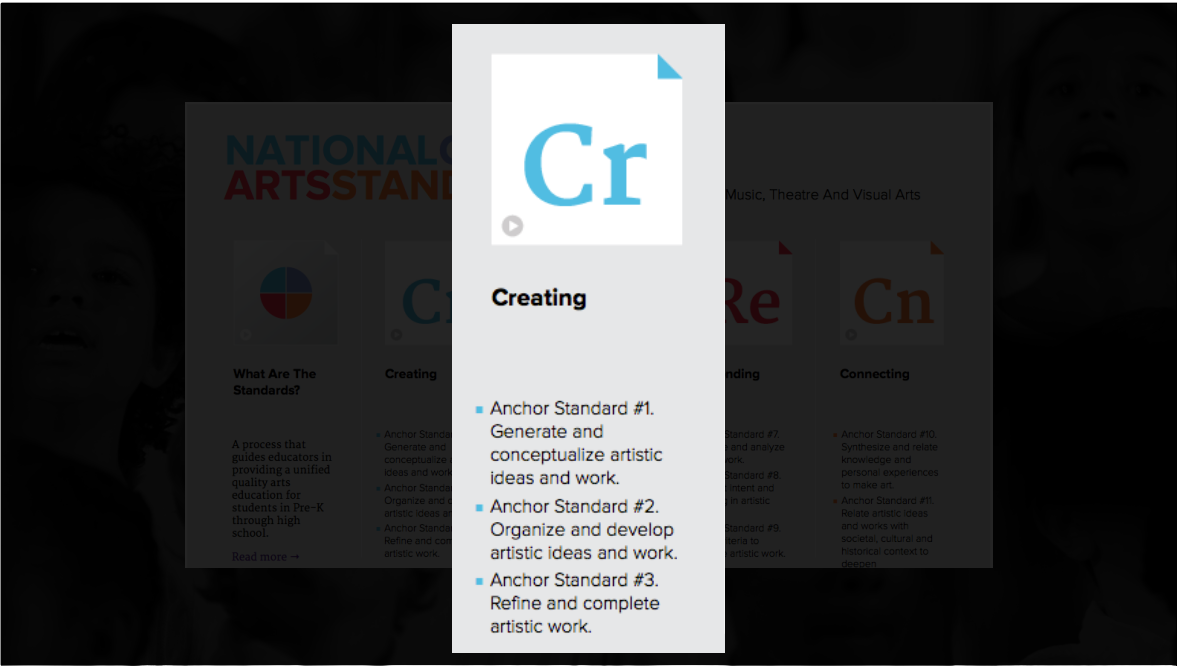




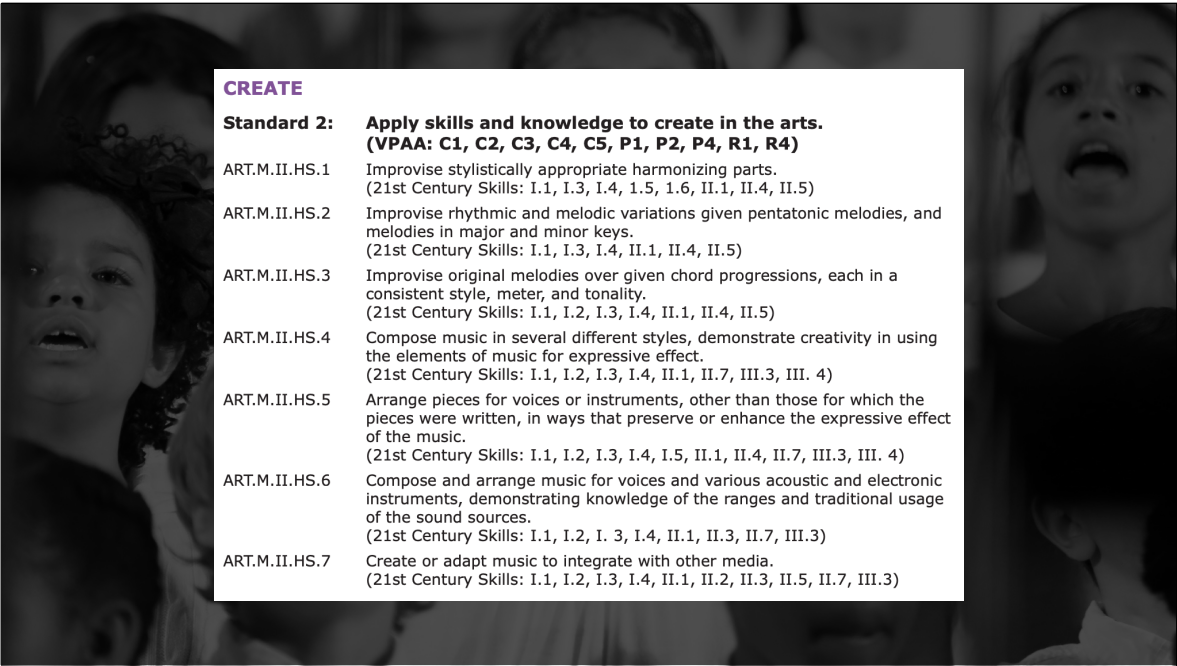
CREATIVITY

IN THE CHORAL CLASSROOM

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Assistant Professor of Choral Music Education
Michigan State University
Michigan Music Conference
24 January 2026



Creativity is part of the national standards!



CREATE

Standard 2: Apply skills and knowledge to create in the arts.
(VPAA: C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, P1, P2, P4, R1, R4)

ART.M.II.HS.1 Improvise stylistically appropriate harmonizing parts.
(21st Century Skills: I.1, I.3, I.4, I.5, I.6, II.1, II.4, II.5)

ART.M.II.HS.2 Improvise rhythmic and melodic variations given pentatonic melodies, and melodies in major and minor keys.
(21st Century Skills: I.1, I.3, I.4, II.1, II.4, II.5)

ART.M.II.HS.3 Improvise original melodies over given chord progressions, each in a consistent style, meter, and tonality.
(21st Century Skills: I.1, I.2, I.3, I.4, II.1, II.4, II.5)

ART.M.II.HS.4 Compose music in several different styles, demonstrate creativity in using the elements of music for expressive effect.
(21st Century Skills: I.1, I.2, I.3, I.4, II.1, II.7, III.3, III.4)

ART.M.II.HS.5 Arrange pieces for voices or instruments, other than those for which the pieces were written, in ways that preserve or enhance the expressive effect of the music.
(21st Century Skills: I.1, I.2, I.3, I.4, I.5, II.1, II.4, II.7, III.3, III.4)

ART.M.II.HS.6 Compose and arrange music for voices and various acoustic and electronic instruments, demonstrating knowledge of the ranges and traditional usage of the sound sources.
(21st Century Skills: I.1, I.2, I.3, I.4, II.1, II.3, II.7, III.3)

ART.M.II.HS.7 Create or adapt music to integrate with other media.
(21st Century Skills: I.1, I.2, I.3, I.4, II.1, II.2, II.3, II.5, II.7, III.3)

Creativity is also part of state standards. How often do these skills show up in your choral classroom?

O'Toole, P. (2005). I sing in a choir, but I have “no voice!”
Visions of Research in Music Education, 6.
<http://www.rider.edu/~vrme/>

ISSN: 1938-2065



I Sing In A Choir But I Have “No Voice!”

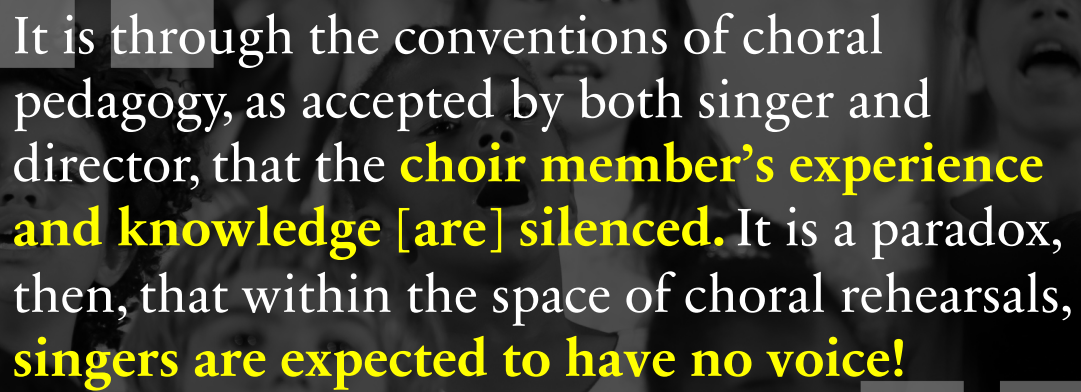
By

Patricia O'Toole

Abstract

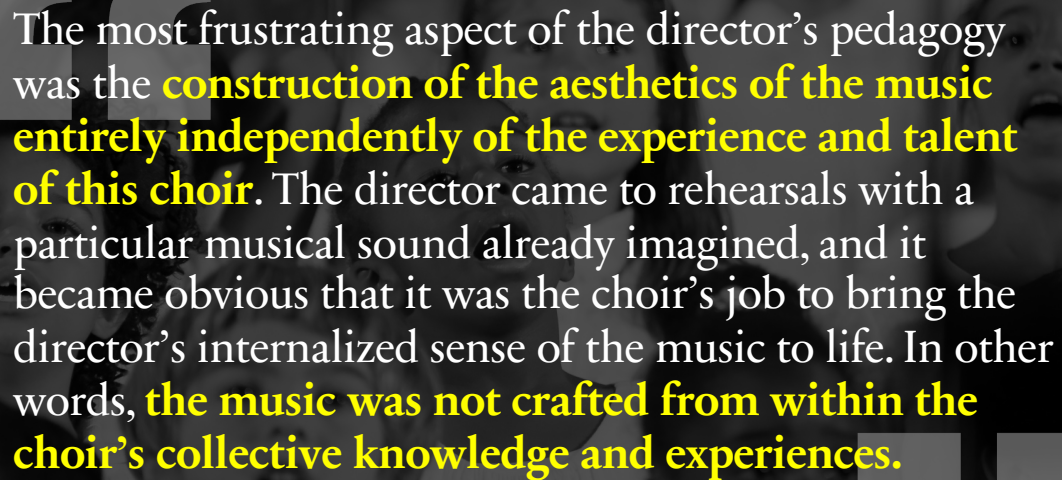
In this article, I argue that the conventions of choral pedagogy are designed to create docile, complacent singers who are subject to a discourse that is more interested in the production of music than in the laborers. Consequently, I present my choral experience from a critical feminist perspective in an attempt to expose the web of power relations that one enters during

O'Toole critiques the ways singers have limited creative agency in choirs.



It is through the conventions of choral pedagogy, as accepted by both singer and director, that the **choir member's experience and knowledge [are] silenced**. It is a paradox, then, that within the space of choral rehearsals, **singers are expected to have no voice!**

(O' Toole, 2005, p. 10)



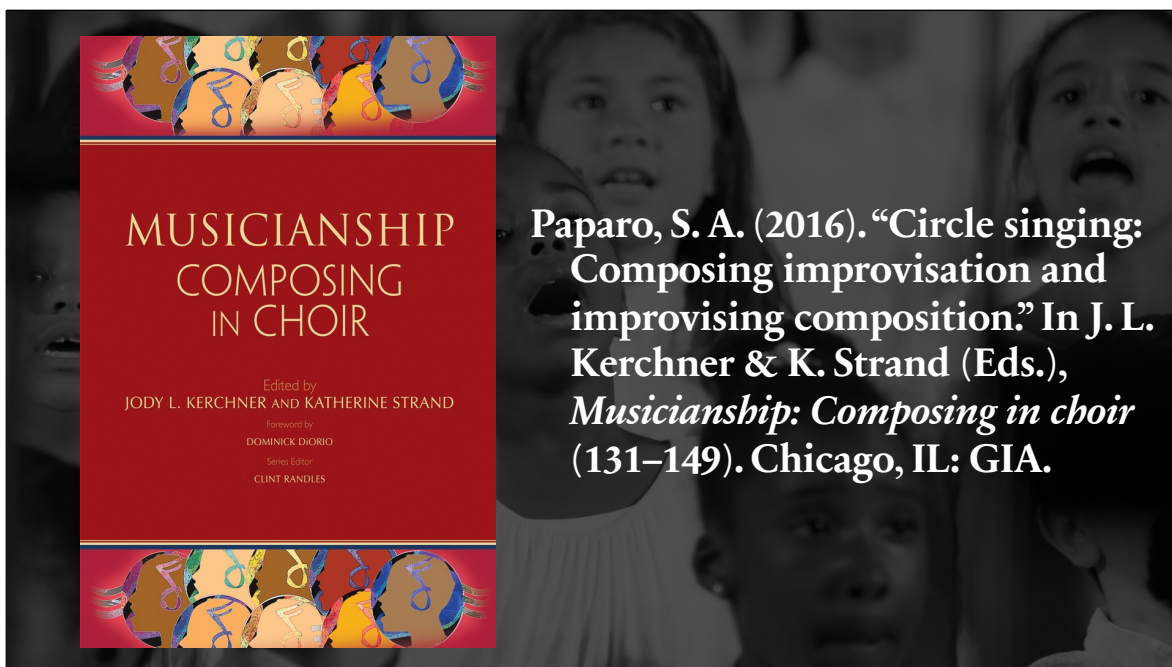
The most frustrating aspect of the director's pedagogy was the **construction of the aesthetics of the music entirely independently of the experience and talent of this choir**. The director came to rehearsals with a particular musical sound already imagined, and it became obvious that it was the choir's job to bring the director's internalized sense of the music to life. In other words, **the music was not crafted from within the choir's collective knowledge and experiences.**

(O'Toole, 2005, pp. 11–12)



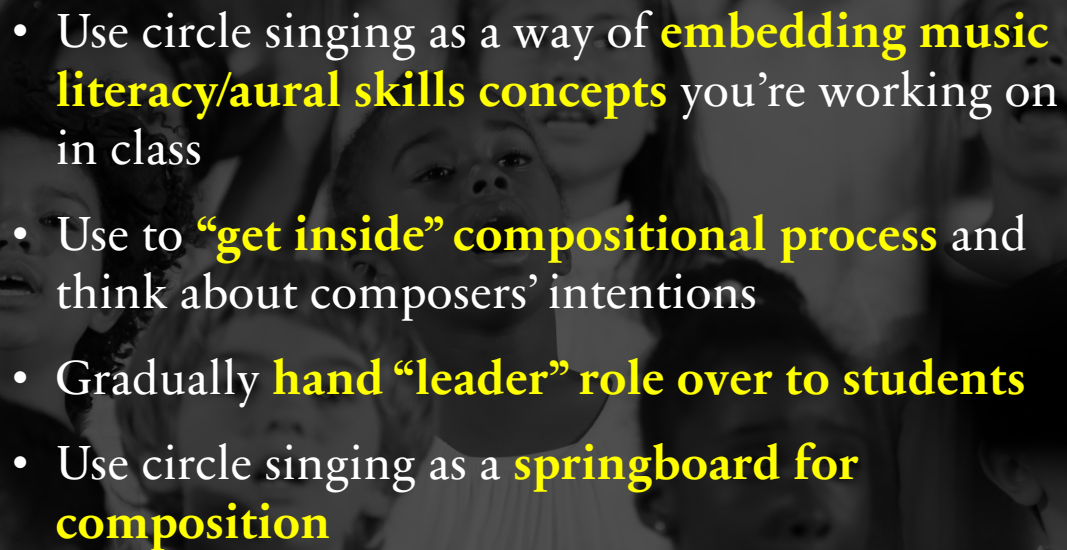
So what do we do?

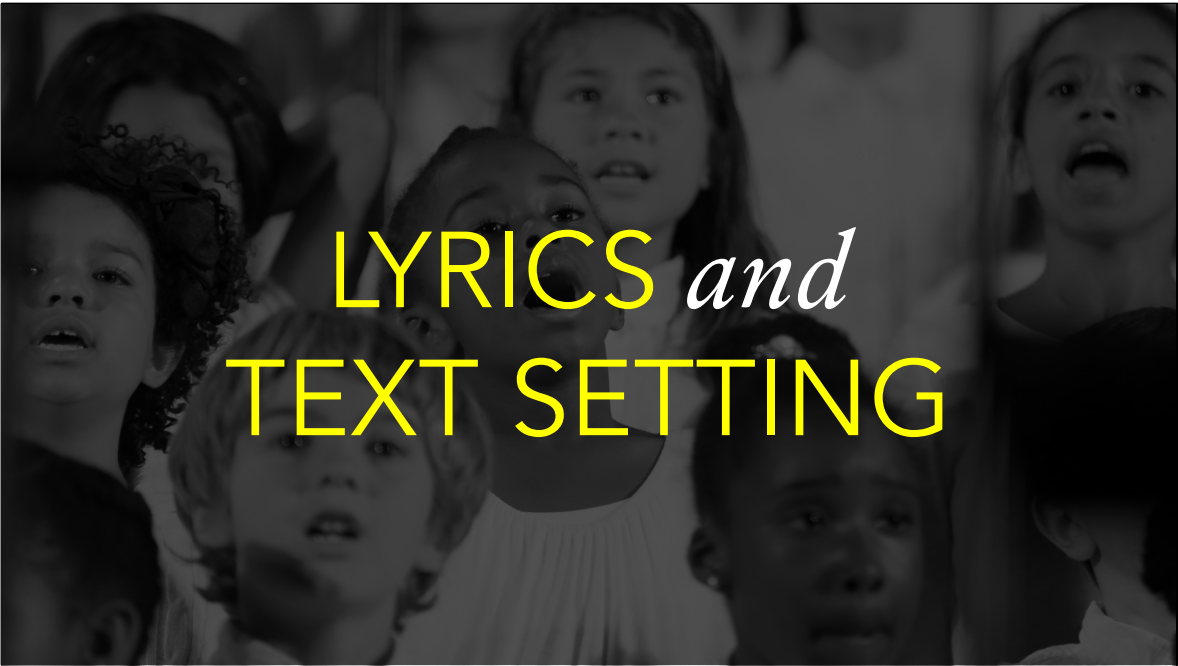


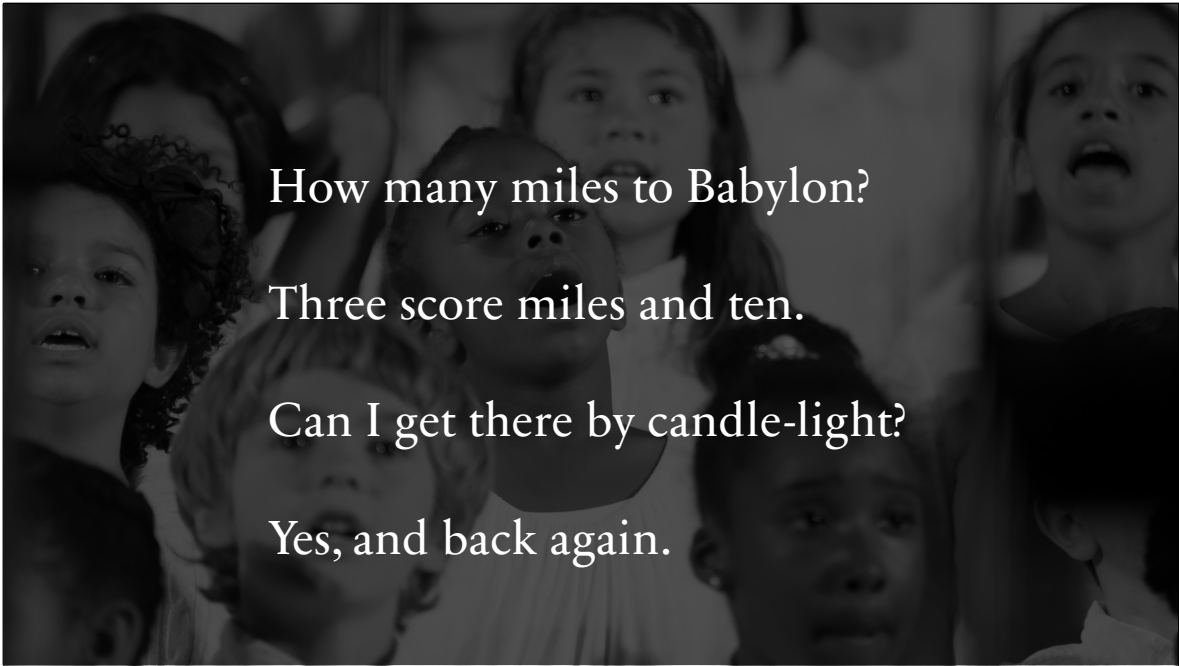


Paparo, S. A. (2016). "Circle singing: Composing improvisation and improvising composition." In J. L. Kerchner & K. Strand (Eds.), *Musicianship: Composing in choir* (131–149). Chicago, IL: GIA.

Read more about Circle Singing in this chapter by Dr. Stephen Paparo (UMass Amherst).

- 
- Use circle singing as a way of **embedding music literacy/aural skills concepts** you're working on in class
 - Use to **“get inside” compositional process** and think about composers' intentions
 - Gradually **hand “leader” role over to students**
 - Use circle singing as a **springboard for composition**





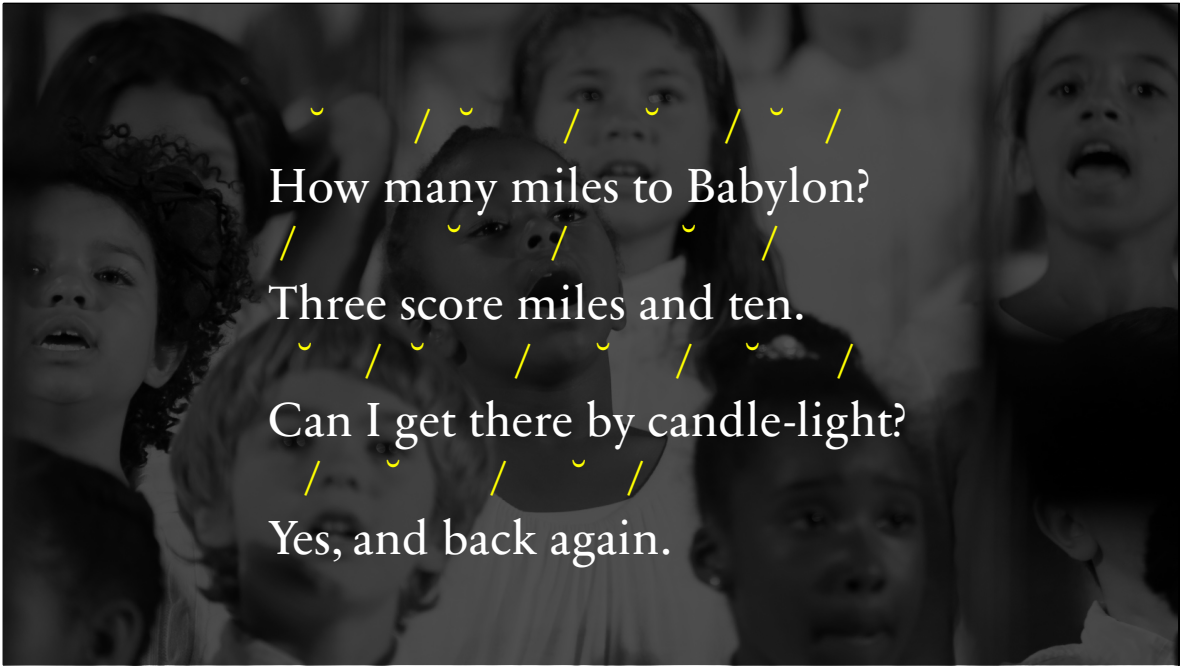
How many miles to Babylon?

Three score miles and ten.

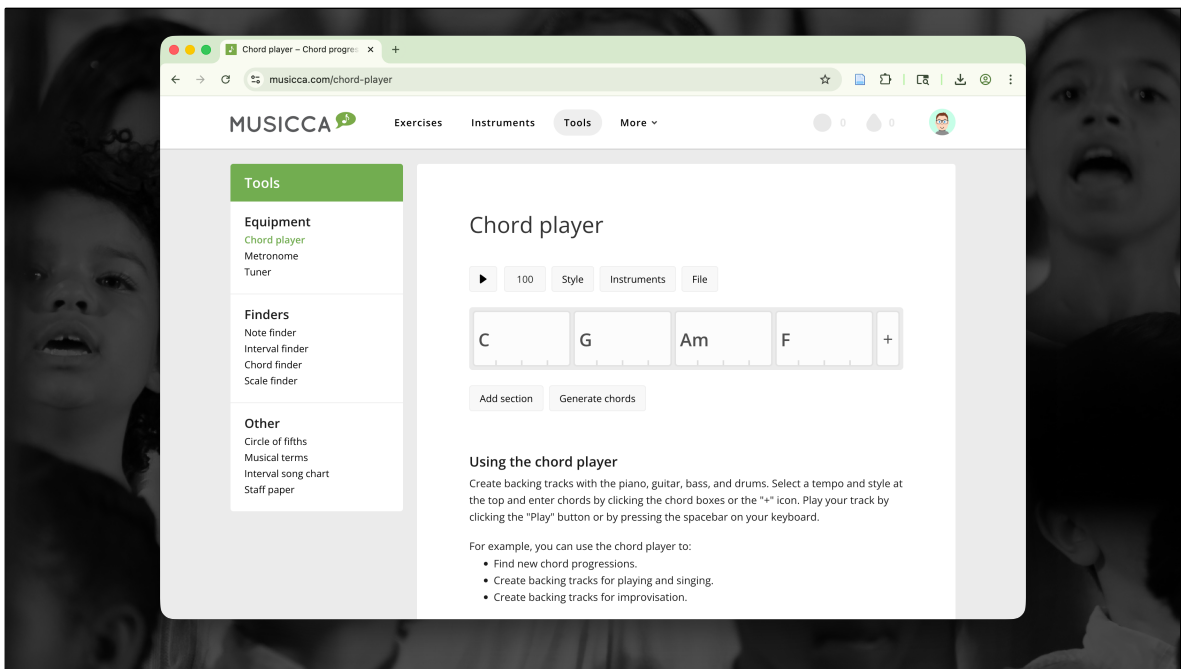
Can I get there by candle-light?

Yes, and back again.

What would we need to know and be able to do if we wanted to write a melody for these lyrics?



Using scansion to identify strong and weak syllables would be one important step.



If students don't have the instrumental abilities to provide their own chordal accompaniments, tools like the Musicca Chord player can help them.


BL1039 BABYLON *M/TWO-PART

BABYLON

Two-Part Treble Voices with Piano



James DesJardins

BriLee Music
the Voice of Choral Music

BriLee Music
Part-by-Part 

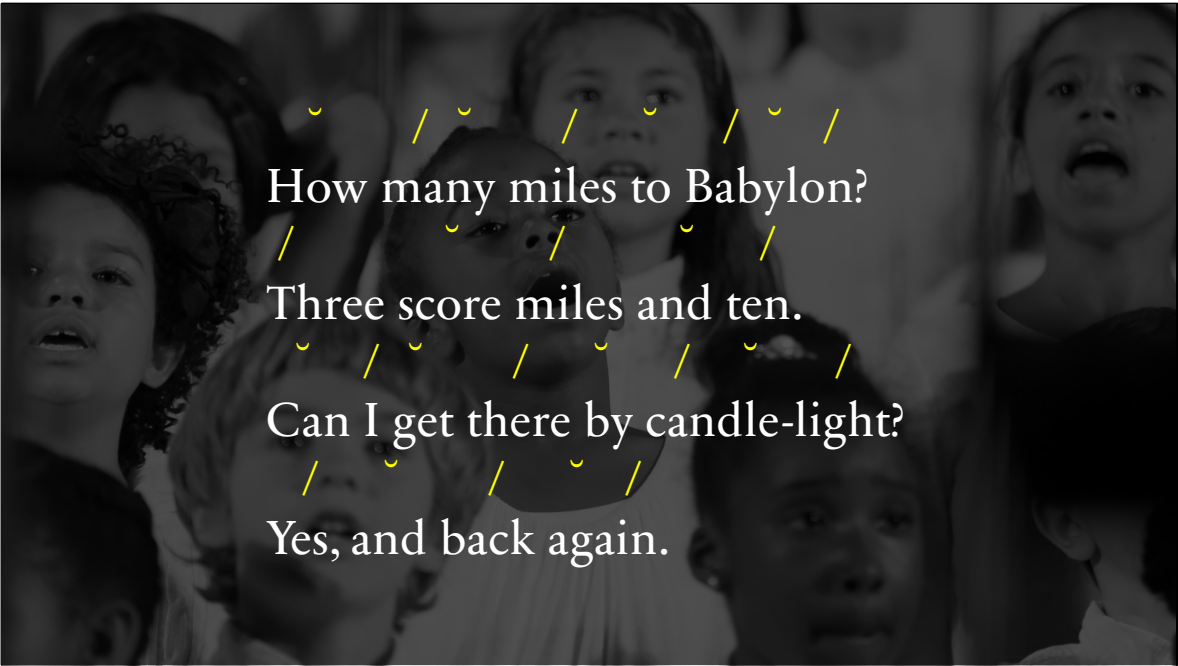
For Accompaniment and Rehearsal Audio
Go to: brileemusic.com/BL_1039

Ranges:

Part 1  Part 2 

Language: English
Use: General/Festival
Time: Approx. 2:28
*Difficulty: Moderate

The lyrics above come from James DesJardin's "Babylon."



How many miles to Babylon?

Three score miles and ten.

Can I get there by candle-light?

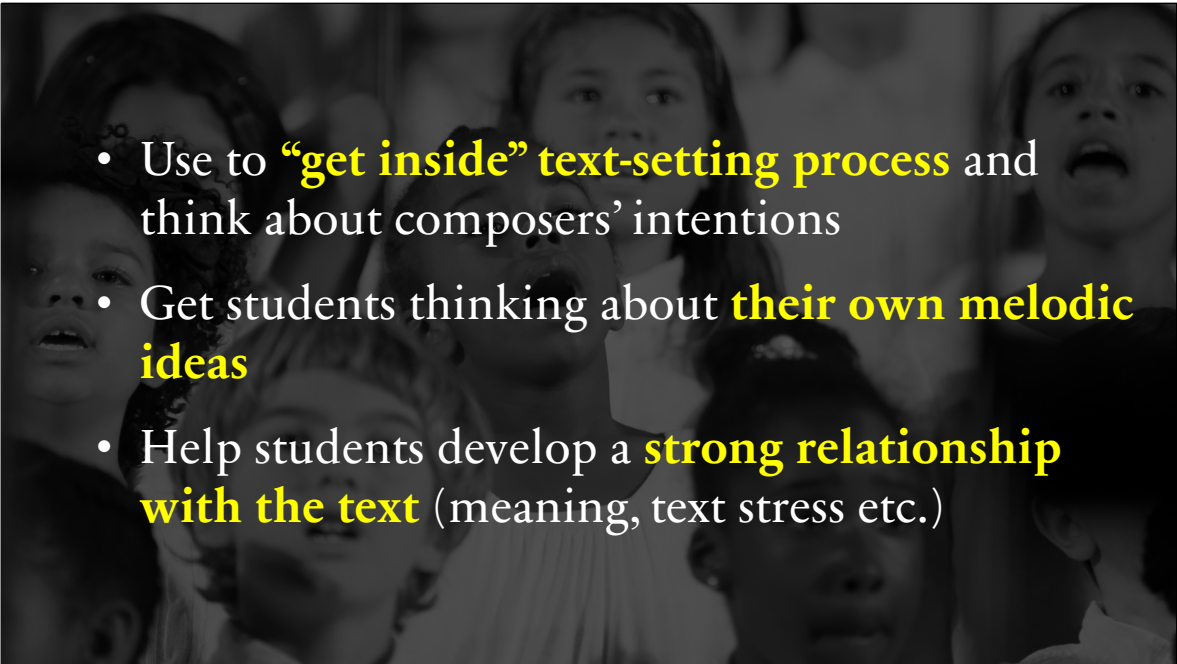
Yes, and back again.



But what if we needed to re-write some lyrics from “Babylon,” maintaining the basic poetic meter?



Here's an excerpt from "Babylon" with no lyrics. What alternate lyrics would you write for that stanza?



- Use to **“get inside” text-setting process** and think about composers’ intentions
- Get students thinking about **their own melodic ideas**
- Help students develop a **strong relationship with the text** (meaning, text stress etc.)





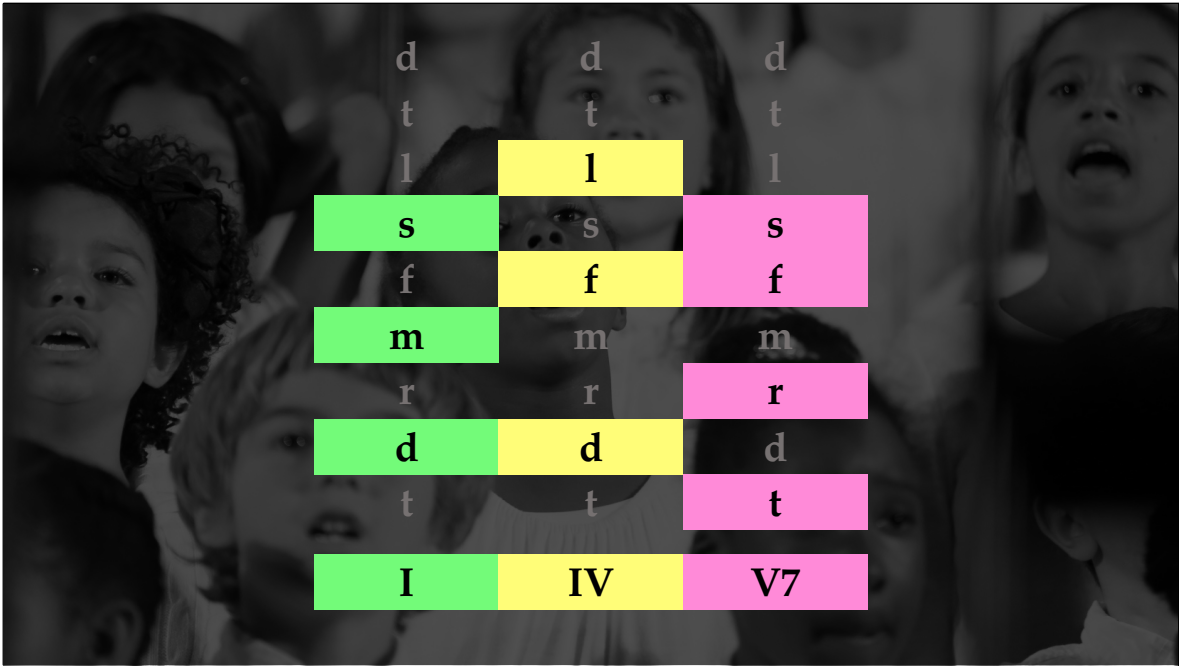
Bring me lit-tle wa - ter, Sil - vy; bring me lit-tle wa - ter now.



Bring me lit - tle wa - ter Sil - vy,



ev' - ry lit - tle once in a while.---



By teaching students chord roots and chord members for basic functions, we can teach them to improvise within a framework.



Thank you!

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