



Composition Program

COMPOSER GUIDE

What to Expect, Suggestions, FAQ's, and more.



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Introduction

Welcome to the Sing Me a Story Composition Project!

As a composer, you'll transform a child's story into an original piece of music to be performed for them by a live ensemble. This is a unique opportunity to use your artistic voice to create joy, empathy, and connection. If questions arise along the way, Sing Me a Story Staff are always available to assist you.

Why Participate?

This project offers a unique and valuable opportunity for student composers to engage in a real world, creative collaboration. With a \$250 commission fee, participants gain hands on experience writing music for an actual performing ensemble and working with the story of a young author. Composers will learn to meet the choir where they are musically, adapting their artistic voice to fit the ensemble's abilities, while also honoring the voice and spirit of the story writer. This is a chance to grow as a communicator, collaborator, and composer, all while making a meaningful impact through music.

How it Works:

1. A child in need local to the commissioning ensemble writes and illustrates a story about anything they want.
2. A collegiate composition student turns the story into a musical score.
3. The commissioning ensemble meets and works with the composer to learn the piece.
4. The ensemble then performs the piece live for the child and their family, usually as a part of a scheduled concert.

Program Timeline

As a composer in the SMAS project, your role is to transform a child's story into a moving, accessible, and age-appropriate musical work for a live ensemble. Below is the timeline for this project.

Child & Composer Selection

Sing Me a Story will identify both a child and a collegiate composer to work with for this project. SMAS will facilitate a story-writing session with the selected child.

Months
1-2

Composition Process

SMAS will connect the participating ensemble with the composer and provide text of the written story as well as information about the child. Composer develops the piece, provides a draft at 30 days (1 month), submits final version at 60 days (2 months).

Month
3

Handoff to Ensemble

Ensemble receives completed piece to begin rehearsals. The director may request any necessary edits that may need to be made upon rehearsing the piece with their ensemble.

Rehearsal

Ensemble begins rehearsals. Director has the opportunity to invite the composer to collaborate with the ensemble in person or via Zoom.

Performance

The song is performed live for the child it was inspired by as a part of a pre-scheduled concert set by the director.

Composer Checklist

This section outlines the expectations and deadlines you are required to meet in order to participate successfully.

Important: Failure to meet the deadlines for the first draft (end of Month 1) or final draft (end of Month 2) may result in termination from the project and forfeiture of payment.

Story Handoff - Day 1

- ☐ Receive the child's story and brief background from SMAS. Sign up as a participating songwriter on the SMAS website by [clicking here](#).

Initial Connection

- ☐ Participate in a virtual meet-and-greet with the ensemble director.

Composition Draft - Day 30

- ☐ Submit a first draft of your score by the end of day 30 (month 1).

Revisions

- ☐ Make edits based on feedback from the ensemble director.

Final Submission - Day 60

- ☐ Finalized score and parts must be delivered by the end of day 60 (month 2). Payment will be issued upon receipt of the completed materials.

Collaboration

- ☐ Optional: Attend one or more rehearsals via Zoom or in person.

Performance

- ☐ Celebrate the live premiere of your work, performed for the child and family.

Creative Guidelines

Narration

If your piece is written for a band, orchestra, or any ensemble without a choir, ***narration is required***. The narration should integrate the child's story text in a meaningful and accessible way and may be delivered during the performance.

If narration is included, clearly indicate in the score where spoken text should occur and include the narration script as a separate document if needed. Examples of how narration has been included in previous pieces can be found [here](#).

Story Integrity

We ask that the song is clearly inspired by the ideas presented in the story.

Instrumentation

Write for the ensemble as specified by the director.

Creating an Impactful Piece

One of the most meaningful aspects of this project is the opportunity to create a piece that resonates deeply with the young author who inspired it. As you compose, consider how your musical choices can engage and uplift the story writer, both emotionally and imaginatively. Some things to keep in mind:

- ***Age-Appropriate Connection:*** Think about the age of the child and what kinds of musical ideas might speak to them. For younger children, this might include clear melodies, playful textures, or musical gestures that reflect key characters or moments. Older children may respond to more layered storytelling or emotional nuance.

Creative Guidelines

- **Highlight Their Voice:** Consider musical ways to bring their words, characters, or emotions to life. Are there moments in the story that could be musically emphasized to make the child feel seen and celebrated?
- **Legacy Pieces:** For children in hospice care or living with an incurable illness, your composition may become a lasting legacy, a musical reflection of their voice, imagination, and spirit. Approach their story with care, aiming to create something meaningful that their family can cherish for years to come. Whether joyful, whimsical, or tender, your music can be a powerful gift of comfort and remembrance.
- **Ask Yourself:** If I were this child, how would I feel hearing this piece? What might surprise me? What might make me feel proud of my story?

Examples of Impactful Performances:

- George Ranch High School Choir brought their child's story to life by dressing up as characters, acting out scenes on stage, and even throwing candy to the audience. [Watch Here.](#)
- Marion Community Schools enhanced their performance of 7-year-old Elliott's pirate-themed story by having students wear pirate hats, adding a fun and immersive element to the storytelling. [Watch Here.](#)
- Iowa State University Choir transformed 11-year-old cancer survivor Blake Bonta's superhero story into a 10-minute musical composition. Choir members portrayed different characters from Blake's narrative, acting out scenes on stage to bring his story to life. They finished the concert with the entire audience chanting Blake's name. [Watch Here.](#)

Submission Guidelines

Full Score

- PDF format, clear layout, all markings included.

Individual Parts

- PDF format, transposed correctly, with measure numbers.

Audio Realization

- MIDI mockup or audio file (MP3 or WAV) to help the ensemble prepare.

Delivery Method

- Submit via email to both the director and SMAS representative.

Ownership & Rights

Sing Me a Story relies on the use of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#). For any questions on this, please reach out to Austin Atteberry at austine@singmeastory.org.

Copyright

You retain copyright of your original work.

Usage License

SMAS and the ensemble may perform and share the piece (recordings, video) in accordance with the agreed upon Creative Commons Attribution License that all parties agree to by signing up as a songwriter participant on our website [here](#).

Credit Guidelines

Include child's first name and "inspired by the story written by "child's first name" as a part of the Sing Me a Story Foundation."

Future Use

You may revise and perform your piece elsewhere with proper credit.

Additional questions or concerns?

Contact Austin Atteberry at Austin@singmeastory.org.

Publishing Opportunity

Sing Me a Story has partnered with J.W. Pepper—the largest sheet music retailer in the country—to give your music greater visibility and longevity, all while supporting the children we serve.

Here's what this means for you as a composer:

- **Free My Score Account**
 - You'll receive a complimentary My Score account on J.W. Pepper's self-publishing platform, where you can easily upload and share your SMAS composition.
- **Promo Code: SMAS-FREE**
 - Use this code when signing up to waive the account setup fee.
- **Wide Reach and Visibility**
 - Your piece will appear on a dedicated Sing Me a Story page on the J.W. Pepper website, reaching thousands of educators, conductors, and performers across the country.
- **Royalties**
 - You'll receive a 25% royalty for Print on Demand sales and a 50% royalty for ePrint sales—allowing you to earn while promoting a mission that matters.

Participation is completely optional, but we encourage you to consider it. Sharing your piece through this platform can help extend its reach while supporting a beautiful cause.

If you have questions or need help setting up your My Score account, reach out to: myscore@jwpepper.com

Acknowledgment and Agreement

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the contents of this guide. I agree to the expectations, guidelines, deadlines, and responsibilities outlined above, and commit to participating in this project with professionalism, respect, and creativity. I understand that failure to meet the required deadlines or deliverables may result in forfeiture of the \$250 payment.

Composer Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____



For any additional questions or concerns contact
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