

Sonic Postcards – an introduction

“Sonic Postcards” was originally a project run about fifteen years ago by the Sonic Arts Network – now Sound and Music. It was a way for children from across the UK, and beyond, to send and receive short audio depictions of their environment. The project promoted focussed, active listening; Sonic Postcards brought about the idea of [“A Minute of Listening”](#).

In Camden we are encouraging schools to get involved in a new version of the project, recording sounds from their own environments to share and exchange with children in other schools.

Here’s a [Sonic Postcard from my kitchen](#).



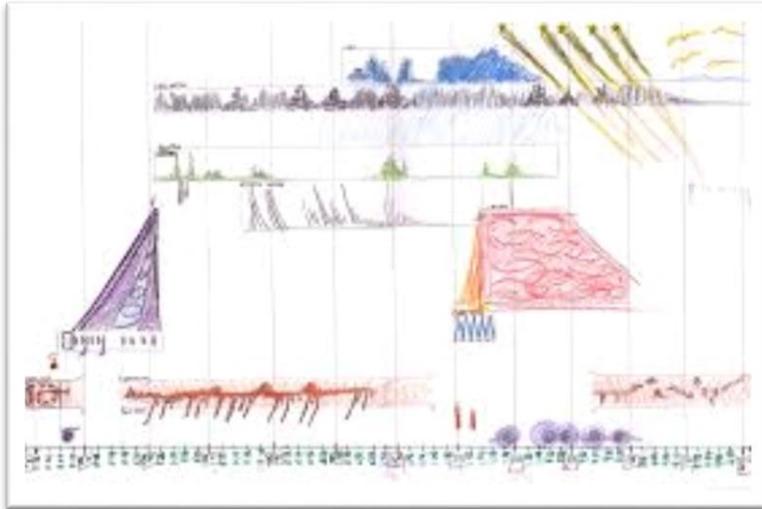
Sonic Postcards in the curriculum

There are lots of cross-curricular links with ICT, geography, science, visual art, speaking and listening, creative writing and poetry, not to mention music.

Creating and receiving Sonic Post Cards is mostly to do with really careful listening; the discussion generated around this is as important as the actual sounds themselves.

Sounds can be classified and described:-

- continuous sounds
- rhythmic sounds
- instantaneous sounds
- sounds from the natural world
- machine-made sounds
- layers of sounds
- vocal sounds – different languages, different dialects
- sounds that get louder / quieter
- silence – is there ever silence?



Sounds can be drawn / represented by symbols and used to produce Graphic Scores. These scores can be used as a way of planning a Sonic Postcard, or drawn as a response to soundscapes sent by others. Graphic scores can be merely aid-memoirs - a practical way of notating what's going on in the sonosphere - or they can become full-scale pieces of visual art.

Sonic Postcard activities

You will need to get to grips with a bit of recording technology, but it's really important not to let any recording / technology faff get in the way of the appreciation of the sounds themselves.

Encourage children to become really aware of the sounds around them, even the tiniest ones. They need to become Sound Collectors.

As a class:-

- listen and discuss some sounds you've already recorded – can the children recognise them / describe them / create symbols for them?
- play "Sound Bingo" or make a "Sound Quiz"
- children can keep Sound Diaries
- children can make Sound Maps
- challenge them to find different sorts of sounds eg a loud sound, a rhythmic sound, a fast moving sound, a relaxing sound, a really low-pitched sound, a sound you can hardly hear, a repeating sound, a sound that makes you jump, a sound that makes you smile.



Recording Sonic Postcards

There are lots of ways of recording and editing sounds and you may well have your preferred method. I'm keen to offer ways which are free, don't need lots of equipment and are available for children to use at home if they want to continue working on a project.

Bandlab Education is very accessible and has the option of incorporating midi sounds and ready made loops. I've made a short guide to [Making a Sonic Postcard using Bandlab](#) (apologies for the audio quality!)

Audacity has been around for a while. It is a free audio editor and is fantastic, but can look a bit complicated. Here's [a beginners' guide](#).

Sharing Sonic Postcards

The whole idea behind this project is that schools send soundscapes to each other. We can do this through school websites / the CMS website or directly between schools.

Sonic Postcards may be made by individuals or collaboratively with a class. Or maybe you compile a SPC for your whole school.

There are no rules about what you should / shouldn't include, but a guide length of between 30 seconds and a minute is suggested.

When people listen to your soundscape, they may be able to work out what your starting points were / what you recorded, but discussions about *what they think they can hear* are perhaps more important. It would, however, also be useful if there were a little explanation about the sounds you used and how you've used them / changed them.

Signing up to the project

Further resources will be available at www.camdenmusic.org

For more info and to sign up for the project, please email sheena.masson@camden.gov.uk

We look forward to sharing your Sonic Postcards!

