

Tracy Cooper

Have you ever wanted to become an adventurer, meet ghosts, and save the world from eternal dullness, all while sharpening your music theory skills? My name is Tracy Cooper and I'm the designer of *Hardship in Harmonia*, a music theory puzzle LARP for grades 6-8. A LARP, or live action role play, is a game where players become part of a story, moving through the real world and going on adventures, where your actions shape how the story ends. In *Hardship in Harmonia*, players will become part of a utopian world where music is as important as the air we breathe. They'll work in teams to solve music theory puzzles in order to progress through The Caverns to get to the Planar Viola, a magical artifact that powers all the music in Harmonia, and bring it to safety before a group of evil bandits can steal it and destroy all the music in the land. If your team gets to it before the other groups, you might even be awarded with gold for your efforts.

The game is intended for a group of 6-24 players and one or more facilitators in a classroom or music camp setting. It takes about 60-90 minutes to complete in full, but can take less time if most of the preparation is done at home before class. There are built-in puzzles to practice pitch recognition on a staff, time signatures, identifying key signatures, writing major scales, reading rhythms, and sight-reading. Many of the exercises also have multiple difficulty levels so the instructor can pick the one that's best for their group. It's recommended that instructors focus on skills that students have already learned in class as a way to review them.

After the instructor explains the story behind the game, splits the players into teams, and gives a quick safety briefing, each team will design their characters based on a series of questions. They'll decide what their characters' motivations are for accepting this quest and their relationships with music and each other. Then, the game can begin. Players will move from station to station, where they'll listen to recordings of the spirits of fictional musicians giving them instructions while immersing them in the game world and then collaboratively complete worksheets to practice different music theory skills. As they do this, they're encouraged to speak in character and embrace the dynamics they established during set-up to make the story come to life. At these stations, they'll decode a secret message by recognizing note names on a staff, figure out which rhythms match the time signatures they're supposed to be in, identify key signatures, and fix the accidentals in some scales to make them major. Once they complete all the stations, they'll approach the instructor, aka the Final Guardian, to check their work and ask them to correct anything they got wrong. Then, after they try to persuade the Final Guardian to give them the Planar Viola, the instructor will give them two final challenges, where they'll practice clapping rhythms and sight reading. Whoever gets through each of these challenges first gets to take the Planar Viola and take home the gold. But the game doesn't end until every team finishes the challenges and makes it out of the Caverns! Once the game is done, players will be asked to reflect on what they learned, what they want to work on more, and how it felt to embody a character in this world.

*Hardship in Harmonia* is a great way to make music theory skill practice memorable and fun. If your class could use a change of pace, enter the Caverns and put your skills to the test!