

CMP Teaching Plan Template



Alligator Alley

Composed By Michael Daugherty

2-FL, 2-OB, 2-BSN, 3-CL, 1-BCL, 2-AS, 1-TS, 1-BS, 2-FH, 2-TPT, 2-TBN, 1-BAR, 2-TBA, 1-MLT, 4-PER, 1-TIMP

American Composers Forum (BandQuest distributed by Hal Leonard)

Analysis

Summary

The Florida Everglades are a large, natural watershed and wetlands in southern Florida. Thousands of unique ecosystems exist in the Everglades that do not occur anywhere else in the world. Many plants and animals call this region their home, including the American Alligator, the king of the Everglades.

Type/Genre

Programmatic

Background Information

The American Alligator is known as the King of the Everglades. It resides on the top of the food chain, and has existed in this environment for thousands of years. Alligators are an essential part of the Everglades ecosystem. After being raised by females, young alligators will prey on insects, small crustaceans, and small fish. Small alligators also become prey to natural species, include small mammals, birds, and larger alligators. Adult alligators consume larger mammals, birds, and reptiles. Female alligators create large gator holes to lay their eggs. Other animals use the gator holes for shelter and warmth. In addition, alligators make paths in the grass as they slide into the water. These paths become ways for mammals to reach the water for drinking. Needless to say, the alligator is an essential part to the Everglades ecosystem.

The Florida Everglades are a large watershed located in the south part of Florida. Their primary purpose is to drain the Kissimmee River into the Gulf of Mexico. In the early 20th Century, the Everglades were partially drained to make way for agriculture. Studies have shown that this move, coupled with pollution from pesticides has considerably damaged the Everglades eco systems. The United States Congress has allocated billions of dollars to restore the Everglades, however, scientists are still fearful that the land has been so damaged that it may never return to a healthy status.

The health of the American Alligators and the Everglades are tied together. Human involvement has considerably damaged the health of the alligator population, and thus the Everglades ecosystem. Conversely, the polluting of the Everglades has worked up through the food chain and is also negatively impacting alligator health. If the American Alligator is to survive, humans will need to change their involvement in the Everglades area to reflect more conservation to protect this beautiful species.

Additional Instrumental Information

- Need incredible percussion
- Need incredible bassoon player
- Leave out mallets if needed
- Get a great whip! Alligator Jaws!



Form	Rhythm	Melody	Harmony	Timbre	Texture	Expression
Introduction m. 1-5	Eighth Notes	Percussion Sound Effects	n/a	Timpani, Whip, Cymbals, Drum	Monophonic	Alligator sounds, movements
A Section m. 6-15	Syncopation 5/4	D Blues	IV Chord Vertical	Bassoon (tenor)	Monophonic/ Homophonic	Alligator locomotion
A ¹ Section m. 16-25	Syncopation 5/4	A Blues	I Chord Vertical	Upper/Lower Woodwinds	Homophonic	Everglades Ecosystem
A Section m. 25-35	Syncopation 5/4	D Blues	IV Chord Vertical	Flute/Oboe – I Bassoon - II	Homophonic Canon	Two Alligators, locomotion
A ¹ Section m. 35-44	Syncopation 5/4	A Blues	I Chord Vertical	Upper/Lower Woodwinds	Homophonic Canon	Everglades Ecosystem, more species and Alligator king
B Section m. 44-52	Dotted notes 4/4+3/4	D minor	Chromatic augmentation and diminution	Bassoon - melody Upper woodwinds – harmony	Polyphonic	Hunter theme introduced
B Section m. 52-68	Dotted Notes Syncopation ¾+4/4	E minor, Open fifth	Open Fifths	Trumpet + Alto Saxophone-V and Horn + Tenor Saxophone-I Low Brass and WW - harmony	Homophonic	Hunter movement, preparation
A ¹ Section m. 68-77	Syncopation 5/4	A Blues	I Chord Vertical	Upper/Lower Woodwinds	Homophonic	Everglades Ecosystem, more movement, the wetland is awake
A ² Section m. 78-88	Syncopation 5/4	E Blues	V Chord Vertical	Upper/Lower Woodwinds – I Upper Brass – II Low Brass – Harmony	Homophonic Canon	Everglades Ecosystem, more species and Alligator king
B Section m. 88-101	Dotted Notes Syncopation 4/4+3/4	E minor	Triads Open Octaves	Flute and Oboe, add more woodwinds at m. 96	Homophonic	Hunter theme, hunter getting closer, accelerations, crescendos
B Section m. 101-118	Dotted Notes Syncopation	Bb minor + Eb minor	Three part Canon	Bassoon/B. Sax, B. Clarinet – I Clarinet – II Flute/Oboe – III	Polyphonic Canon	Hunter theme, lurking, searching
B Section m. 119-141	Dotted Notes Syncopation	E minor	Open Fifths	Horns/T. Sax/B. Sax/Bassoon/ B. Clarinet – I Trumpets/Clarinets/Alto Saxes – II Flutes/Oboes – III	Polyphonic Canon	Hunter theme, conflict, contact
Bridge m. 141-144	Quarter Notes	Thirds	Thirds	Whole Band	Homophonic	Percussion effects
Coda m. 145-160	Triple vs. Duple meters	F Major Eb Major Ab Major	Triads	Upper+Lower Woodwinds/Brass – Melody Low Brass – Harmony	Homophonic	Conflict being resolved
A ³ Section m. 160-End	Syncopated 5/4	B Major	I Chord	Upper Woodwinds + Bassoon/B. Clarinet	Homophonic	Alligator Locomtion

Elements of Music

Form (Story):

Alligator Alley is composed using two main themes, the Alligator and Hunter (A+B). Throughout each section, the composer keeps the same melodic structure while altering the compositional craft (canons) and harmony. The composer starts the A theme with a monophonic melody in the bassoon. As the composer repeats the theme, adds

open fifth harmony within the same rhythm as the melody. In addition, the composer moves between Concert D (IV chord) and Concert A (I chord). All together, the composer repeats the first theme four times using various crafts to vary the phrase. The composer first gives identity to the alligator with his use of the bassoon timbre, 5/4 meter, syncopated rhythm, and blues scale used in the melody. All of these features aurally describe the attributes of an alligator, including: the hard, thick skin (thick, rich bassoon tone color), the locomotion of five limbs (5/4 time captures the four legs and tail moving at once), the alligator movement in the water (body submerged, nose and eyes out of the water, quickly swimming forward represented by the syncopated rhythm, which gives a feel of forward moment, with a back and forth sway), and a blues scale for land movement (different intervals in the blues scale create an asymmetrical, lop-sided sense, exemplifying how an alligator steps with flat feet, standing upright, and swaying its body from side to side in order to keep balance.

The B Section is written in minor and uses a different time signature (5/4 to 4/4). Perhaps the composer was making shift from a five limb animal (alligator) to a four limb animal (human). As the B theme is played, the composer uses varied timbres, including the introduction of brass players on the melodic line. Hunters are often associated with humans. The term may apply to people who harvested alligators for food and resources, or to those that may indirectly cause harm to the alligators. For instance, when parts of the Everglades were drained to make way for sugar farms, the land the alligators lived on was considerably diminished. Again, humans damaged the alligator population when they released the invasive, alien Burmese python into the Everglades. They pythons have challenged the alligators for their role at the top of the food chain by consuming the same prey sought by the alligators. The B section, through tonality and timbre develops the hunter theme as a danger to the alligator and the entire Everglades ecosystem.

After both themes (characters in the story) are introduced and developed through craft diversification, the composer returns to the A theme with a thicker density, especially in the harmonic structure. This time, the A theme is played over both the I chord and the V chord. As the song progresses, the alligator them expands to include all instruments. Perhaps this is an opportunity to involve the other organisms that live harmoniously with the alligator (including the one's it eats). The Florida Everglades have been home to the alligator, and the wild life coexist in a way that keep the ecosystem healthy and balanced, as goes the A section from m. 68-88.

When the B section returns, it begins soft, almost as if only one hunter is present. The theme builds intensity, marking the arrival or more hunters. Remember, hunters are not just humans with guns, but also agricultural and animal polluters. As the B section modulates and intensifies through the addition of more instruments, change of color (more brass), the conflict between the alligator (Everglades ecosystem) and hunters grows more serious.

A coda section, completely different from the A and B section arrives to demonstrate a direct engagement between the two parties. The melodic, harmonic, and metric structures change often to indicate an equal struggle between both sides. A large cadence exists at the end of the coda, indicating that a winner of the conflict is to be named.

Finally, the A section returns once more to reinforce the longevity, strength, and durability of the American Alligator, a creature that has transcended time since the time of the dinosaurs, surviving many earthly disasters. While the Alligator has faced many struggles, man has been the most destructive and dangerous, will it survive?

Rhythm

The A section is composed with a unique syncopated rhythm in 5/4 time. The syncopation occurs on count 1, 2, and 3. This awkward rhythm goes well with alligator locomotion, especially on land. Alligators are one of the few reptiles that stand upright when they walk. Most reptiles either sprawl or are fully erect. Alligators, however, stand halfway between each. Moreover, when an alligator walks, the tail shifts opposite the head to balance the body from tipping over. This unique movement is captured in the distinctive rhythm, not once, but many times. An alligator is much smoother in the water, using the tail to propel itself. When the rhythm is not syncopated, it is steady eighth notes to represent this movement.

The B section is composed using dotted or tied rhythms that continue in a regular duple feel. The movement of hunters (humans) is steady, unencumbered (at least for the folks that are not clumsy). Alligators are the top predator in their ecosystem, for a hunter to be successful they must be more cunning, nimble, and agile. The B section theme develops this through rhythmic construction in a 4/4 and 3/4 pattern.

The coda section alternates between a compound and duple meter. The collision of meters accurately depicts the battle between the hunter and alligator.

Melody:

The alligator melody is written using an alternating Concert D, A, and later B Blues scale. The contour of the melody descends from the top note of the scale to the bottom. In the hunter theme, the melody is rooted in the D, E, Eb, and Bb minor. Each phrase uses the first 5 notes of the minor scale. While the melodies are simple, they are diverse from each other to authentically represent the two sides of the conflict (alligator and hunter)

Harmony:

The melody is harmonized in two main patterns. First, the main alligator and hunter themes are harmonized with the same rhythm and different notes, often within triadic parameters. Second, there is a harmonic rhythm used to emphasize accents that go along with the shape of the melody. These accents include mostly open fifths or triads.

Timbre:

The alligator theme is marked by the distinct color of the bassoon. This is not the first time a bassoon family instrument has marked a reptile. In the classic Disney movie Peter Pan, the crocodile motif was played by the contrabassoon. What is it that makes the bassoon the instrument associated with the type of animal? Other upper/lower woodwinds add to the alligator theme, perhaps to represent the harmony and cohesion found within a healthy Everglades ecosystem. While the alligator is a predator to many organisms in the Everglades, it is still a necessary resident to maintaining balance.

The hunter theme is marked by brass instruments. The forceful color breaks through the ensemble and previous harmonies, interrupting the A section. Perhaps the composer meant for the brass to demonstrate the invasive presence of man within the Everglades, and their threat even to creatures such as the alligator.

Finally, the percussion effects play an integral role in regards to the color of this composition. The most important instrument is the whip. The sound of the whip MUST emulate the sound of an alligator's jaw. Alligators have one of the strongest bites in the entire world. When their jaw is closing, it has the pressure power to crush a turtle shell. Other percussion instruments sound foreign, perhaps mimicking the alien surrounds that are the Everglades.

Texture:

The piece begins with a monophonic texture, moving to homophonic for most of the piece. A short phrase in polyphony is used near the beginning, perhaps as a device to foreshadow the B theme. Daugherty's use of homophonic music may be to emulate the homeostasis capability of an ecosystem without foreign invaders; what we want the Everglades to become.

Expression:

The dynamics of Alligator Alley are shaped by the conflict. As the piece progresses, the dynamics grow in their intensity. It should be noted, that the composer shows dramatic change by continually starting a phrase back at piano or mezzo-piano, adding a crescendo as the line reaches an apex. The composer makes the most dramatic dynamic changes with scoring changes, where he starts with one instrument and adds others.

The Heart Statement

Using an array of compositional devices, composer Michael Daugherty depicts the struggles of the American Alligator in the Florida Everglades ecosystem, thus creating contrasting melodies that embody the conflict between man and nature.

Skill Outcome: Students will learn how to tune and balance perfect intervals.

Strategies

- 1) Hear it. Students will recognize the perfect 5th in interval and chord form. Play examples of the perfect 4th and 5th on the piano and using plainchant examples. Have students identify perfect 4th and 5th versus non-perfect 4th and 5th.
- 2) Sing it. Have students play a root, then sing the 5th or 4th. Then have them play a 4th or 5th and sing the root.
- 3) Build it. Students will scale up from the root to the 5th. Ask students to listen to one another and make comments about intonation. Use the piano to help with hearing the correct sound.
- 4) No Beats. Have one student start on a concert F. When the second student enters on concert F, have the first student play a concert Bb. Use other games involving Concert F's and Bb's.

Knowledge Outcome: Students will investigate the use of canons, understanding their creation and evolution.

Strategies

- 1) After reading about the definition of a canon, ask students to find one interesting fact about the canon and composer from the 1500-1600's that used a canon.
- 2) Canon Perspective. Have students play a choral in various positions. Allow students to understand what it means to be the first melody, second, third, so on. Use the canon from Alligator Alley as student's progress.
- 3) Construct a canon in class. Use graphic symbols at first to test note descent vs. ascent. Should it be in step motion or have jumps? Where should rests go? When should people enter?

Affective Outcome: Students will establish an argument regarding environmental conservation, knowing the conflict and the possible outcomes.

Strategies

- 1) Have students research an environmental issue of their choice. Have them report on the conflict (who or what it affects, who caused the problem) and what could happen if something is done and what would happen if nothing is done. Have the students report out on the topic. Give the students an example with a rubric.