Lesson Title: Exploring Major and Minor Tonality

Grade Level: 3rd - 5th Grade

Intro:

The school I teach at in Santa Rosa Beach is on Highway 30A, a scenic stretch of road traversing the Emerald Coast of Northwest Florida. A few years ago, a student brought me a copy of Grace Hammond Skertich's book, Goodnight 30A. The text connects with our students as they know the locations mentioned in the text and our small coastal towns' dreamy, laid-back atmosphere. I've used the book as a catalyst for teaching major and minor tonality. However, any text will do, especially if your students create their own!

This lesson is best taught over several class periods, allowing students to explore tonality, collaborate, and create their works in small groups or a large ensemble.

Objectives:

• Students will understand the difference between major and minor tonalities.

• Students can play major and minor arpeggios on Orff instruments.

• Students will create and perform ostinatos that complement major and minor tonalities.

• Students will collaborate to create a lullaby that represents water, the sounds of nature, and the peaceful atmosphere of a sunset over the ocean.

Materials Needed:

• Orff Instruments: Soprano, Alto, and Bass Xylophones; Contra Bass Bars; Alto and Bass Metallophones; Soprano and Alto Glockenspiels

• Additional Percussion: Several different-sized frog rasps, an ocean drum, wind chimes, two large rainsticks, and an optional thunder tube

• Scarves or other props for movement activities

Lesson Outline:

1. Introduction (5-10 minutes)

• Begin by discussing water/ocean and its moods or feelings, such as calm, stormy, or flowing.

• Ask students: “How could we represent water or the ocean using music? What would peaceful water sound like? What about a stormy sea?”

Optional Movement Activity:

• Invite students to use non-locomotor movements to express the movement of water or weather. For example, they could sway their arms to mimic gentle waves or make circular motions representing swirling currents. Expand the movement

to include locomotor, moving between other students and using the classroom space.

• Provide scarves or other props and encourage students to use them to illustrate the ebb and flow of water or gentle breezes and the more intense movements of a storm.

• Connect this movement exercise to the mood of a lullaby by focusing on slow, flowing gestures.

2. Tonal Exploration (10 minutes)

• Demonstrate a major arpeggio (C-E-G) and ask students how it sounds. Discuss how major sounds often feel “happy” or “bright.”

• Play a minor arpeggio (A-C-E) and ask students to describe how it feels. Guide them to terms like “sad” or “mysterious.”

• Ask students to describe the sounds of major and minor arpeggios in their own words, encouraging them to use descriptive language.

• Allow students to experiment by playing both arpeggios on their pitched Orff instruments. Give them time to get comfortable switching between major and minor.

3. Creating Ostinatos (10 minutes)

• Introduce the concept of an ostinato as a repeated pattern in music.

• Have students work in pairs or small groups to create simple ostinatos using major and minor tonalities. For example:

• Major ostinato: C-E-G

• Minor ostinato: A-C-E

• Challenge them to create patterns that could reflect calm water or waves. Begin to include non-pitched percussion instruments with each group.

4. Composition and Improvisation (15 minutes)

• Combine groups and have them layer their ostinatos over a steady beat.

• Introduce a simple melody from the score for Goodnight 30A, or allow students to improvise melodies that fit the major or minor tonality.

• Encourage students to play with dynamics and tempo to reflect different “water” scenes, such as a gentle stream, rain, or a powerful wave.

• Guide students to shape their compositions to evoke the calm and gentle mood of a lullaby inspired by the book *Goodnight 30A* by Grace Hammond Skertich or any text representing the sunset on the ocean with sounds of nature.

5. Learning the Goodnight 30A Accompaniment (10 minutes)

• Introduce the accompaniment for *Goodnight 30A*, focusing on each part for pitched percussion and non-pitched instruments:

Pitched Percussion Options:

• Option 1: Have the pitched percussion instruments (xylophones, metallophones, glockenspiels) enter in layers from the lower to higher voices. This will create a gradual, flowing effect that mirrors the calm ebb and flow of water.

• Option 2: When performing this section with the book Goodnight 30A or other text, have the pitched percussion enter together over the non-pitched percussion parts. In this option, the pitched percussion would play their ostinato parts twice before ending on a C to create a final, peaceful resolution. The non-pitched percussion instruments would continue playing quietly as the next part of the text is read.

• Frog rasps, ocean drum, and rainstick: Play improvised sounds without a steady beat to represent the natural ambiance of a sunset. Optionally, add a thunder tube for a soft rumble in the distance.

• Wind chimes: Played slowly and gently to represent a calming breeze.

• Log or tongue drums: Provide a simple ostinato rhythm to set a soft, steady pulse.

Optional Idea:

Please encourage students to incorporate parts they previously created, such as ostinatos from earlier in the lesson, layering these with the accompaniment to enhance the overall sound.

6. Group Performance and Reflection (10 minutes)

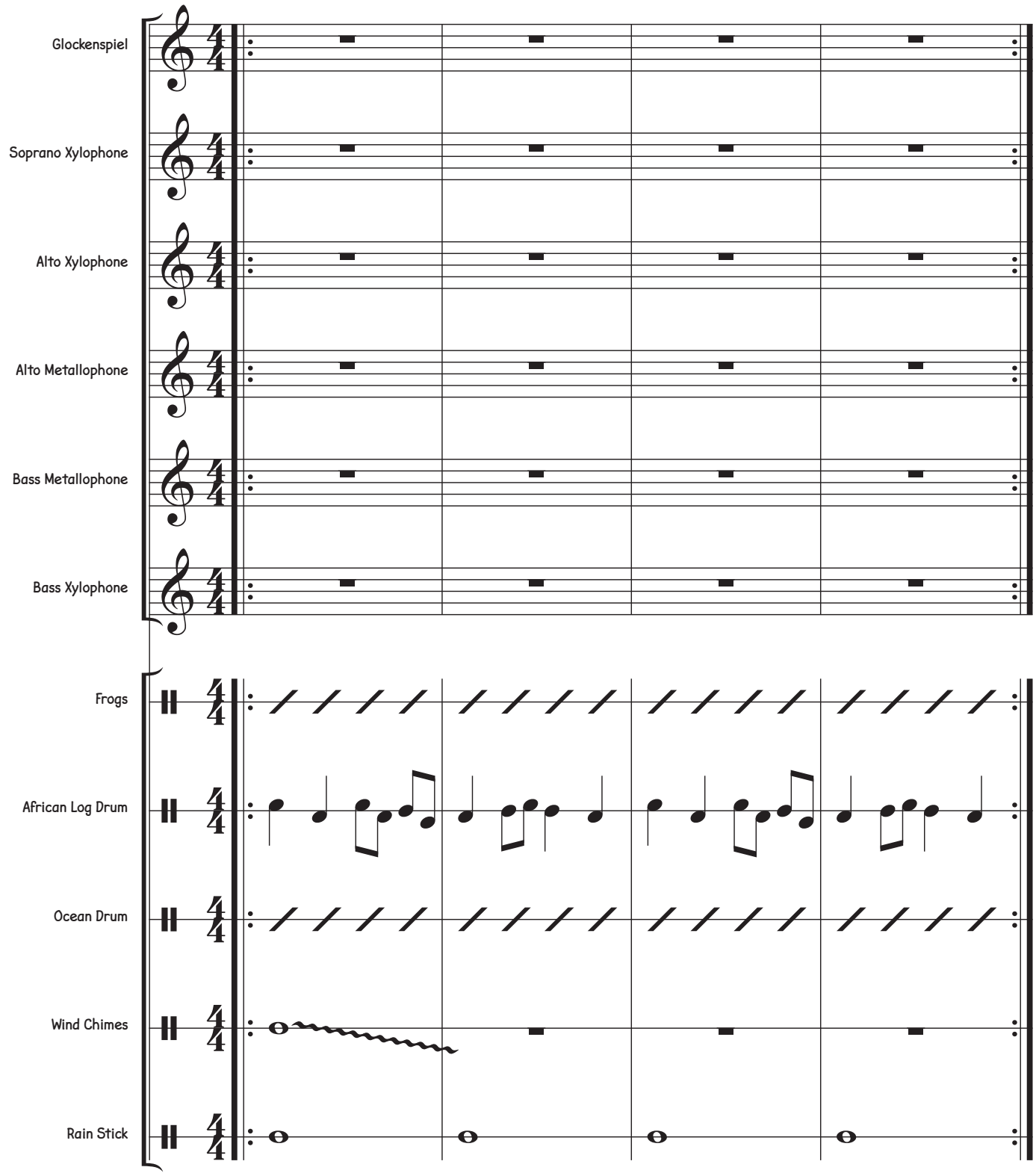
• Have the students perform their ocean-inspired lullaby compositions for the class, including the *Goodnight 30A* accompaniment.

• After each group performs, ask them to describe how they used tonality, ostinatos, and dynamics to represent water and nature.

• Conclude by discussing how music can capture different emotions and scenes and have students share how the activity helped them understand major and minor sounds.

Goodnight 30A

Dan Browne



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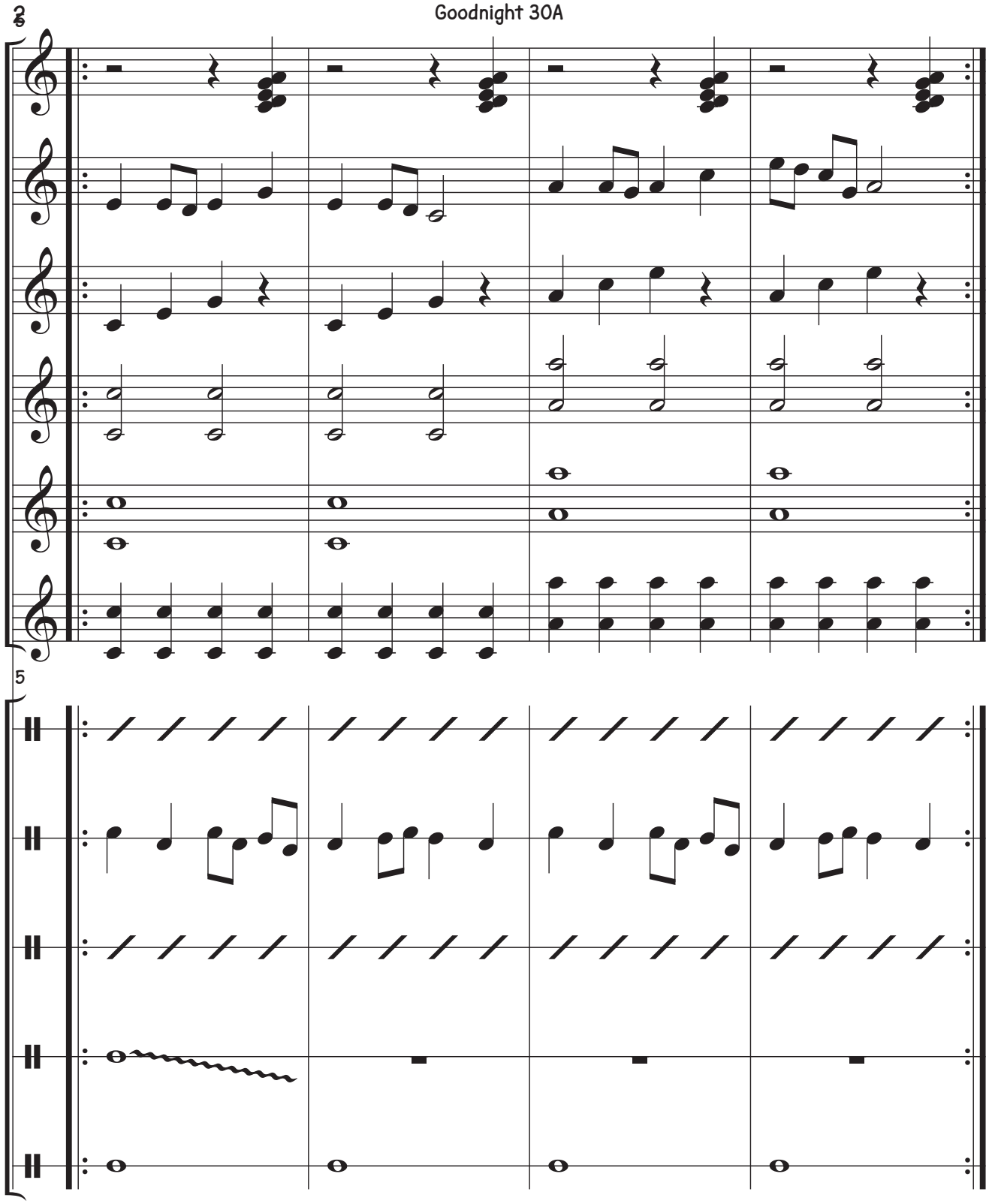

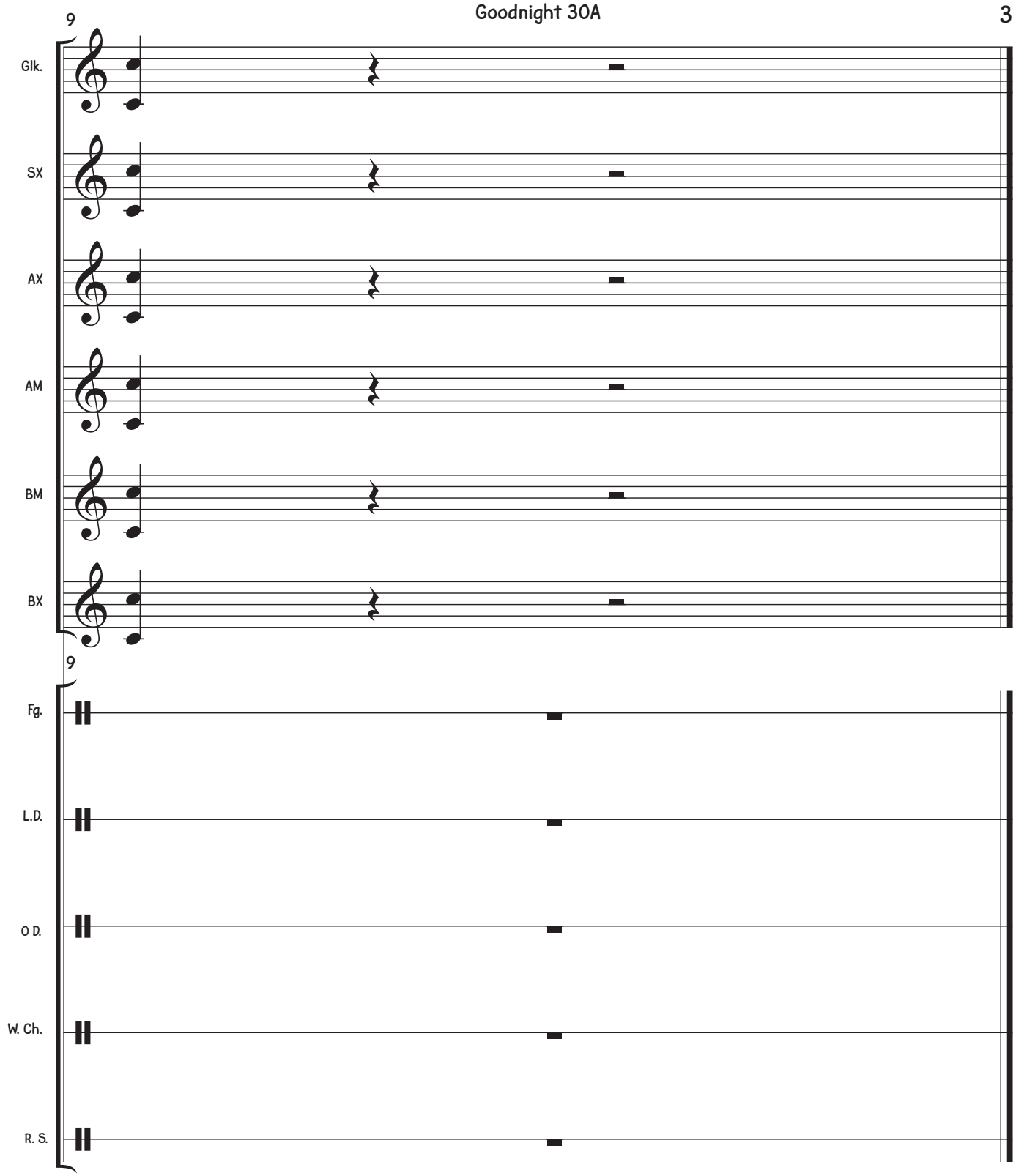
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