

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

This Curriculum Guide is designed to prepare, reinforce, and extend learning concepts and ideas from the MPR Class Notes Video *How Composers Compose*.

The information and activities in this guide are intended to make music come alive and to align with Minnesota Standards in Music Education. We hope you will personalize, modify, or adjust content to meet the needs of your unique classroom.

In this curriculum, you will find a number of activities both directly and indirectly related to content from *How Composers Compose*.

The learning objectives of this video and curriculum are:

- 1) Students will understand what a composer does and be able to describe aspects of the compositional process.
- 2) Students will experience the compositional process by creating their own music.

PREPARING TO WATCH THE VIDEO

Just as literacy teachers use pre-reading strategies, music teachers can use pre-listening/pre-watching strategies. This helps students create a mental framework within which to organize new ideas, to relate new content to prior knowledge, and to make connections. What you bring to a listening experience will affect what you hear and take away from that experience.

1. *Preview some important vocabulary and concepts.* The primary aim of the video is to explain what a composer does and explain a bit about the compositional process.
2. *Ask questions.* Get students thinking about the actual activities a composer must do and the knowledge he or she must have in order to compose music. The questions below are all asked and answered in the video. Students may not have ready answers to these questions, but asking them beforehand will pique their interest and increase their attention when these questions (or a version of them) are asked (and answered) in the video.
 - a. What does a composer do?
 - b. Where do composers get their ideas?

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- c. What do composers need to know in order to compose?
 - d. Where do composers find inspiration?
 - e. How long does it take to compose a piece of music?
 - f. Do all composers compose in exactly the same way?
3. *Do some preliminary research.* Select and assign composers to students and ask them to create a composer report. Follow the template below or create your own format for final reporting. You may choose to assign composers to each student or allow them to select their own. In any case, allow for a broad definition of composer. The Class Notes Video focuses on a classical composer, but by allowing for a broad definition of the term, students may see the profession as more accessible and less intimidating. A broad understanding of the term helps de-mystify the profession and underscores the idea that *anyone* can be a composer. The list of composers you might use for this is virtually endless. There are, of course, the famous, familiar names (Bach, Beethoven, Mozart.) If you want to present a wide variety of time periods, genres, gender, and ethnicity, consider some of the names on the following list:

Amy Beach	Enrique Granados	Miles Davis
William Grant Still	Steve Reich	Clara Schumann
Tan Dun	Ruth Crawford Seeger	Carlos Chávez
Scott Joplin	Bernard Herrmann	Charles Ives
Germaine Tailleferre	Iannis Xenakis	Libby Larsen
Erik Satie	Sofia Gubaidulina	Koji Kondo

COMPOSER NAME:	
BORN (year and location)	
DIED (if applicable; year and location)	
FACT #1:	
FACT #2:	
FACT #3:	

FACT #4:	
FACT #5:	

Asking students to simply find facts allows for them to read and select information that is most relevant and interesting to them.

REINFORCE IDEAS AND CONCEPTS FROM THE VIDEO THROUGH ACTIVE LEARNING

1. *Play "Composer True or False."* Select a composer and learn several key facts about him or her. Test students' knowledge by turning those facts into a true and false game. You can raid the library for composer books or get a composer "fandex," sort of like baseball cards for composers.

https://www.google.com/?gws_rd=ssl#q=composers+fandex&tbm=shop&spd=15136678686828345124

For example, if Wolfgang Mozart is the chosen composer, you might use a few of these questions:

- a. His first music teacher was his father. (True.)
 - b. He lost his hearing. (False. Remind them this happened to another famous composer: Beethoven.)
 - c. He lived in Australia. (False. AUSTRIA!)
 - d. He wrote an opera called "The Magic Flute." (True.)
 - e. He died young. (True.)
2. *Play a composer matching game.* Select a several images of composers and ask students to connect the composer picture to the correct name. The exercise is simple enough, but you might follow up with some listening or research on those composers. See the sample worksheet on the following page. Hint: the correct order of names, starting with the top picture, is Debussy, Perry, Mozart, Beach.)



JULIA AMANDA PERRY



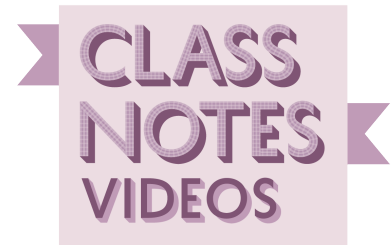
WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART



AMY BEACH



CLAUDE DEBUSSY



3. *Utilize some composer paper dolls and/or action figures.* Using that fandex mentioned above, trace, color, and cut out composer pictures. Tape them to popsicle sticks/craft sticks. Track down these action figures:
<http://www.ebay.com/itm/like/291337037430?lpid=82&chn=ps>

Or some finger puppets:

<http://www.philosophersguild.com/Composers-Finger-Puppet-Set.html>

Younger students enjoy “conducting along” to a composer’s work with a puppet/action figure version of the composer.

4. *Do some score study.* Since composers are the people who create scores, take an in-depth look at all the things that can go into a score, and compare how different scores can look when you compare them. Start by watching the Class notes Video: A Look Inside the Score.

<http://www.classicalmpr.org/story/2014/09/23/class-notes-whats-in-a-score>

Then, start looking at a bunch of scores. Here’s a great website/database to get you started:

<http://imslp.org/>

There are hundreds of free, downloadable, public domain scores available on this website. Public libraries and used bookstores are also good resources for finding inexpensive or free scores.

For comparison purposes, include a wide variety when selecting scores. Vary the time period, the country, and the subgenre of music. Older works will be easier to find for free (public domain), but including newer works allows students to compare and contrast the evolution of the score over time. Observations about notational practice, not to mention writing implements and handwriting habits, are good fodder for classroom discussion. Do a few side-by-side comparisons and identify common and divergent elements. Here are a few specific suggestions for good pairings:

- a. *Iberia*, C. Debussy and *Petrouchka*, I. Stravinsky

- b. *The Four Seasons*, A. Vivaldi and *Variations for Orchestra, Op. 31*, Arnold Schoenberg
- c. *Symphonie Fantastique*, Hector Berlioz and *Night Music*, Thea Musgrave
- d. *Orfeo*, C. Monteverdi and *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*, K. Penderecki.

After examining the score, it's always great to listen to what you've just seen. Use the Audio Backpack feature on Classical MPR's Education website to help curate your own examples.

<https://apps.classicalmpr.org/audio-backpack/>

- 5. *Take your score study a step further.* Explain to students that a score is like a roadmap or a set of instructions that musicians use to know what to play and when to play it. Tell them it is full of symbols- some that they might know and others that are unfamiliar (or in foreign languages.) Tell them that they will receive the page of a score and their job is to guess what the circled symbols tell the conductor or musicians. Use the following mini-worksheet and the score sheet at the end of this Guide to structure the activity.

SCORE DETECTIVE	
Look at the score sheet and guess what each circled or boxed symbol means. Draw or write the circled/boxed symbol in the left column, and put your guess in the right column.	
Draw/write symbol	What does it mean????

EXTEND LEARNING WITH PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

1. *Perhaps the best and most engaging way to start to understand composition is to do it yourself.* Students get very invested when they are in control of artistic choices and it's a great vehicle for self-expression. Composition activities are also a great way for students to synthesize and apply all aspects of music learning and skills.

If you haven't facilitated a lot of student composition projects, it can seem daunting at first. Never fear! There are lots of simple, accessible ways to do this. Here are a few easy-to-do activities to get you started.

- a. *Rondos*

Explain to students that a rondo is a musical work that in its most basic form, follows a pattern of:

A B A C A

Remind them that "A" is the same—or virtually the same—each time you repeat it.

Create a grid with the rondo pattern and empty boxes below. Instruct students to fill each box with directions for what sounds happen with each corresponding letter. As they work, check to make sure that instructions include both *what kind* of sound and *how much* of it. Feel free to establish parameters (must include singing, etc.)

Utilize classroom instruments or electronic sounds (from Garage Band or whatever else you and students have at your disposal) so that students have as many tools as possible at their disposal. Often times, open-ended directions yield the most creative results.

For melodic material/content, it's okay to utilize familiar melodies as a part of a larger work. Composers throughout history have done this a lot.

Make sure students give their rondo composition a name. Naming a work can provide the greatest connection with self-expression and imagination.

This project can be performed as a solo or a group activity. Specifications about the number of performers should be included, of course. Asking students to work together on a project like this encourages and promotes teamwork and collaboration skills.

Here are a couple of examples:

STAR LIGHT, STAR BRIGHT RONDO

For voice, triangle, and finger cymbals (two performers):

A	B	A	C	A
Singer sings <i>Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star</i> Instrumentalist plays triangle to a steady beat	Two performers play finger cymbals play four half notes	Singer sings <i>Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star</i> Instrumentalist plays triangle to a steady beat	Singer speaks in rhythm: Like a diamond in the sky Second performer rests	Singer sings <i>Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star</i> Instrumentalist plays triangle to a steady beat

Xylomania

For solo Orff xylophone:

A	B	A	C	A
Play this pattern on Orff xylophone: AAAA C AA AAAA C AA AAAA C AA A (hold)	G (hold) G-F-E	AAAA C AA AAAA C AA AAAA C AA A (hold)	(higher register) EEEE D (hold) D-C	AAAA C AA AAAA C AA AAAA C AA A (hold)

Certain variables (note durations, which C, etc.) but it gives enough direction for a performer to interpret, practice, and perform. For an interesting experiment, ask students to compose their own works, then swap, so that instead of performing something they've written, they perform classmates' works. This helps develop the idea that all music is an interpretation of a composer's intentions and that the score is simply the way a composer tries to communicate those intentions.

- b. *Create soundtracks.* A tricky thing about composing: it can feel daunting to create something from nothing. When the sky's the limit, it's hard to know just where to start. One way to work around that is to use the structure and narrative of a literary work—prose or poetry—as a frame to guide your musical composition. This echoes the video, too. There are a couple of ways to do this:

- i. Read a story aloud and ask students to create accompanying sounds with their bodies and voices to help illustrate and enrich the experience of the story. This can easily be extended to incorporate the use of classroom instruments as well. Rhythm sticks are surprising versatile. Tapping them on the floor creates the sounds of footsteps walking, rubbing them together might suggest the wind in the trees, and so on. You can also use a variety of classroom instruments and let children select which instrument (and its corresponding timbre) best captures the story element.

A variation on this activity is to simply read a book with rhyming text and students can use rhythm instruments to play along with the underlying pulse.

The musical outcome of these activities might not be sophisticated (or even sound great) but the process makes a big impact on students and helps engage them in the composition process. Since the activity is very basic, it works with young groups.

- ii. Read a literary work as inspiration and then move away from the text. To introduce that idea, listen to some soundtracks.

- iii. Find a steady stream of music soundtracks here:
<http://www.yourclassical.org/listen/movies>.

Listen to a few examples and then guess what the story is about. (Students may easily get the “correct” answer if they’ve seen the movie. This isn’t a bad thing—it actually helps illustrate the point well.)

Ask students to select something—a favorite classroom book, a poem, anything that inspires them. Multi-cell comics or excerpts from graphic novels work well, too. After reading the work, ask students to tell the story with music. Accessible classroom instruments or found-object instruments are all accessible tools, and of course, more advanced students may choose to notate their works for and perform on a specific instrument or instruments. For some students, this is enough direction.

Other students will need more direction and guidance. Start by asking some guided questions, such as:

What happens at the beginning of the story?

What happens in the middle?

How does it end?

How many characters are there in this story?

Should each character have its own sound?

What is the overall mood of the book?

Using answers to those questions, students will begin to use sound to tell this story with music. Notation can be traditional, of course, but be open to alternative means of representing the music.

For example, below is a composition using an alternative to traditional notation based on the famous Aesop fable *The Tortoise and the Hare*.

The Tortoise and the Hare

Snare drum played with sticks and brushes

Orff metallophone

Singer

Cymbal player

<p>BEGINNING Drummer plays steady stream of sixteenth notes (<i>Ti-ti-ti-ti, ti-ti-ti-ti</i>) on the snare drum with sticks. (This introduces the character of the hare.)</p>
<p>NEXT Metallophone player plays a slow ostinato, alternating between two pitches, staying on each pitch for two full counts (<i>Ta-ah, Ta-ah</i>). (This introduces the tortoise.)</p>
<p>THEN Singer sings the phrase, "Ready, set, go!"</p>
<p>NEXT Drummer and metallophone player begin their patterns simultaneously, following the same internal pulse. Tortoise will maintain this very steady beat until the end of the piece.</p>
<p>THEN After several seconds, the drummer starts to slow down. Switches to sweeping the snare drum head with brushes very slowly. Eventually he or she stops. (This indicates the hare's nap.)</p>
<p>FINALLY The drummer suddenly grabs the drum sticks and plays very fast, but at some point in the middle of this, the cymbal player plays one giant crash with the cymbals, which finishes the piece. (This indicates the end of the race.)</p>

A few ideas for well-known books that lend themselves well to compositional activity:

The Little Engine that Could, Watty Piper

- Great way to explore the musical concept of *accelerando* and *decelerando*.

Caps for Sale, Esphyr Slobodkina

- Perfect book to reinforce the idea of imitation in music.

Goodnight Gorilla, Peggy Rathmann

- Good choice for exploring the idea of character and timbre.

The Napping House, Audrey Wood

- Useful for adding layers and exploring the idea of texture in music.

Poetry is a little more abstract, so musical sounds are more likely to imitate sounds from nature and be less directed by narrative action.

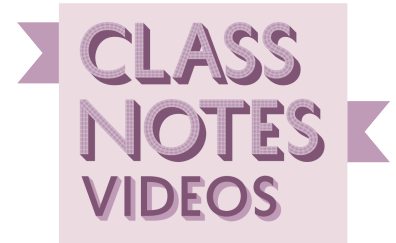
How are you Peeling? Saxton Freymann & Joost Elffers

- Good for exploring the idea of emotion communicated through music and musical expression.

In addition to advancing musical goals, these activities are a great way to promote and reinforce literacy.

2. Consult resources to expand on your classroom composing activities. Here are a couple of really accessible books that give great ideas for encouraging music composition in the classroom

<http://www.amazon.com/Maud-Hickey/e/B009AKFYGG>



REPERTOIRE INCLUDED IN THIS CLASS NOTES VIDEO

All of the music in *How Composers Compose* is by the subject of the video, the young American composer Jake Runestad. The works excerpted include:

Spirited Light

Dreams of the Fallen

The Peace of Wild Things

The Soul, Like the Moon

Coming Home

Nada Te Turbe

Nyon Nyon

Soundfiles for most of these works (and others) can be played and heard on the composer's website: [www. http://jakerunestad.com/](http://jakerunestad.com/). For younger students, the choral piece *Nyon Nyon* (used briefly in the video) might be of special interest as it uses a single nonsense word to explore different vocal effects: <http://jakerunestad.com/store/nyon-nyon/>.

Jake Runestad also composed the round *I Love Puppies* sung in the Class Notes video *The Musical Round: A Roundabout Tale*. The video can be found here:

<http://www.classicalmpr.org/story/2015/03/03/class-notes-a-roundabout-tale>.

—and the score can be found here:

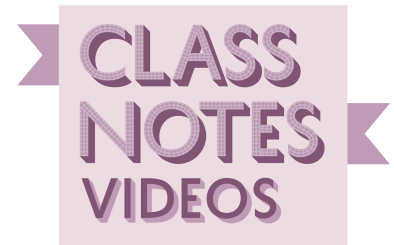
<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/radio/services/cms/education/puppies.pdf>.

Several other Class Notes videos can be used to reinforce *How Composers Compose*, in particular *A Look Inside the Score*, found here:

<http://www.classicalmpr.org/story/2014/09/23/class-notes-whats-in-a-score>

And *Teaching Composition*, found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URKUCuNjP44>

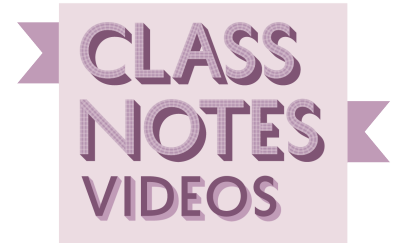


STANDARDS

One of the best things about composition in the classroom is that it hits so many standards all at once.

Compositional activities reinforce many aspects of Artistic Foundations strands across grade levels. All activities can be easily modified to include specific concepts and standards (i.e. dynamics, ABA form, etc.) Customize these activities to meet the specific needs of your classroom.

More importantly, compositional activities meet every aspect of the Artistic Process strand across grade levels. By performing and critiquing student work, all aspects of each specific standard within that strand are met.



CLASS NOTES™ from Classical MPR

Video Series Curriculum Guide: *How Do Composers Compose?*

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