

A blue silhouette of a person singing into a microphone, with one arm raised. The silhouette is positioned behind the main text.

Think Like A Vocalist: Exploring Melodic Contour and Style Across Genres



Lesson Objective

Students will analyze, compare, and reinterpret melodies by exploring covers of popular songs across multiple genres and artists.



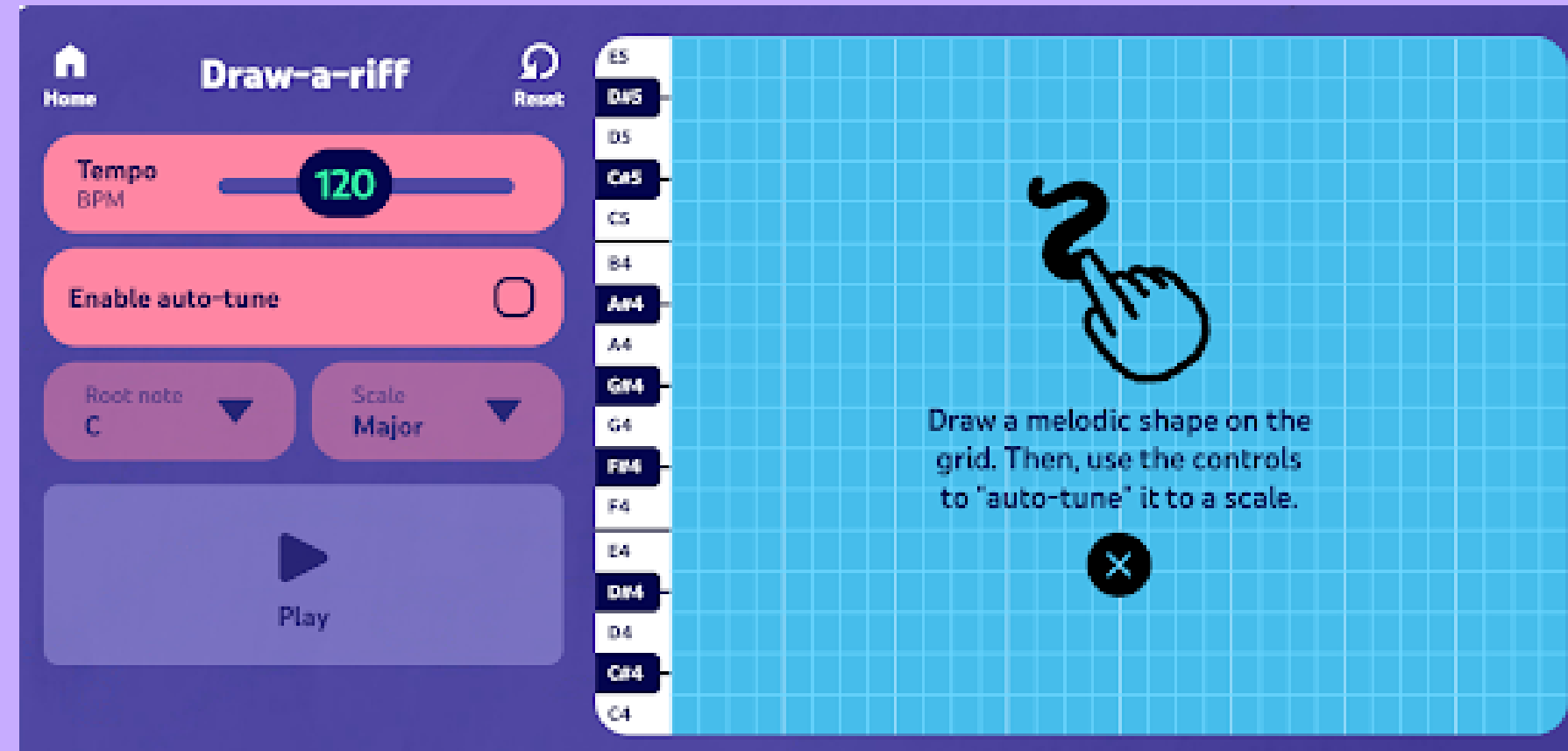
Exploring Melodic Contour – Vocabulary

- **Melodic contour:** The shape or direction of a melody as it moves up and down in pitch.
- **Tempo:** The speed of music.
- **Autotune:** A tool that automatically corrects or adjusts the pitch of a note so that it matches the chosen key and scale.



Exploring Melodic Contour

1. Open the Riff Runner app.
2. Select 'Draw-a-riff.'





Pyramid-shaped Riff

Original

Home Draw-a-riff Reset

Tempo BPM 120

Enable auto-tune

Root note C Scale Major

Play

ES
D#5
D5
C#5
C5
B4
A#4
A4
G#4
G4
F#4
F4
E4
D#4
D4
C#4
C4

Autotuned

Home Draw-a-riff Reset

Tempo BPM 120

Enable auto-tune

Root note C Scale Major

Play

ES
D#5
D5
C#5
C5
B4
A#4
A4
G#4
G4
F#4
F4
E4
D#4
D4
C#4
C4



Staircase-shaped Riff

Original

Home Draw-a-riff Reset

Tempo BPM 120

Enable auto-tune

Root note C Scale Major

Play

ES
D#5
D5
C#5
C5
B4
A#4
A4
G#4
G4
F#4
F4
E4
D#4
D4
C#4
C4

Autotuned + Tempo change

Home Draw-a-riff Reset

Tempo BPM 96

Enable auto-tune

Root note C Scale Major

Play

ES
D#5
D5
C#5
C5
B4
A#4
A4
G#4
G4
F#4
F4
E4
D#4
D4
C#4
C4



Wave-shaped Riff

Original

The screenshot shows the 'Draw-a-riff' app interface. On the left, there are controls: 'Tempo BPM' set to 120, 'Enable auto-tune' (unchecked), 'Root note' set to C, and 'Scale' set to Major. A 'Play' button is at the bottom. The main area is a piano keyboard with a red wave-shaped line drawn across it, starting at C4, peaking at E4, dipping to G3, and rising to C5.

Autotuned + Scale change

The screenshot shows the 'Draw-a-riff' app interface with the same red wave-shaped line. The controls are: 'Tempo BPM' set to 120, 'Enable auto-tune' (checked), 'Root note' set to C, and 'Scale' set to Melodic Minor. The piano keyboard shows green rectangular markers above the notes, indicating the autotuned pitch for each point on the wave.



Reflection Questions

- How would you describe the sound of each shape you drew?
- Which scale did you prefer the sound of, and why?
- Did you prefer the autotuned or original versions, and why?
- Which tempo did you prefer and why?



Comparing Covers - Vocabulary

1. **Form:** The structure or organization of a piece of music. How different sections (such as verse, chorus and bridge) are arranged and repeated.
2. **Instrumentation:** The specific instruments and voices used in a piece of music and how they combine to create the overall sound.
3. **Genre:** A category of music that shares similar styles, sounds, and traditions.
 - **Pop:** A style with catchy melodies, simple structures, and lyrics that appeal to a wide audience.
 - **R&B:** Rhythm and Blues; features strong grooves, soulful vocals, and expressive phrasing.
 - **Country:** Often uses guitars, storytelling lyrics, and steady rhythms inspired by folk and blues traditions.
 - **Musical Theater:** Combines songs, dialogue, and movement to tell a story, often performed on stage.
 - **Folk:** Rooted in cultural traditions, featuring acoustic instruments and lyrics that tell everyday stories.
 - **Rock:** Built around electric guitars, bass, and drums, with strong rhythms and energetic performances.

Select 2 genres to review that reflect those in the 2 versions of your chosen song.



Comparing Covers

**Song version #1 video
(see resources for links)**

**Song version #2 video
(see resources for links)**

Which version of the song is better?

Consider the form, instrumentation and genre when sharing your response.



Reflection Questions

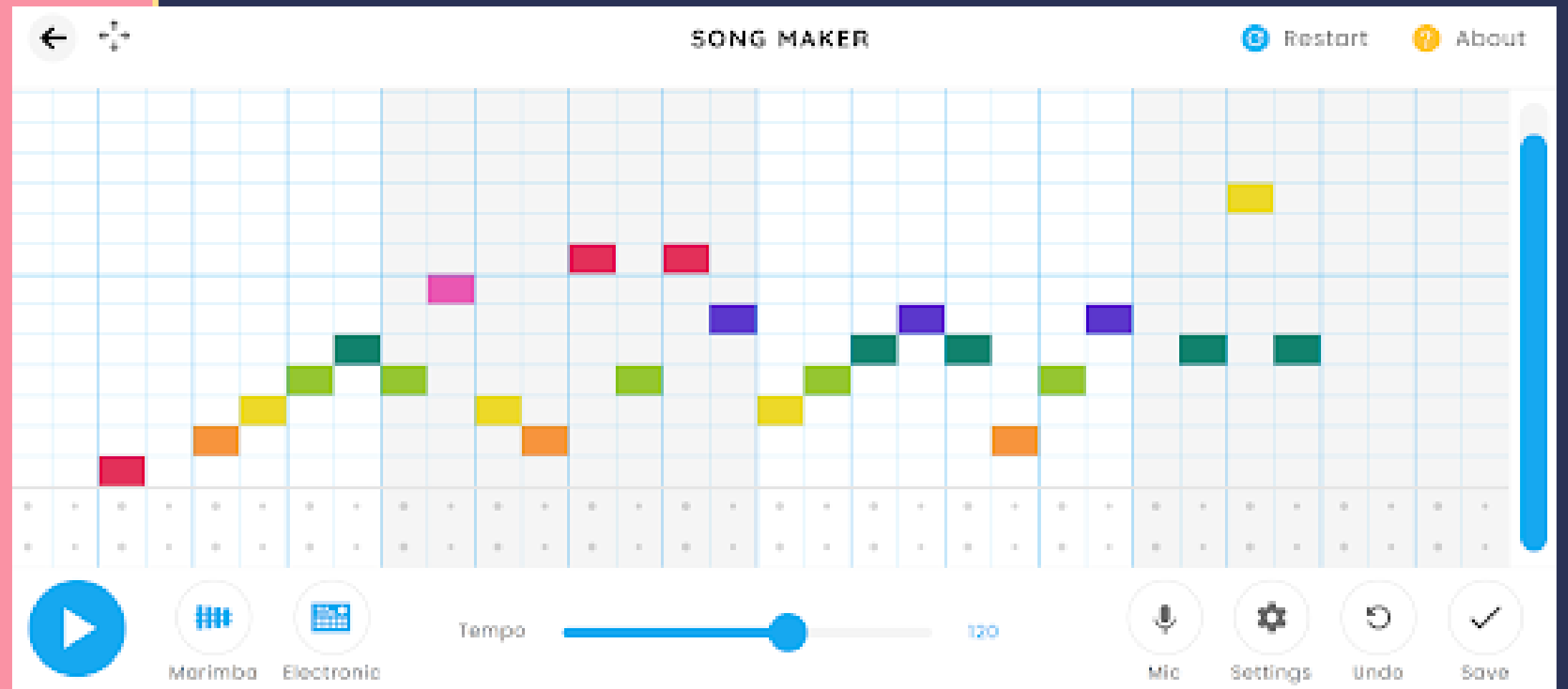
- What did you learn from engaging in a debate about musical covers?
- Did your opinion change from this debate?
- Which side do you feel 'won' the debate, and why?

Think Like A Vocalist: Mapping and Embellishing the Chorus Project Overview



Project Objective: Students will analyze and map the chorus of a song using Songmaker and then creatively embellish it with their own musical ideas. This project has two parts:

- 1. Map the Chorus:** Visualize and understand the melody of a song's chorus.
- 2. Embellish the Chorus:** Add 1 riff and 1 melisma to the chorus.



Think Like A Vocalist: Project Rubric



Criteria	3 – Proficient	2 – Developing	1 – Emerging
Chorus Mapping	The full chorus is mapped accurately in Songmaker, featuring all of the correct pitches and rhythms.	The first two lines of the chorus are mapped mostly accurately in Songmaker, with 1-3 pitch or rhythm errors.	The first two lines of the chorus are mapped partially accurately in Songmaker, with more than 3 pitch or rhythm errors.
Riff and Melisma Creation	One complete melisma and one complete riff are mapped on top of the chorus in Songmaker. Both follow the correct beat structure.	One complete melisma or riff is mapped on top of the chorus in Songmaker. It follows the correct beat structure.	One partial melisma or riff is mapped on top of the chorus in Songmaker. It does not follow the correct beat structure.
Project Setup	The scale, length and beat split settings are adjusted correctly on Songmaker.	Some combination of scale, length and beat split settings are adjusted correctly on Songmaker, but 1-2 of these elements are adjusted incorrectly.	The scale, length and beat split settings are all not adjusted correctly on Songmaker.



Project – Vocabulary

1. **Chorus:** The main, repeated section of a song that usually contains the hook or most memorable lyrics. It often has the same melody and words each time it appears and expresses the central message or feeling of the song.
2. **Riff:** A short, repeated musical pattern or phrase that gives a song its recognizable hook or groove.
3. **Melisma:** A group of notes sung on a single syllable of a word that creates a smooth, expressive sound, often used to add emotion or style to a melody.



Project Expectations – Part 1

Part 1 Step-by-Step

1. Open Songmaker in Chrome Music Lab.
2. Adjust the settings:
 - **Scale:** Chromatic
 - **Length:** 16 bars
3. Practice Round: Map out “Happy Birthday” on Songmaker.
4. Select one version of the song analyzed in Activity 1.
 - Slow it down to 0.75x speed (scores provided for original versions only).
5. Map out the chorus on Songmaker.
6. Save your Songmaker link and email it to your teacher for submission.



Project Expectations – Part 2

Part 2 Step-by-Step

1. Open the [Songmaker](#) link from Part 1 of this project..
2. Adjust the settings:
 - **Split beats into: 4**
3. Embellish the chorus by adding:
 - **1 riff**
 - **1 melisma**

Hot Tip: Use the [Riff Runner app](#) to practice mapping out the contour of your riff and melisma. This will enable you to hear how they sound in isolation from the chorus.

4. Save your updated Songmaker link and email it to your teacher for submission.



Reflection Questions

- How did your riffs and melismas enhance this chorus?
- Did your riffs and melismas impact the mood of the chorus?
- Which version of the chorus do you prefer? The original or your embellished version, and why?
- How do your embellishments make the chorus feel more authentic to you?