

*Using Stories To Explore the
Pentatonic Modes*

Presented to
Montana Music Educators Association

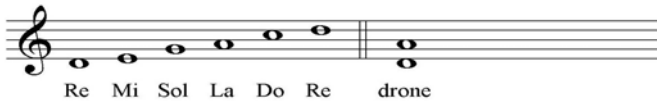
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“The Little Pine Tree”

Folk tales give students the opportunity to find meaningful applications for instrumental pieces, improvisation, movement, and theory. Many times, the sound of a mode, a rhythmic concept, or a movement idea can be given significance when attached to a story or a character.

I have used this story as a medium for modal improvisation with my students. First, we discuss the different possibilities that exist within C pentatonic.



Included in the understanding of each pentatonic mode, is the appropriate accompaniment for each scale. We learn very quickly that “1” and “5” are the notes that we prefer for the drone. However, this is impossible in the E Pattern, since the “5” (B) has been removed. Therefore, we are left with the dilemma of how to accompany this scale. Ultimately, we decide on “1” and “8” (E¹ and E²).

As we play through each “pentatonic mode,” we discuss the flavor or mood of each mode. I use this as an opportunity to explore descriptive language. Rather than descriptors such as “happy” or “sad,” I encourage more colorful adjectives such as “gloomy,” “joyful,” or “spooky.”

MOVEMENT

I often begin by listing a series of words for my students to explore through movement. Rather than tell them that I want them to be an owl, I will ask them to “soar” “glide” “use a curved pathway” or “move majestically.” This helps to eliminate a less artistic rendition loud hooting and a frantic flapping of wings!

Suspiciously

Creeping
Sneaking
Tip-Toeing
Lurking
Hiding

Powerfully

Twirling
Surging
Rushing
Sweeping
Twisting

Gracefully

Reaching
Stretching
Wandering
Leaping
Searching

Playfully

Skipping
Dancing
Jumping
Frolicking
Laughing

THE LITTLE PINE TREE

Adapted by Paul Cribari
Taken from the files of Brigitte Warner

Wish-es I made, for leaves of real gold, but nee-dles are bet-ter for fight-ing the cold.

In a forest there grew a little pine tree. He looked very handsome with his straight trunk and shiny green needles all over his branches, but he was very unhappy. “Oh,” he sighed, “If only I looked different! All the other trees in the forest have such pretty, soft leaves that dance in the wind. My needles are so straight and stiff that they can’t move at all, and they are so prickly that nobody comes near be. But – as it costs nothing to wish I might as well wish for leaves – prettier leaves than those on the other trees. Gold leaves! Ah, yes; how I would like to have leaves of gold!” And with these words the little pine tree fell asleep.

Pine Tree Song in La Pentatonic

In the morning the tree felt very strange when he tried to stretch his limbs, as he always did upon waking up. He had a difficult time lifting his branches. They seemed very heavy. When he opened

his eyes, he had to shut them again quickly, for there was such a glare and glimmer. When he was finally able to keep his eyes open, he found that every single one of his branches was covered with leaves of pure gold. He was very happy! He said to himself, "Now I am more beautiful than any other tree in the forest. None of them -- poor things -- have such beautiful leaves!" And with that he drew himself up as tall as he could and bent and turned his limbs so that the sunlight blazed and glittered on his leaves of gold.

It was almost evening when robbers with large sacks over their shoulders wandered into the forest. The little tree with his shining golden leaves stood out from all the other trees. The robbers came up to the tree and when they examined the leaves, their joy knew no bounds. The leaves were of pure gold! Every one of the leaves was instantly stuffed into the robber's bags, and with that the robbers threw the sacks over their shoulders and left as quietly as they had come.

La Pentatonic Improvisation on Xylophones

The pine tree shook and trembled, partly in fear and partly from the chill of the night air. "Oh dear, oh dear, what shall I do now? I am uglier than ever! I shall never ask for gold leaves again; men will always rob me of them. If only I could have leaves of glass!" And with these words the little pine tree fell asleep.

Pine Tree Song in La Pentatonic

The next morning, the little tree was awakened by a wonderfully soft ringing, tinkling sound. (**Chimes**) He looked around to see where this strange music was coming from, and found to his surprise that he himself was the source of the beautiful music. His branches were covered with the most delicate leaves of glass, and the sun made them sparkle with all the colors of the rainbow. He really was a most marvelous sight! "Look at me," the little pine tree shouted, "I am more beautiful than all you other trees, and I can make finer music than any of you birds!" He shook his branches gently so that the leaves shone delicate prisms, while producing the sweetest music ever heard in the forest.

Mi Pentatonic Improvisations on Metals **Improvisations increase in intensity until tree breaks**

But it was not long before the sun disappeared behind big, black clouds. A strong storm was building on the horizon! It was howling, and growling, and wind whirled and whistled around the pine tree. The wind blew fiercely through the little tree's branches and shook them without mercy. "Stop it, stop!" cried the tree. "Can't you see that you are breaking my precious leaves?" But the wind did not listen and blew harder than ever. The delicate glass smashed against each other and fell to the ground, broken into a thousand pieces.

The little pine tree was very sad and unhappy when he looked at his ugly, bare branches. He thought to himself, "But of course! How could I have been so thoughtless as to wish for glass leaves? I think now, that if I could have leaves like all the other trees, I should be content." And with these words the little pine tree fell asleep.

Pine Tree Song in La Pentatonic

When the little pine tree awoke in the morning, his limbs felt soft and light, and they seemed to dance in the morning breeze. He looked at himself, and lo and behold – he was covered with soft, green leaves that rustled and danced on his branches. “Now I shall be satisfied!”

Towards evening, a family of deer came along in their search for a good supper. They soon saw the little tree with his young, tender leaves. Immediately, the deer began to nibble on the leaves, and found them very tasty and juicy indeed.

Re pentatonic improvisations on woods

The deer settled down for a good meal, and since the tree was small, they could reach even to the very top with their long necks. In a very short time, they had eaten up all of the leaves, and the pine tree once again stood bare. He was so embarrassed and unhappy that he did not dare to look up. He stood there with his branches drooping, and said, “Why was I not satisfied with my needles? If only I could have my needles back again...” It was a very long time before he fell asleep that night.

The little tree was very fortunate, for when he woke the next morning, he found that his own sender, fragrant needles had once more been given to him. Fall came, and all the other trees lost their leaves. The little pine tree stood alone in the forest; he was the only green tree left for miles around. Later that winter, a group of children were hiking through when they spotted the tree. It was the most beautiful tree they had ever seen, so they decided to decorate it with bits of tinsel to make it shine, and pieces of fruit for the animals to eat. Between the constant visits from the animals who feasted on the fruit, and the children, who regularly came to dance and play around the tree, the little pine tree grew to be very old, very tall, and VERY happy with his needles.

Celebration in Do pentatonic.

The End