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Music Stories

By: [Carole Cox](#)



Music stories are compositions of a narrative or descriptive sort. Students can listen for the story in the music, and this type of music can be integrated with literature, literacy, social studies, science, mathematics, and the other arts.

Rationale

The 1st grade teacher read a picture book about Saint-Saens' music story, "The Carnival of the Animals," played the music for the children, and had them pantomime the movements of the animals to the music. Saint-Saens used the rhythm of the march for the lions, but at recess Alice lined other students up and led them around the playground in a spirited conga line rhythm, encouraging them to roar in time with the step, step, step, kick of the conga.

When her teacher asked her about it she said: "I saw the conga on a re-run of *I Love Lucy* on TV. I liked it. If I were the composer, I would have the lions dance the conga."

Music stories are compositions of a narrative or descriptive sort, and they are intended to depict or suggest nonmusical incidents, ideas, or images, such as those drawn from literature or legend. Students can listen for the story in the music, and this type of music can be integrated with literature, literacy, social studies, science, mathematics, and the other arts. Hope (2003) suggested that music can be integrated into an interdisciplinary curriculum with each area retaining unique integrity (e.g., both literature and the study of narrative or music based on a story).

Burrack and McKenzie (2005) investigated the effect of teaching approaches that associated visual art, the language arts, and music. They found students were better able to develop conceptual connections across these curricular areas: for example, the expressive movements of music to color in art and literature. One student in the study commented as follows: "When the picture mixed with the music, it really brought everything together." Cosenza (2006) made a case for integrating the visual arts and music as well.

Barrett (2001) emphasized the importance of challenging students to relate music to other disciplines and cultures when integrating music into the curriculum, maintaining that "deep understanding often depends upon the intersections and interactions of the disciplines" (p. 27), such as that which can occur when music is related to literature as well as the visual arts. Collett (1991) described a sequential arts education methodology (that resulted in students learning more with a curriculum based on integrated thematic units generated by the arts. For example, when two music story pieces were integrated into classroom instruction — Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf" and Saint-Saens' "Carnival of the Animals" — achievements in reading, sciences, and attitudes toward school were improved.

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Music/Arts Standards

- Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

- Evaluating music and music performances
- Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts
- Understanding music in relation to history and culture

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Strategy

Literature can be used to introduce the story upon which a piece of program music is based. Programmatic music can be selected for grade-level appropriateness, for music related to another content area to practice an interdisciplinary approach to teaching the arts, or for other criteria such as current events or student or teacher interest in a piece of music or a particular composer.

After selecting a piece of programmatic music, introducing it with literature, and playing it for students, use reader response questions and prompts to lead a discussion. What were you thinking about as you listened to the music? Tell about anything the music reminded you of from your own life as you listened. What did you wonder about the music? Tell how you heard the story in the music.

For younger students, create a T-chart to record student ideas in two columns. In the left-hand column, list the Sights/Story, and in the right-hand column, list Sounds/Music. Older students can write responses in a double-entry journal. A double-entry journal uses a page with a vertical line down the middle, similar to a T-chart. In the left-hand column, they can note the sights or part of the story they hear in the music, and in the right-hand column, they can write the sounds of the music that correspond to the sights and the story. Older students can write in their journals while listening and share what they have written in a small group first; then a spokesperson from each group can share what they discussed with the whole class.

You can continue writing in music journals with students and discussing the journal entries, or you can choose from several ways to extend the experience of listening to and writing about programmatic music: You can read literature related to the story or to the author of the story that forms the inspiration for the music; read, write, and learn more about the piece of music, the composer, or the period of history in which it was written; or create interdisciplinary projects related to the music, such as creating a dance choreography, dramatizing the story with the music, or responding to the music with the visual arts.

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Grade-level modifications

K–2nd Grade

Read aloud the picture book *Carnival of the Animals* (Lithgow, 2007), which is a narrative of the music composed by Camille Saint-Saens in 1886, reimagined by John Lithgow. In Lithgow's story, a young boy wanders off from a school field trip in a natural history museum and sees his classmates, teachers, and family transformed into a menagerie of the animals that the composer Saint-Saens represented in his musical composition.

Play the music and ask students reader response aesthetic questions and prompts after each animal is introduced in the music: What were you thinking about when you listened to this part of the music? How did the music make you feel? The teacher can take dictation for younger students on chart paper, and older students can write their response in a double-entry journal as described in the general strategy.

The teacher can also read *Carnival of the Animals: Classical Music for Kids* (Saint-Saens & Turner, 1999), which gives an introduction to the music, shows the instruments associated with each animal, and provides commentary. This book comes with a full-length, music only CD. The teacher can use a T-chart with students, asking them to identify the instruments of the orchestra played for each of the animals.

Students can reflect on this piece of programmatic music through the other arts by doing the following: (1) pantomiming the movements of the animals and creating a dance choreography using the movements to the music, (2) drawing or painting illustrations for each of the animals, (3) creating dramatic scenes with the animals with dialogue and conversations among the animals, and (4) writing poems or stories about each of the animals. A good book to read aloud to model drawing and painting is *Can You Hear It?* (Lach & Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), which includes a CD and shows 13 examples of pictorial music and visual masterpieces such as a Remington's painting of the Old West and Aaron Copeland's "Billy the Kid: Gun Battle." For poetry writing, the teacher can read *Carnival of the Animals With CD: Poems Inspired by Saint-Saens Music* (Chernaik, 2006), with 13 different poets writing a poem corresponding to each of the animals in the composition.

Recommended children's books

- *Carnival of the Animals with CD: Poems Inspired by Saint-Saens Music* by Judith Chernaik
- *Meet the Orchestra* by Ann Hayes
- *Can You Hear It?* by William Lach & Metropolitan Museum of Art
- *Carnival of the Animals* by John Lithgow
- *Zin! Zin! Zin! A Violin* by Lloyd Moss
- *Carnival of the Animals: Classical Music for Kids* by Camille Saint-Saens and Barrie Turner

3rd Grade–5th grade

Read aloud Sergei Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* (Schulman & Prokofiev, 2004), which comes with a fully orchestrated and narrated CD. After playing the music, the teacher can lead a class discussion using reader response questions and prompts: What did you picture in your mind as you listened to the story and the music? The students can write in double-entry journals on what they pictured in their mind for each part of the story in the left-hand column, and they can write the sounds and music that corresponded to that part of the story in the right-hand column.

The teacher can make a chart with five columns for (1) characters in the story, (2) description of the characters, (3) the instrument representing each character, (4) the sound of the character in the music, and (5) the mood of the music in that part of the story and how it made them feel. The teacher can read the story and play the music again. Students can take turns at the chart, asking other students to raise their hands when they hear another character in the music.

Students can use the other arts to respond to the book and music by illustrating scenes from the story and music for posting on classroom bulletin boards, for making a class book, or for first pantomiming the characters and then writing scripts for each of the scenes to present as a story dramatization to accompany the music with spoken lines.

Recommended children's books

- *Peter and the Wolf* By Ian Beck
- *Peter and the Wolf* By Chris Raschka
- *Sergei Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf* By Janet Schulman

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Differentiated instruction

English language learners

Listening to music and focusing on the visual imagery of programmatic music allows English learners to use multiple senses to understand and use English. Create and add to a word bank of musical sounds, terms, and instruments, and use cognates in the students' home language to provide primary language support. The use of charts also scaffolds the learning for English learners. Students can write in double-entry journals with the help of a peer more proficient in English, with the teacher; or they can draw their ideas in journals to later use in discussions. They can also use pantomime and gestures to demonstrate their understanding of the music. Using props and realia like actual musical instruments provides further scaffolding.

Struggling students

Create a list of words to describe music and make a copy for each student to use as they discuss music and write in journals. Musical terms, the names of instruments, the words for sounds, and other relevant vocabulary can be on this list that students can access as they respond to music and write in journals. You can also take dictation for student comments on chart paper during whole class or small group discussions, and students can copy these into their journals. Students can also draw and label an image or scene from the music, using the word list.

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Assessment

For younger students, the teacher can direct students to draw a picture of a character or of an image or scene from the story behind the programmatic music. They can then use a frame that the student can complete about their drawing:

Here is _____. The instrument for _____ is _____. It sounds _____. It made me feel _____.

Confer with older students using their double-entry music journals, noting their comments; their understanding of the music, imagery, and stories; and their personal response to the music. During these conferences, you can learn more about the students' interest in types of music and plan further activities with the student related to the programmatic music used in the classroom.

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References

Cox, C. (2012). *Literature Based Teaching in the Content Areas*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

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Short Story 96 Andy Sawyer 7 Story and Film 117 Peter Wright 8 Why Teaching the Short Story Today is a Thankless Task 147 Charles E. May 9 Postgraduate Research 161 Ailsa Cox. Appendix: Film Adaptations 174. Further Reading 185. The Real Louise and Other Stories is published by Headland (2009). Michael Greaney teaches at the University of Lancaster, UK. His interests lie in modern/contemporary fiction and theory. His first book, *Conrad, Language, and Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), received the Joseph Conrad Society of America's Adam Gillon Award for the most significant work in Conrad studies from 2001–2004. In a narrative essay, you tell a story, often about a personal experience, but you also make a point. So, the purpose is not only to tell an entertaining tale, but also to expound on the importance of the experience. In the narrative essay examples below, see if you can pull out the moral or theme. When it's your time to draft a similar type of essay, hopefully, you can stir the heart of the reader. Sad woman with tea looking at phone. Sample Narrative Essays. Below, you'll find two narrative essay samples. One has a sad little twist and the other is a personal narrative essay that details the The Best Stories for Classical Music and Movement. Owl Moon. Owl Moon is a lovely story about a little girl and her father who go out into a wood to search for an owl at night. Over in the Jungle is another from the series of popular books by Marianne Berkes. It teaches all about habitat and who you can expect to find in the jungle. Below is a link to some authentic tribal African music and chants, which would be a great accompaniment. Story of the Orchestra : Listen While You Learn About the Instruments, the Music and the Composers Who Wrote the Music! This is a great resource for anyone wanting to introduce children to the world of Classical music. Composers and instruments brought to life in a kid friendly way.