



MUSIC IN OUR SCHOOLS MONTH® 

Music In Our Schools Month® General Music: 4th Grade, 2020–2021

“Composing: Using Probability vs. Purpose”

Nursery Rhyme: “Jack Be Nimble”

Recording: *Music of Changes* by John Cage

**Recording: Piano Sonata no. 11 in A Major, K. 331: I. Andante grazioso by
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

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Overview: Students will create original compositions based on the C-pentatonic scale using Orff instruments in two ways: using probability and purposeful thought. They will have the opportunity to compare their compositions and evaluate their own work based on a rubric provided by the teacher. Extensions for remote learning are also provided.

Prerequisite Skills

For students to be successful in this unit they will need knowledge of and experiences with the following:

- Basic mallet playing skills: mallet technique, correct playing posture, etc.
- Beat and rhythm awareness.
- Working collaboratively in small groups.
- Basic understanding of home key (*do*): If we are playing our instruments in C pentatonic, C is *do*.
- Basic understanding of musical form (AB, ABA).

Instructional Goals/Objectives

Launching Point 1: Listen to two different styles of composition and compare/ contrast using academic language (beat, melody, instrumentation, etc.).

Launching Point 2: Discuss the concept of probability as the mathematical idea of chance. Explore creating a composition using dice as the impetus for creating the melody.

Launching Point 3: Discuss elements of melody that guide traditional compositional methods: skips vs. steps, repeated notes and phrases, ending on *do* (the tonic).” Explore creating a composition using the ideas about musical elements formulated during group discussion.

National Core Arts Standards (2014)

***RESPONDING*—Launching Point 1**

Anchor Standard: MU:Re9.1.4a. Evaluate musical works and performances, applying established criteria, and explain appropriateness to the context.

Essential Question: How do we judge the quality of musical works and performances?

Enduring Understanding: The personal evaluation of musical works and performances is informed by analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

***CREATING*—Launching Point 2**

Anchor Standard: MU:Cr2.1.4a. Demonstrate selected and organized musical ideas for an improvisation, arrangement, or composition to express intent, and explain connection to purpose and context.

Essential Question: How do musicians make creative decisions?

Enduring Understanding: Musicians’ creative choices are influenced by their expertise, context, and expressive intent.

***CREATING*—Launching Point 3**

Anchor Standard: MU:C 1.1.4b. Generate musical ideas (such as rhythms, melodies, and simple accompaniment patterns) within related tonalities (such as major and minor) and meters.

Essential Question: How do musicians generate creative ideas?

Enduring Understanding: The creative ideas, concepts, and feelings that influence musicians' work emerge from a variety of sources.

Assessment: Assessment rubrics are included in each Launching Point.

Materials and Library of Congress Resource Links for the Unit

- A recording of *Music of Changes* by John Cage (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7LD1iTI-IM>).
- A recording of Piano Sonata no. 11 in A Major, First Movement, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp_h649sZ9A).
- Orff instruments or resonator/tone bell sets (enough for one instrument configured in C pentatonic per group of no more than four students).
- Listening checklist for students (provided in Launching Point 1).
- Assessment rubrics (provided in Launching Points 2 and 3).
- Pencils.
- “Jack Be Nimble” or other nursery rhyme of your choice.

Teacher Talk—To the Teacher (Historical and Cultural Information)

Launching Point 1

John Cage (1912–1992):

- ✓ American avant-garde composer
- ✓ Composed 12-tone music and experimented with prepared piano
- ✓ Experimented with tape recorders, radios, and record players to create his music
- ✓ Turned to Eastern Philosophies, including Zen Buddhism, that influenced his later works.
- ✓ Indeterminism—randomness—became the guiding principle of his compositions
- ✓ The *I Ching*, an ancient Chinese text, became the basis for *Music of Changes*: Pitch, duration, instrumentation, etc. were determined by consulting the text.

Resources

Music of Changes (description, n.d.). Retrieved from https://johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work_ID=134

4'33" (description, n.d.). Retrieved from https://johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work_ID=17

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

- ✓ Austrian classical composer.
- ✓ Child prodigy: Showed an understanding of tonality, chords, and tempo from a very early age.
- ✓ Traveled Europe playing publicly starting at age six.
- ✓ Could write out entire scores he had heard from memory.
- ✓ Wrote several operas by age 16.
- ✓ Wrote over 600 pieces of music during his lifetime.

Resources

Schwarm, B. (2016, March 15). Piano Sonata no. 11 in A Major, K. 331. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Piano-Sonata-No-11-in-A-Major-K-331>

Wolfgang Mozart (2019, November 26). Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/musician/wolfgang-mozart>

Launching Point 2

- The version of “Jack Be Nimble” suggested in this lesson is notated in 6/8 time. However, please use whatever version that is most familiar to you.



- “Jack Be Nimble” is one of the shortest nursery rhymes and was chosen due to the

potential time constraints (scheduling, duration of each class session, etc.) each of us face. Feel free to substitute the nursery rhyme of your choice—one that does not traditionally have a melody attached.

- If Orff instruments are not available, resonator/ tone bells configured in C pentatonic work as well.

Launching Point 3

Please refer to information provided in “Teacher Talk” for Launching Points 1 and 2.

Launching Point 1

Objective: Students will listen to two different styles of composition and compare/ contrast using academic language (beat, melody, instrumentation, etc.).

Essential Question: How do we judge the quality of musical works and performances?

Specific Performance Standard: MU:Re9.1.4a. Evaluate musical works and performances, applying established criteria, and explain appropriateness to the context.

Procedure

1. Listen to a recording of *Music of Changes* by John Cage (an excerpt can be used if time is an issue).
2. Have the students fill out the chart provided below as they listen.
3. Listen to an excerpt of Piano Sonata No. 11, First Movement by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.
4. Have the students complete the chart provided below as they listen.
5. Facilitate a discussion about the data collected by the students.
6. After the initial discussion, provide students with context for each composition: brief background about each composer, when the individuals lived, techniques they used to compose, etc. Emphasize randomness vs. purposefulness.

Assessment: Students may use the following chart to assess what they hear in each listening example. The chart can then be used as a launching point for teacher-facilitated discussion.

	John Cage: <i>Music of Changes</i>	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Piano Sonata no. 11,
Did the piece have a melody (could I sing it easily if I had to)?	Circle one: Yes No	Circle one: Yes No
Did the piece have a steady beat (could I tap my foot along with it)?	Circle one: Yes No	Circle one: Yes No
Was the piece organized logically? Did it have form?	Circle one: Yes No	Circle one: Yes No
What instrument or instruments did you hear?		

Note: During the discussion portion of the lesson, the teacher should act as facilitator. Initially, the discussion should focus only on the data collected from the students' charts rather on their personal opinions of the pieces. Later, the discussion can progress to "I didn't like this one" or "I like that one better" with follow-up questions from the teacher: "Why did you like that one better?" "What about that piece made you like it less?" If the opinions of the students change in any way after context has been provided, make that part of the discussion.

Extension

- Search for videos of visual artists have created that pair their work with John Cage's *Music of Changes*.
- Find and share other examples (video and audio) of other compositions that involve randomness. Compare contrast to John Cage's work.
- Find examples (video and audio) of prepared piano pieces (e.g., *The Banshee* by Henry Cowell).

Launching Point 2

Objective: Students will create original compositions based on the C-pentatonic scale using Orff instruments. Compositions will be created using probability.

Essential Question: How do musicians make creative decisions?

Specific Performance Standard: MU:Cr3.2.4a. Present the final version of personal created music to others, and explain connection to expressive intent.

Procedure

1. Describe “probability” as “chance” and refer back to how John Cage used the Chinese text *I Ching* to create *Music of Changes*.
2. Divide students into groups of no more than four in each group, and assign one Orff instrument (in C pentatonic) to each group. Give each group one die to use.
3. Hand out a copy of the text and/or notation to “Jack Be Nimble” to each group and a pencil for note-taking.
4. Explain that each number on the die will be assigned a note name: If a 1 is rolled, it will correspond to low C. If a 2 is rolled, it will correspond to D. 3 = E, 4 = G, 5 = A, and 6 = high C.
5. Each group member will take turns rolling the die for their group, notating on their copy of the nursery rhyme the note name for each rhythmic note or word of text for “Jack Be Nimble.” For example, student 1 rolls a three. The word “Jack,” represented by a quarter note, is assigned the note E.
6. Students will perform their compositions for their peers.

Assessment:

	Teamwork	Composition
3	Our team cooperated by listening to each other's ideas and solving problems together.	We followed the guidelines of the assignment and are proud of our work.
2	Our team sometimes listened to each other's ideas and sometimes solved problems together.	We struggled with the guidelines of the assignment and our work isn't our best.
1	Our team did not listen to each other's ideas and did not solve problems together.	We didn't follow the guidelines of the assignment and weren't able to finish our composition.

Extension for Remote Learning:

Using the concept John Cage used in *4'33"*, students will create a 30 second soundscape:

- ✓ Find a place (indoors or outdoors) and record all sounds that occur in a 30-second time frame in that chosen space.
- ✓ Sounds occurring in the chosen space of time (30 seconds) become the composition.
- ✓ The only rule: Students creating the piece cannot make deliberate sounds during the 30 seconds (coughs, sneezes, sounds made by shifting around are okay).
- ✓ Student can use any available recording device: cellphone, iPad, computer, etc.

Resources

The Story Behind John Cage's *4'33"*. (2017, November 6). Retrieved from <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/59902/101-masterpieces-john-cages-433>

Assessment for Remote Learning:

Students will explain their process to an adult family member through the following question prompts. Responses may be recorded.

1. Which environment did you choose to record?
2. Why did you choose this environment?
3. What was easy about this activity? Why?
4. What was difficult about this activity? Why?

Launching Point 3

Objective: Students will create original compositions based on the C-pentatonic scale using Orff instruments. Compositions will be created using purposeful thinking.

Essential Questions: How do musicians generate creative ideas?

Specific Performance Standard: MU:Cr3.2.4a. Present the final version of personal created music to others, and explain connection to expressive intent.

Procedure

1. Review the probability composition activity.
2. Refer to Mozart's Piano Sonata no. 11, First Movement, and review how it contrasted with John Cage's piece.
3. Lead a brief discussion on the elements of music that purposefully guided Mozart's composing style: melody, beat and rhythm, repeated notes and phrases, home tone (*do*) as a reference point.
4. As before, divide students into groups of no more than four. Groups may be the same as the previous activity or different, student choice or teacher choice.
5. Hand out a copy of the text and/or notation to "Jack Be Nimble" to each group and a pencil for note-taking.
6. Explain that this time, rather than using the roll of the dice, students will have to work collaboratively to create a purposeful melody for "Jack Be Nimble" using concepts like repeated notes and phrases, skips vs. leaps, and *do* as a reference point. Questions like "Could I sing this if I had to?" and "Would this be easy to teach someone by just singing it to them (by rote)?" should be considered.
7. The only rule for this activity: Compositions must end on C, or *do*.
8. Students will perform their compositions for their peers.

Assessment (The same rubric from Launching Point 2 will be used.)

	Teamwork	Composition
3	Our team cooperated by listening to each other's ideas and solving problems together.	We followed the guidelines of the assignment and are proud of our work.
2	Our team sometimes listened to each other's ideas and sometimes solved problems together.	We struggled with the guidelines of the assignment and our work isn't our best.
1	Our team did not listen to each other's ideas and did not solve problems together	We didn't follow the guidelines of the assignment and weren't able to finish our composition.

Extension for Remote Learning:

Challenge students to create compositions using “found sounds”: glass or plastic bottles, combs, pots and pans, other materials from around their homes. The composition must show ABA form.

Self-Assessment Checklist to be filled out by the student:

	Yes	No
My composition is at least 30 seconds long.		
My composition has a title. Write the title here:		
My composition has an “A” section.		
My composition has a different “B” section.		
My composition shows ABA form.		
My composition uses at least 2 found sounds. List the sounds here:		
I have played my composition for an adult in my family.		