



What is IMPROVISATION?

Age Range: Elementary

Learning Objective: Students will learn or review the term “improvisation” and generate musical ideas using musical ideas using a limited set of rhythms or pitches.

EXPLORE sounds

EXPLAIN. “Improvisation is when you make something up on the spot. There are several different ways to improvise. Today we will try one way. The good thing about improvisations is that there is no wrong way to do it.”

SHOW. “I can improvise a rhythm by tapping a pattern on my lap.”
(Demonstrate a short, improvised rhythm.)

“I can improvise a melody by singing random notes any way I want.”
(Sing a short, improvised melody.)

“If it’s hard to get started, I can pick just a few notes.”
(Choose two notes on a keyboard or mallet instrument and play them in an improvised sequence.)

CREATE. Using a keyboard or mallet instruments, ask students to take turns playing “black key music” (*music using only the black keys*). Suggest prompts like “elephant music” (*slow and low*) or “hummingbird music” (*fast and high*). You might identify a pattern of notes and ask students to create a melody using only a few notes, such as C, E, and G. Voices can improvise “elephant” and “hummingbird” music too!

EXTEND learning

Choose one or more activities to extend learning.

WATCH. Watch the artists from [Heliopsis](#) or [Kroehm Duo](#) explain how they improvise.

LISTEN. Listen to [There’s No Tellin’](#) by Kroehm Duo. Ask students to show you with a signal (*such as wiggling fingers*) every time they think they hear improvisation.

CREATE. Ask older students to notate their improvisations. Use an ABA grid to structure ideas. Encourage students to consider instrumentation, duration of sound, dynamics and tempo. See the completed gride below as an example.

A	B	A
Tambourine: 10 shakes <i>Allegro and forte</i>	Piano: C-E-G patterns <i>Legato and piano</i>	Tambourine: 10 shakes <i>Allegro and forte</i>