

Fossils from *Carnival of the Animals*

Lesson Suggestions by Brian Hiller and Don Dupont

Music by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921)

Suggested Grade Levels: 2–3

Target Concepts

Rhythm: Rhythm pattern

Form: Rondo

Music history

Timbre: Non-pitched percussion families
(metals, woods, skins)

Materials

- Rhythmic Building Block visuals
- Percussion instruments
- A recording of “Fossils” from *Carnival of the Animals*

National Standards: 2, 3, and 6



Rhythmic Building Blocks

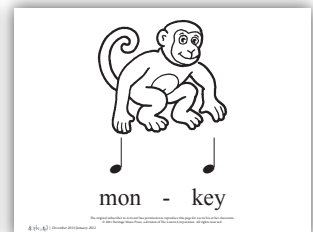
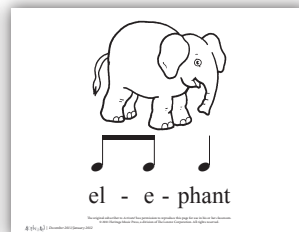
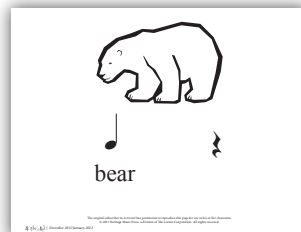
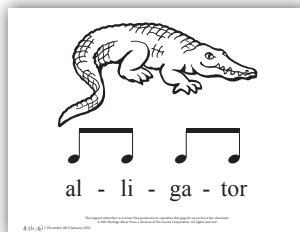
Carnival of the Animals was composed in Austria in 1886 by the French composer Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921). Saint-Saëns himself considered the suite frivolous and thought that if it were presented to the public, he might no longer be taken seriously as a composer. He only allowed it to be published upon his death. *Carnival of the Animals* was first performed in its entirety in 1922 and has since become one of Saint-Saëns’s best-loved works.

“Fossils” is a bit of a musical joke in which the composer borrows musical themes considered to be the “fossils” of the day, including Mozart’s “Ah! vous dirai-je, Maman,” better known as “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”; the French folksongs “Au Clair de la Lune” (“Partant pour la Syrie”) and “J’ai du bon Tabac”; as well as the aria “Una voce poco fa” from Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*. Saint-Saëns even used his own *Danse Macabre* as the main theme in which the xylophones evoke the image of skeletons playing cards.

— Brian and Don

Lesson Suggestions

1. Present the Rhythmic Building Block visuals:



2. Invite the students to speak and then clap each one. Next, combine any two. Speak and then clap the combination. Finally, create a string of four (the visuals can be repeated or omitted) for your students to speak and then clap. Encourage the students to create their own patterns.

3. Create a simple 16-beat composition (8 beats repeated) with input from your students. For example:



Have your students clap the rhythm. Label this rhythm as A.

4. Next, use the building blocks to create a new 16-beat composition (8 beats repeated). For example:



Have the students pat the rhythm on their legs. Label this rhythm as B.

5. Finally, create a 16-beat composition (4 beats repeated four times.) For example:



Have the students snap the rhythm. Label this rhythm as C.

6. Divide the class into three groups, assigning one rhythm to each group. While you maintain a steady beat on a drum, lead your students in performing the body-percussion patterns in rondo form (ABACA). After the performance, discuss and identify the form with your students.
7. Next, distribute different percussion instruments to each group. For example, A plays rhythm sticks, B plays hand drums, and C plays triangles. Play the composition, transferring the body percussion to the instruments.
8. Play a recording of “Fossils” from *Carnival of the Animals*, asking your students to listen for musical details, such as repeating sections, instruments, and familiar tunes. Discuss what they heard.
9. If your students did not identify the form, play the recording again, asking them to listen specifically for repeated passages. Ask the students to identify the form. If you wish, listen to the recording again, labeling the sections ABACA as they occur.
10. Recall the body percussion movements taught in steps 3–5, and ask the students to perform their patterns to accompany the music when each section occurs.
11. Once your students are confident in identifying each section and able to perform the body percussion with confidence, transfer the parts to non-pitched percussion instruments and play along with the recording.

Extension Idea

- Create a “winter rondo” with your students using the rhythms from the building blocks by assigning winter-themed lyrics to each rhythm. For example:

Impressionism: A Mini Unit

Lesson Suggestions by Kim Soleski Ward

Suggested Grade Levels: 4–5

Target Concepts

Tone color
Expression
Music history

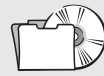
Materials

- Recording of “Snow Is Dancing” by Claude Debussy
- Beanbags
- Recording of “Spring” from *The Four Seasons* by Antonio Vivaldi
- Recording of “La Mer” by Claude Debussy
- Recording of the *Children’s Corner Suite* by Claude Debussy
- Copies of Impressionism Drawing/Writing Response
- Images of Impressionist paintings (optional; perhaps you can borrow some from your art teacher)

Materials (con’t)

- Recording of the *Mother Goose Suite* by Maurice Ravel
- Non-pitched percussion instruments
- Recorders or xylophones
- A copy of the Impressionist Themes for projection
- Copies of Impressionist Composition Outline
- Pencils and paper
- Recording of music by Lili Boulanger (optional)

National Standards: 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9



Impressionism: A Mini Unit

- Impressionism Drawing/Writing Response
- Impressionist Themes
- Impressionist Composition Outline

Lesson Suggestions

Lesson One

1. Begin the lesson by playing about one minute of Claude Debussy’s “Snow Is Dancing.” Ask the students what they notice about the music. Continue by telling the students that they will be learning about a style of music called Impressionism that was developed in France in the early twentieth century. Impressionism is also a style of visual art, and the two forms have some things in common, which will be explored in the lesson. Let the students know they will begin by comparing Impressionist music to a piece of music that was composed in the early 1700s two hundred years before Impressionism began.
2. Give each student a beanbag. Ask the students to use the beanbags to create a beat with the music. Suggestions for making the beat include throwing the beanbag gently in the air and catching it on the beat; dropping the beanbag on the floor to the beat; moving the beanbag from one hand to the other on the beat; holding the beanbag in one hand and tapping the bag with the other hand; etc. Play about one minute of the first movement of “Spring” from Antonio Vivaldi’s *The Four Seasons*. Observe how the class is able to follow the steady beat of the music.
3. Discuss the strong beat and how easy it was to feel the pulse. Tell your students that they will repeat the beanbag activity with a piece of music that was composed by Debussy in 1903. Play about one minute of the third movement of “La Mer.”
4. Ask the students to compare and discuss the sense of beat in “Spring” and “La Mer.” Guide the students to discover how “Spring” has a regular, steady beat. It is easy to follow and doesn’t change through the piece. “La Mer” has rapidly changing rhythms and tempos that are difficult to follow. Explain how these rapidly changing rhythms, meters, and dynamics are common features of Impressionist music. Collect the beanbags.

5. Tell the students that “La Mer” means “the ocean” in French. Ask the students to listen to “La Mer” and, as they listen, imagine something that is happening on the ocean. Play the piece for about two minutes. Repeat the first two minutes of the piece, asking the students to mime their imagined ocean scenes. After the music has stopped, ask a few students to share their story. Relate the stories to the musical characteristics of “La Mer.”
6. Read the following information about Claude Debussy and his piano suite *Children’s Corner*:
Claude Debussy was born in Saint-Germain-en-Laye in France on August 22, 1862. He studied piano and composition at the Paris Conservatory. He is known as the founder of the musical style of Impressionism. Debussy died in 1918 of cancer. He composed many pieces for orchestra, chamber groups, and piano. One of his most popular piano pieces is the piano suite Children’s Corner. A suite is a group of songs that are related to each other. In this case, each part of the Children’s Corner Suite represents a part of childhood. Debussy dedicated the suite to his daughter Claude-Emma, who was known as “Chouchou.” Three pieces from this suite were composed to represent Chouchou’s toys. “Jimbo’s Lullaby” is about her stuffed velvet elephant. “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” is about her clown puppet. “Serenade of the Doll” is about a group of girls playing with dolls.
7. Ask the students to remember a toy they especially loved when they were very young. The toy may be something the students still have, or it may be something they remember. Tell the students that you will be playing short segments from Debussy’s *Children’s Corner Suite*. As the students listen, ask them to choose one of the segments that best represents their toy. Play about thirty seconds each of “Jimbo’s Lullaby,” “Golliwog’s Cakewalk,” and “Serenade of the Doll,” without identifying them to the students.
8. Play the three pieces again and ask the students to pantomime playing with their favorite toy when they hear the segment that best represents their toy. During each segment, ask the students who are not pantomiming play to guess what kind of toy their classmates are miming.
9. Lead a class discussion about the various toys the students chose as well as the musical characteristics of each of the three pieces. Identify the title of the three pieces, and discuss how the music represents the elephant, clown, and dolls.
10. Give each student a copy of the Impressionism Drawing/Writing Response page. Read the instructions on the page and then play the suite examples while the students complete the worksheet.

Lesson Two

1. Begin the lesson by playing “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” in the background as you briefly review the information about Debussy, “La Mer” and *Children’s Corner Suite* from the previous lesson. Perhaps display images of a few Impressionist paintings. Some artists to display are Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Point out the blurry look of the paintings, the use of unusual brush strokes and color combinations. These characteristics roughly correspond to some of the musical characteristics of Impressionist music. Composers were experimenting with new musical timbres, tonalities, and scales.
2. Read the following information about Maurice Ravel and the *Mother Goose Suite*:
Maurice Ravel was born in southern France on March 7, 1875. His family moved to Paris when he was three months old. As a young boy, he studied piano at the Paris Conservatory. He studied there for many years but never finished the degree program. Ravel is well known for his work as an orchestrator. His orchestral music demonstrates a deep knowledge of every instrument. Ravel met Debussy during the 1890s. They knew each other well and admired each other’s compositions. The Mother Goose Suite is a set of five pieces first written for two pianos. The suite was composed in 1910 for the children of some good friends of Ravel. Later in his life, Ravel orchestrated the pieces. We will be listening to the orchestrated version. Each of the five pieces represents a fairy tale or something from a fairy tale.
3. Listen to the first two minutes of “A Conversation Between Beauty and the Beast.” The first tune represents Beauty. Ask the students to listen and raise their hand when they hear the Beast begin talking. The Beast is represented by the bassoon.
4. Ask each student to choose a non-pitched percussion instrument. Explain how the students will be using the instrument to represent both Beauty and the Beast. Relate this activity to how Impressionist composers used instruments in unusual ways, creating special effects and new sounds. Challenge your students to create new ways of using the instruments. For example, instead of hitting the mallet on the drumhead, the students could rub the mallet across the top or scrape it on the side of the drum. Give the students a few minutes to

experiment with making new sounds on their instruments. Ask the students to choose one of those new sounds to represent Beauty and another sound to represent the Beast.

5. Play the music again, inviting the students join in with their newly created sounds. The students should match their Beauty and the Beast sounds to the corresponding sounds in the music. Begin the music at the thirty-second mark. This will provide about thirty seconds of playing for Beauty and for the Beast. Remind the students that their music must match the rhythm and dynamic of the orchestra, and that they must always be able to hear the recorded music as they play along. If you have time, you can repeat this activity with each student choosing a different instrument.
6. “Pavane for the Sleeping Princess,” another piece from the *Mother Goose Suite*, is a representation of the “Sleeping Beauty” story. A *pavane* is a slow dance. Ask the students to take out their recorders or xylophones while listening to the piece. Display the Impressionist Themes projection. Teach the Pavane Ostinato, and then play along with the music using the following guidelines:
 - Listen to the orchestra play the *ostinato* two times.
 - Play the Pavane Ostinato six times with the music.
 - Listen to the B section of the piece until the time marker 56 seconds.
 - Play the Pavane Ostinato eight times and then hold a low E until the music ends.

Lesson 3

1. Begin the lesson by playing “Snow Is Dancing.” Ask the students if they remember the name of the composer who wrote the *Children’s Corner Suite* (Claude Debussy). Display the Impressionist Themes projection. Teach the *ostinato* for the “Snow Is Dancing.” The students can play this *ostinato* along with the music until the thirty-six-second mark. The students can join in again at 1:36.
2. Review the *ostinato* played in the previous class.
3. Demonstrate some special effects on the recorder. A *trill* is when two notes are played rapidly one after the other. Demonstrate on G, trilling up to A. Invite the students to try it. Demonstrate a *glissando* on the recorder. Begin with middle C. *Glissando* up an octave to high C. Then, demonstrate the *glissando* from high C to middle C. Invite the students to try it.
4. Divide the class into groups of between four and six students. Give each group a copy of the Impressionist Composition Outline. Ask each group to choose one of the recorder themes. One person in the group plays that theme eight times on the recorder. The other group members play along on other instruments. The students can include recorder trills and *glissandi*. The students should write which instruments play on each repetition of the main theme as well as any other instructions. Ask each group to give their piece a title. Give the students between ten and fifteen minutes to create and practice the pieces.
5. Invite each group to announce the name of the composition and perform it for the class.
6. Finish the class by listening to “The Fairy Garden” from *Mother Goose Suite* by Ravel.

Extension Ideas

- Create an art gallery in the music room with images of Impressionist paintings. Play a piece of Impressionist music and ask the students to choose one of the paintings that best represents that piece of music.
- Listen to some music by Lili Boulanger. She composed some amazing music and was the first woman to win the famous *Prix de Rome*. Some suggested listening pieces are “D’un Matin de Printemps” (“Spring Morning”), “D’un Vieux Jardin” (“The Old Garden”), and “Nocturne.”
- Impressionist composers experimented with different types of scales. The whole tone scale was used a lot by Claude Debussy. Teach the whole tone scale as printed on the Impressionist Themes page.
- Collaborate with your art teacher and plan to teach units on Impressionism at the same time.
- If your city or town has an art museum with Impressionist paintings, take your students on a field trip. They will really appreciate seeing these original paintings after learning about the style.