

Living with Devils

Teacher Resources

Activities in this pack:



Information



Activity 3 **Learn**



Activity 6 **Create**



Activity 1 **Learn**



Activity 4 **Create**



Activity 2 **Learn**



Activity 5 **Create**

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Introduction

The stimulus for this project is the Tasmanian video *Living with Devils*. The composer of the sound-track music, Maria Grenfell, generously made time for an extensive conversation about her role in the creation of the work. The process suggested below is based on her insights and experience.

Notes to teachers

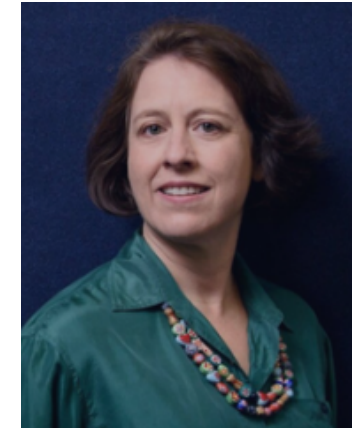
This activity is to help students understand the process of creating music for film. The way teachers develop the following ideas for work in their classrooms will depend on student prior experience and understanding, as well as on the equipment and programs available to them.

It may be useful to seek the involvement of colleague teachers from other disciplines.

It is likely to work best as an individual or small group task.

Consider initiating a discussion about ownership, copyright, and related ethical matters. While there is a broad level of tolerance for student work in an educational setting, the finished product of this activity should not be uploaded anywhere without following copyright protocols.

About the composer



Maria was born in Malaysia, and completed composition studies in Christchurch, New Zealand and in America. She is an Associate Professor at the University of Tasmania Conservatorium of Music and co-ordinates the composition stream. She is regularly involved in mentoring young composers through various composer development programs throughout Australia.

Maria Grenfell's work takes much of its influence from poetic, literary and visual sources, non-Western music literature. Her orchestral music has been commissioned, performed or recorded by all the major symphony orchestras in Australia and New Zealand. In 2021 she was commissioned to write the score for the documentary film *Quoll Farm*.

The Task

Create the soundtrack for a mini-documentary video about a Tasmanian native bird or animal.

NB: More advanced students might create the entire documentary if time permits.

This can either be an audio file created by a sequencing program, or a composition that others perform.

A documentary has 4 parts:

- Visual
- Dialogue and silence
- Sound effects
- Music



Learning Intentions

By completing this activity, students will develop some understanding of:

- The role of music in a film soundtrack (MUSIC);
- How the elements of music can be manipulated to achieve a specified expressive purpose (MUSIC);
- How the elements of music can be manipulated to achieve a specified expressive purpose (MUSIC);
- An understanding of the music composer Maria Grenfell and processes she uses to create a score.
- How to create a mini-documentary video (MEDIA);
- How to write a commentary as part of soundtrack (ENGLISH);
- The lifestyle/behaviour of a Tasmanian native bird or animal (SCIENCE).



The Visual component

Assemble all the material you can find relating to the animal of your choice and its habitat.

This might include existing video footage, drone footage, still images (including Google Earth), art work (paintings, line drawings for example), writing about your chosen animal.

If you know a someone who is very knowledgeable about the animal you have chosen, you could conduct an interview as an excellent way of gathering first-hand information.

Think carefully about your first scene; it needs to “grab’ the viewer and make them want to see more.

Trees waving? Grass rustling? A close-up of your bird or animal? Once you have decided on your opening, sort all your material into a likely sequence which will give your viewers a really good idea of how the animal lives, moves, and socializes as well as what it looks like. This will give you a series of “scenes”.





The Aural component

There are up to 4 elements in a video soundtrack, and they each have a different purpose.

1. **Silence.** This focuses the viewer on the visual image as well as providing contrast and “breathing space” for the ears.
2. **Speech.** The main purpose is to provide information. This could be snippets of conversation, commentary on what’s on the screen, or a reading-aloud of some of the written material you have gathered. The text could be on the screen if it seems like a good idea, but it doesn’t have to be, so long as the speech is very clear and not too fast.
3. **Sound effects (sfx):** These give the viewer a sense of being present in the scenes they are seeing. They are imitations or recordings of actual sounds, including natural sounds such as wind and rain as well as sounds the animal makes. These could come from a variety of sources; you might be able to record them yourself, or from someone else’s work, or from the thousands available on the Internet. Google ‘Foley Sounds’ and the variety is seemingly endless.
4. **Music:** This is what provides the character or mood of the scene. When Maria received the briefing notes for her work, all other elements of the video were complete. This is fairly usual in terms of being commissioned to create a film score.



Hot tip!

Record the spoken parts and sfx, with short silences as seem appropriate. This will provide the means to time the visual component; it will be necessary hold the camera on still images for enough time to match the soundtrack.

Put the visual and aural components together before dealing with the music element. Make sure you have accurate timings on each scene.



The Music component

In the documentary *Living with Devils*, the visual scenes were sequenced, edited, and timed, with sound effects and narration in place. Notes given to Maria Grenfell from the director were along the lines of “calm, but tantalising and expectant – what’s going to happen? 53 seconds” for each scene.

Maria Grenfell explains:

The music is the last thing to be done. The producer provides me with video snippets and explanatory notes, including the spoken component if any. Part of the brief is the definition of the desired mood for each scene.

Character comes first. It’s the music that determines how the visual image is interpreted. You can make the same thing seem relaxed and happy or scary and threatening, just by changing the music.

I write sequentially; I’m helping to tell a story. All the ideas, textures and colours are set at the outset, then they interact and change in various ways. The introduction sets the landscape and establishes the mood.





The Process

1. Choose the Tasmanian bird or animal for your documentary. Some ready-made video options are:

Tasmania Devil: [Tasmanian Devils have a soft side \(youtube.com\)](#)

Tasmanian Tiger: [Last Tasmanian Tiger 1933 \(youtube.com\)](#)

Padymelon: Reolink Captures: [Red-neck Padymelon and Joey \(youtube.com\)](#)

Echidna: [Amazing & Rare Echidna Train on Kangaroo Island | Exceptional Kangaroo Island \(youtube.com\)](#)

Quoll: [Spotted-tailed or Tiger quoll - Dasyurus maculatus in 4K \(youtube.com\)](#)

Or find/make your own. If using your own, be guided by the [visual component](#) information.

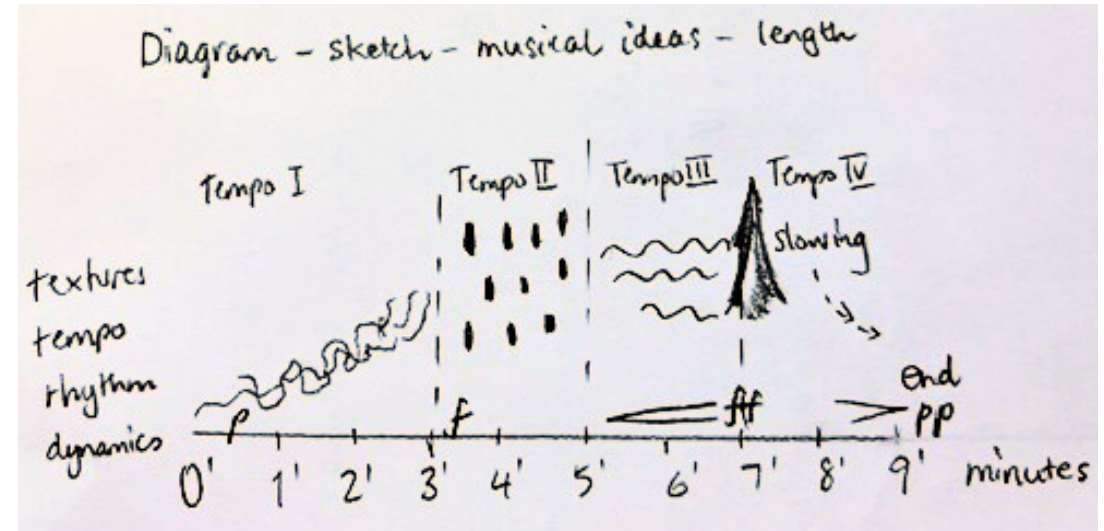




Plan

2. Maria plans her work on paper, carefully noting the length of the piece and jotting down ideas. Here is an example she provided:

She plans her work graphically before moving onto the notation. All the material she thinks about reflects the character and mood of the scene, either as described in the briefing notes from the producer or what she has in mind for a standalone piece.



Make notes, test your ideas, and make some musical decisions.

Work through each scene, from silence to silence. As you do, consider:

- What should the mood be? How can it be created in sound?
- What tempo, rhythm, pitch, timbre and dynamics should be used?
- Will you include a melodic or rhythmic motif to represent the animal?
- Is there an accompaniment pattern that would suit the character of the animal?

Consider what sound sources are available: classroom instruments, instruments students are learning, found sounds, voices (spoken / sung), body percussion, electronic sounds.

Use the model above to plan where certain activity will occur in your excerpt – maybe using 5 or 10 second increments.

On your chart mark the following:

- What are the general sections in the excerpt you have chosen?
- What is the mood lining each section?
- Where is there action you want to have the music reflect?
- Are there sections where silence is important?
- Are there particular sound effects to include in the score?



Put it all together

Use Garage Band or another sequencing program to create, record and log your work. Be sure that what you plan is achievable by the people available to do it.

Create a graphic or conventional score for each scene and ensure all important instructions or directions are included.

Put it all together; if you have software such as Logic, Pro-Tools or Cubase, synchronizing film and sound is straightforward. It's do-able without though. It just needs care and careful timing.

Evaluate

Look at the Documentary and consider how Maria Grenfell's score complements the visuals:

[Living With Devils : ABC iview](#)

What ideas from Maria's music might you use in your piece?
What do you like/ think you could improve in your score?

