

### Writing sea shanties (up to 60 mins)

This exercise asks pupils to write and perform their own sea shanties, drawing inspiration from the production of Treasure Island.

### Who is it for?

This learning resource is for students studying Music and Literacy at Key Stage 2 (years 5 & 6)

### Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- Plan, draft and revise written work.
- Improvise and compose music
- Appreciate and understand music from different traditions

### You will need

- Access to the production of Treasure Island in the On Demand player
- A collection of sea shanties – there are many websites devoted to these, including:

[http://brethrencoast.com/Sea\\_Shanties.html](http://brethrencoast.com/Sea_Shanties.html)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGyPuey-1Jw&list=RDqGyPuey-1Jw>

### Activities

1.

Watch a scene where the sailors sing a sea shanty.

2.

Explain to the children that shanties were work songs sung by sailors. With their strong simple rhythms, shanties helped sailors keep time with each other as they worked. Different shanties accompanied different tasks. Some with long, repetitive rhythms were sung when turning the capstan to haul up the anchor. Others with short, jerky beats, were sung as sailors made the short, steady tugs required to adjust the sails of the ship.

Shanties often had a call and response component to them. Sailors would repeat a phrase in response to a specific line sung by the lead shantyman or stomp their feet at designated moments in the song.

Sailors often made up verses that reflected the ship or voyage they were on. They could use the occasion to make fun of the ship's captain and first mate without fear of punishment. Shanties such as "Drunken Sailor" and "Blow the Man Down" poked fun at the foolish mistakes of mischievous sailors.

3.

Print off and look at the words and rhythms used in different sea shanties. Ask the children to find words or phrases they like and to explain why they like them. They should circle or highlight any particularly interesting sounds or rhythms that they might like to use in their own shanty.

4.

Using the example given in the appendix, model to the class one way of writing their own sea shanty, line by line.

5.

Break the class into pairs or small groups, and ask them to work on their own shanty – either following the same structure, or inventing one of their own. Less confident groups can continue working on the example and change it to suit them.

6.

Once every group has a first draft, remind them of the importance of rhythm in a sea shanty – far more essential than rhyme, as it kept sailors in time with their work. Using your shared example, demonstrate how easy it is to change the rhythm of a line by changing some words or moving them around.

7.

Ask each group to make sure their sea shanty has a strong rhythm that fits with every line.

8.

Invite each group to rehearse and perform their sea shanty. Sailors would only have had very simple instruments, like a fiddle or a whistle – but if you don't have any instruments, clapping or stomping to create a rhythm is just as important.

## Appendix

### i. How to construct a simple sea shanty:

Example of sea shanty:	Instruction:	Example of written line:	Another example:
Come all ye young fellows that follows the sea	Start with a plea to all sailors/pirates	Come ALL you who NIGHTLY dream of life ON the seas	Gather round me all pirates who fight easily
Singing way hey, blow the man down	Write a line about what life is life on the sea	Say it's HIGH on the waves Say it's LOW on the waves	Shiver me timbers and threaten the sea
Now please pay attention and listen to me Give me some time to blow the man down	Tell them what life is like  Repeat a line	ReMEMber it's life that ain't ALWAYS EASY Say it's HIGH on the waves Say it's LOW on the waves	It's a life full of cut-throats and robbing the rich Shiver me timbers and threaten the sea
I'm a deep water sailor just come from Hong Kong	Who are you? What are you like?	I'm KIND Killigrew But BAD through and through	I'm Joan like a Goat And I'll cut you quick
You give me some whiskey, I'll sing you a song	What do you want? What happens if you don't get it?  Repeat a line	ALL I am needin' is GROG for my head IF I don't get it – you'll FIND yourself dead Say it's HIGH on the waves Say it's LOW on the waves	Give me your treasure I'll spare you your life  Shiver me timbers and threaten the sea
When a trim Black Ball liner's preparing for sea On a trim Black Ball liner I wasted me prime	Mention a type of ship  Repeat a line  What happened on the ship	I sailed a schooner 'cross the wildest of seas Say it's HIGH on the waves Say it's LOW on the waves On that schooner of bandits I saw many a brawl	I guided a galleon from the Barbary Coast Shiver me timbers and threaten the sea And captured rich cargo from some scurvy naves.
When a trim Black Ball liner preparing for sea You'll split your sides laughing such sights you would see There's tinkers and tailors, shoemakers and all They're all shipped for sailors aboard the Black Ball Now, when the big liner, she's clear of land Our bosun he roars out the word of command	What did you do?  What warning do you have?  Why is life so good on the ship? Etc etc  Ask any question... What is your one wish?  How will you end your days?	I fought for me life while 'tending to be kind So others were blamed, I didn't mind. So if someone is kind, watch your back – so they say Say it's HIGH on the waves Say it's LOW on the waves Life on a ship is full of vile villainy And never trust a pirate no matter whate'er his name For it's High on the waves Say it's Low on the waves	I beheaded rough ruffians with barely a thought, Shiver me timbers and threaten the sea So, if you spot the 'Roger flying high out at sea Better hope and pray that it won't be me  For I'll slice you in two for a golden dubloon  And I'll Shiver YOUR timbers and threaten your sea.