

Mini-Project 103 The First Nowell Tasks

Using a diagram of the 8 notes of a scale, you are going to work out all the notes in the carol. All you have to decide is whether the notes go up or down – it's a very helpful tune. You'll find out that some notes in a scale are more important than others and that knowing this can help you predict which note comes next. You'll practise keeping the beat while you sing the song and play the tune on a keyboard. (You don't need a real one). Finally, you'll use what you've found out about the shape of the tune to write it out in music notation, with a minimum of help.

There are 2 pdfs in addition to this one. You need a hard copy of “Mini-Project 103 The First Nowell Task 12” in order to write out the tune. Apart from that you can cope without printing anything else out if you want to save the ink, though you will need some paper to draw a scale diagram and write the note numbers on in steps 2 to 9.

The bits in italics offer you some extra help if you are finding a step tricky. Most of the questions are to encourage you to have a think and you shouldn't need answers.

“The First Nowell” is a very useful carol when you are starting to get to grips with notation. Not only is there lots of repetition, but it mainly goes by step, up and down a scale.

It's such a repetitive tune that it can be easy to lose track of it and get lost in an endless loop round and round the same notes. If you find yourself at risk of this happening as you focus more on more on bits of the tune, get yourself back on track by listening to a recording. Here's King's College Cambridge nowelling in 2010
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mltWsC8RtM>

We don't know who composed “The First Nowell”. As far as we know it was published first in the early 19th century and is probably Cornish in origin.

1. Start by singing through the first verse and the chorus which is lines 5 and 6.

The first nowell the angels did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay,
In fields where they lay akeeping their sheep
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the king of Israel.

Notice how often there are two notes for a single syllable. Right at the start “The” has two notes, and so does “first”. Sing through carefully noting which syllables have two notes. Do any have three? You could circle the syllables with more than one note,

Now sing the first line only – and then sing it to la. That will probably make it easier when you do the next step as it helps you be more aware of all the notes and you don't have to think about the words. But you do have to detach the notes from the words which can be a task in itself if you haven't done much of it.

How many syllables are there in the first line?
How many notes do you sing?

Look at the note row you made in Step 4. What do you notice about the notes for the underlined syllables?

Important notes are more likely to:

- be given to stressed syllables
- be longer
- come at the beginnings and ends of phrases – and of whole tunes

They are also more likely to be:

- be the turn-round points in the tunes – the highest or lowest notes
- be the note that's landed on after a jump – it's as though they are more secure

That last bullet point is going to help you with Step 6

7. You're going to work out the note numbers for the second line. That goes by step again, except in just one place.

Here are the words: “was to certain poor shepherds in fields where they lay”

Underline the stressed syllables – there are four of them.

That will help you, as the important notes rule operates here too.

Sing from the beginning of the carol in order to work out was the note for “was” is. Then carry on, going by step one note up or down up to “fields”.

was	to	cer	-	tain	poor	shep-	herds	in	fields	where	they	lay

What happens between “fields” and “where”? Is that a step or a jump?

Use what you now know about important notes and landing places after jumps to predict which note it is for “where”.

Once you've got to “where” the tune goes on by step.

8. Sing the first two lines of the carol to la. Then sing them to the note numbers, pointing to the vertical diagram.

Here are the words for lines 3 and 4:

“In fields where they lay akeeping their sheep

On a cold winter's night that was so deep”.

Underline the stressed syllables.

Sing those two lines. What do you notice about them compared with lines 1 and 2?

There's a good chance it was obvious to you that the tune for lines 3 and 4 is the same as that for lines 1 and 2. You can write in the note numbers. Since the words are different sometimes some other syllables have two notes. Where does the jump come this time?

in	fields	where	they	lay	a -	keep -	ing	their	sheep			

on	a	cold	win -	ter's	night	that	was	so	deep			

10. Practise being able to perform the beat while you sing “The First Nowell”.

The tune is in three time. Like a waltz.

There's a useful sitting down slap and clap pattern for three time. On **1** you slap your knees and on **2** and **3** you clap. Slap, clap, clap; slap, clap, clap; slap, clap, clap.

Sing the last line “born is the king of Israel” while you slap, clap, clap. You should find that you go through the slap, clap, clap pattern four times.

Notice how the slap comes when the stressed syllables start - “born” “king” “Is” “el”.

Think about the words for the first line – look at them if you need. The first stressed syllable is “first”, so you'll need a slap for that. The two notes for “The” come on a clap just before the slap. A lot of tunes do this, start before a stressed syllable / note.

In music notation stressed notes come straight after bar lines. Or, the other way round, the first note in a bar is a strong note. The beat before the bar line is weak. It's called the **up beat** perhaps because conductors do a downwards motion at the start of a bar on the strong beat and an upwards one on the last beat.

So “The First Nowell” starts at the end of a bar on the up beat. The technical term for the bit that comes before the first strong beat is an **anacrusis**.

What this means for performing the beat in the song is that you must be clapping on “The”, ready to slap on “first”.

Give yourself an introduction of nearly 4 sets of slap clap clap and then carry on

												The	first		no -	well		the
S	C	C	S	C	C	S	C	C	S	C	C	S	C	C	S	C	C	

You may find it really easy to keep the slap clap clap going while you sing the carol. That's great. You don't need to practise it. If you don't find it easy it would help your musical skill development to work on it. Practise each line separately until you can do it – it's mainly a co-ordination matter. Notice how the note for the last “well” in line 5 takes up 3 beats,

Lines 1 – 5 start on the upbeat. Line 6 starts on a strong beat – the slap.

11. Play the tune on a keyboard

You can do this on a real or virtual keyboard. Here's a straightforward one on line <https://www.musicca.com/piano>

The 8 notes from lowest to highest are C D E F G A B C. You don't need any of the black notes. Use your knowledge of the note numbers to work out which note to start on, and then play the tune. You know where it goes by step, up or down, jumps or stays the same.

12. Write the tune out in music notation (with some help)

This task is on the pdf headed “Mini-Project 103 The First Nowell Task 12”. You can check what you've done on “Mini-Project 103 The First Nowell Answers”.