

# Lesson Plan – Mars

## Learning objectives

Pupils will –

- Perform rhythms in 5
- Perform and combine repeating rhythmic patterns
- Explore crescendo
- Work together to create and perform a structured piece

## Key vocabulary

**Rhythm:** a collection of notes of different duration forming a pattern

**Ostinato:** a repeating pattern

**Crescendo:** gradually getting louder

**5 time:** music is divided into counts of 5

**Pitched instruments:** instruments that can play different pitches (xylophones, glocks etc)

**Unpitched instruments:** instruments without a specific pitch (drums, shakers etc)

## Resources

- Mars performance
- Mars resource
- Optional: Instruments (classroom percussion, pitched and/or unpitched)

## Lesson outline

### 1. Introduction

Listen to the opening of Mars.

Discuss what it sounds like and what it reminds pupils of.

### 2. Task 1: Learn the Mars rhythms

Learn the 'spaceship' rhythm using words and body percussion

Learn the 8, 2, 10 rhythm, clap on the first beat of each count

### 3. Task 2: Compose

Split the class into two groups

Challenge each group to perform one rhythm

Challenge the class to combine their group pieces into one big piece

Add a crescendo and a clear stop signal

### 4. Performance

Perform both rhythms at the same time with a crescendo

## Assessment

Can pupils keep a steady rhythm? Can they follow signals and stop together?

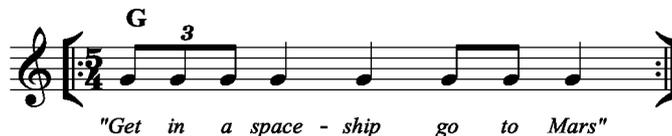
## Extension

Move rhythms onto instruments

Compose a short Mars march. See below.

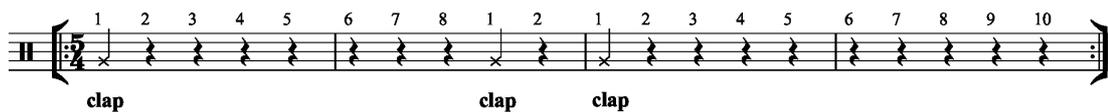
### Task 1: Learn the Mars rhythms

1. Stand your class in a circle and teach everyone the following rhythm –



Begin by speaking the words and then encourage your children keep thinking them over and over whilst they clap the rhythm.

2. Now practice counting to 8, 2 and 10 and clapping on number 1 of each count, like this



3. Split your circle into two teams and try performing these two rhythms at the same time. Explain that they are both called 'ostinatos' – repeating patterns – and that they are in 5 time
4. Moving onto instruments explain that Holst uses one note for his 'get in a spaceship' ostinato – G. Challenge a member of the class to play the rhythm on a G using whatever pitched instruments you have.
5. Holst's 8, 2, 10 rhythm is a little more complicated. He starts on G but then leaps up and slips down, like this:



Choose a volunteer to have a go at this. They can choose their own notes as long as they try to follow the same general shape.

## Task 2: Compose

1. Split into two groups and assign each group one of the following rhythms:

Rhythm 1: 'Get in a spaceship' – use unpitched instruments, body percussion and Gs

Rhythm 2: '8, 2, 10' – use unpitched instruments, body percussion and xylophones. If your children are learning orchestral instruments, this is the group for them because the choice of notes is much freer.

2. Give each group a few minutes to work on their rhythm. Give them the extra challenge of creating a crescendo – gradually getting louder as they play.
3. Bring the class back together and after hearing each group one by one, put them all together. Your children should decide which order the ideas join in and how to create a crescendo. You also need to figure out how to stop (this could be visual signal, or a loud crash on a cymbal or something else)

### Extension activity: Compose a Mars march

Later in his piece, Holst creates a march. It is made up for the following three ingredients –

- i. Steady pulse
  - ii. Rhythmic ostinatos (repeating patterns)
  - iii. Another crescendo (gradual increase in volume)
1. Sitting or standing in a circle, lead the class in a steady pulse. You can do this by tapping your hands on your knees. Practise starting and stopping together neatly without counting in or speaking, just signalling
  2. Decide which instrument should play the pulse and appoint a ‘pulse keeper’. A small hand drum or a woodblock is perhaps the best option
  3. To invent your own ostinato (repeating rhythm) to go on top, use this simple method -
    - Ask a simple question such as ‘what is Mars like?’
    - Gather several answers and decide on the best one (i.e. ‘Mars is red and hot’)
    - Ask your children to think this answer as you play the pulse
    - Now ask them to speak it over and over to the pulse
    - Finally, ask them to clap the answer (clapping each syllable), round and round. By doing this they have created an ostinato
    - Can they play their ostinato on instruments? If using pitched instruments, stick to just white notes

You might end up with something like this:



Holst's march is in 5/4 time but yours doesn't have to be! If you want to do it in 5 you might have to carefully adapt your rhythms because we naturally think in 4/4 time

4. Split into small working groups and challenge each group to create their own march. Each group should have a pulse keeper, and they should invent their own ostinato. Can they also perform with a crescendo (gradually get louder)?
5. Bring the class back together, hear each group separately before asking your children to put all of their ideas together to make one big march, with a crescendo.