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Songwriting with Year 3.

We went to the Children's Poetry Archive: <http://www.poetryarchive.org/>

We talked about different types of song structures:

1. Verses and choruses
2. Through composed (where each line has its own melody – ie. No repeating sections)
3. Verses without choruses

then we looked at some poems and looked at their structures.

1. One was a prose poem which was basically a paragraph.
2. There was a limerick
3. There was a rhyming poem with couplets

Now the issue we came up against was that the poem structures and song structures did not necessarily match up!

However the poem they got most excited about had a lot of rhyming couplets as well as a stanza at the beginning that repeated at the end. So when we were writing the song what we were able to do was use the same melody for the stanza at the beginning and the stanza at the end, as well as similar musical material for the couplets.

So what we did was to take the idea of something repeating structurally in the poem and match with repeating musical ideas.

The way that we got the melody was to listen to the audio recording of the poem and then ask them how they heard the line in their heads. When they sang something, I would play it on the piano and ask them if that was what they meant. I am not a pianist, but I was able to pick out the melody on the piano. Because we were working line by line it was simple to find the pitches on the keyboard. (N.B. You might want to try something like playing a C chord on the piano or a D chord on the guitar before they start so that the children have that in their ears and the melody can be harmonized in that friendly key)

As we went through the poem we continued to sing together what we had already written so that the children had a sense of how the song was hanging together, so that we didn't forget what we had already written, and so we could listen and hear where the song might go to next.

At one point one of the children sang a beautiful phrase under her breath and I caught it and picked it out on the piano. It was different from what had come before and had a haunting quality that was perfect. When we were discussing what octave it should be in she specifically asked for the lower octave and sang it with a raspier tone quality than the rest of the song. She was quite insistent that it be so and so we honored her compositional opinion and wrote it that way. It is easy to forget that for young children timbre and dynamic effects are so important. They respond so much to that sort of storytelling through sound quality.

The song was sung just as a simple melody line and didn't need any accompaniment to make it work.