, cont.

LISTEN. Listen to a few examples of pieces with clear melodies:

In "[Lama Bada Yatathama](#)," the melody is passed around between the different instruments, with the clapping providing rhythm.

In "[Ngoma ya Tumbuluko](#)," the cello plays the melody with the mbira supporting.

In "[Earth](#)," flute plays melody and harp supports.

As you listen, have students try to describe the melody. They may use that tracing finger in the air to try to follow the melodic contour!