

O holy night Adolphe Adam/John Sullivan Dwight



Grading

Intermediate

About this song

'O holy night' ('Cantique de Noël') is a well-known Christmas carol, composed by Adolphe Adam in 1847. The words were written by the minister John Sullivan Dwight.

Vocal range

A 10th



Vocal format

Unison/independent parts

Themes/subjects

Carol/Christmas/Christianity

Musical elements

Texture and structure

Musical characteristics

Unison and two-part harmony, simple verse and chorus structure

Exercises

- Ask learners to breathe deeply and hiss or blow out slowly; count how long learners take to blow out. Repeat this exercise, encouraging learners to improve on the previous time.
- Ask learners to balance on one leg and rotate the other leg in a circular motion, starting with the ankles, then the knees, and finally the hips. Learners should try this clockwise, then anti-clockwise, before repeating with the other leg.
- Ask learners to move their stomach muscles in and out without breathing. (This makes them very aware of the movement required when they breathe.) Ask learners to breathe in for four beats, feeling the ribs expanding outwards, and out for four beats, keeping the ribs engaged for as long as possible.
- Demonstrate the characteristic rhythm of the song:



Recommended CânSing exercises

- Vocal exercise 9 (Sneeze)
- Diction exercise 1 (Tongue twister)
- Vocal exercise 2 (Fiddle diddle de)
- Body exercise 4 (Relax and stretch)

Teaching and learning

- Begin by reading slowly through the lyrics of the first verse. Listen to a recording of the melody, going over any words that are unfamiliar to learners or difficult to pronounce.
- Teach Verse 1 line by line, encouraging learners to sing expressively.
- Make sure learners follow the melodic line accurately and encourage them to sing whole phrases in one breath. Try using physical gestures to encourage learners to sing through the phrases.
- Introduce the melody of the chorus – the top part. Give plenty of support to help learners find the first note of the melody. This note is three notes higher than the last note of the verse (F to B \flat – 4th higher).
- If learners struggle with a specific phrase, ask them to listen to you or the track, and then join in.
- When learners are familiar and confident with the notes and lyrics, encourage them to sing whole phrases in one breath and to sustain the long notes at the end of every phrase.
- You may find that learning the melody is enough for one session and decide to tackle the second part of the chorus in the following session.
- Introduce the second part of the chorus to everyone. Ask learners what they notice about this part. The rhythm is exactly the same as the melody, and the harmony part moves around four notes (D to G).
- Give plenty of support to help learners find the first note of the harmony part. This is two notes lower than the last note of the verse (F to D – 3rd lower).
- When all learners are confident with the harmony part, divide the class into two equal groups. Give one group the melody (Part 1) and the other group the harmony (Part 2).
- Try to perform in two parts, with or without the recording. Change the parts around so that everyone has an opportunity to sing both parts.

O holy night



Next steps

- ♪ Check that long notes receive their full value, particularly at the end of phrases. Words need to be very clear, with strong consonants and focused vowels.
- ♪ Try to perform the chorus in two parts without any accompaniment, to encourage learners to listen carefully to the sound of the harmony.
- ♪ Try to vary the performance. For example, begin with a solo voice in Verse 1, two voices in Verse 2, and the whole class in the chorus. After experimenting with different vocal textures, try to vary the dynamics in different sections of the song. For example, begin with quiet dynamics in the verse, crescendo (gradually getting louder) into the chorus, and finish with a diminuendo (gradually getting quieter) on the last phrase in the chorus.

Performing, composing and appraising

- ♪ With a partner, learners could use the rhythm and words of the chorus to compose their own two-part harmony piece. This should move mainly in thirds using the G Major scale (GABCDEF#G1). All partners should perform their piece to the group using instruments or voices.
- ♪ Learners could attempt to compose their own song in a verse and chorus structure, following the Christmas theme in the music and lyrics. Learners could perform their song and use body percussion as accompaniment.
- ♪ Listen to the recording of the song and ask learners to comment on the texture of the song, the pace of the piece, and the qualities of a Christmas carol. 'O holy night' was recorded by Mariah Carey on her album entitled 'Merry Christmas'. Listen to and appraise this recording, and discuss its main characteristics and features.

Assessment for learning and developing thinking

Questioning

Tool: Big question

- ♪ Do you think this song was easy or difficult to learn? What are your reasons?
- ♪ Is there a different point of view within the group? Explore the reasons for this.

Feedback

Tool: How to improve

Show learners how to improve. Suitable next steps for some might be to come in confidently on the upbeats in the verses or to sing the song with conviction. For others, next steps might be to focus on accuracy of pitch when singing the two-part harmony in the chorus. Demonstrate by singing or playing the recording; give learners time to improve, and then check that next steps have been reached.

Self- and peer assessment

Tool: Post-it challenge

In pairs, learners should discuss the following two questions and evaluate their learning:

- ♪ Have I learnt anything new through singing this song?
- ♪ What do I need to change to improve my singing skills?

Learners should write their comments on post-it notes, and then share them with the rest of the group.