



Lesson: Program Music and The Flight of the Bumblebee
Elementary School

STANDARDS: New York: Strand # 3: Making Connections

- Through listening, identify the strengths and weaknesses of specific musical works and performances, including their own and others’.
- Describe the music in terms related to basic elements such as [melody](#), [rhythm](#), [harmony](#), [dynamics](#), [timbre](#), [form](#), [style](#), etc.
- Discuss the basic means by which the voice and instruments can alter [pitch](#), [loudness](#), duration, and timbre.
- Describe the music’s context in terms related to its social and psychological functions and settings (e.g., roles of participants, effects of music, uses of music with other events or objects, etc.)
- Describe their understandings of particular pieces of music and how they relate to their surroundings.

Arts: Understanding Music through Listening

Motivation: Students will gain an understanding of program music through listening to the piano performance of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Flight of the Bumblebee* and comparing it to other performances in other instrumentations.

Individual Activity:

1. Without revealing the title of the piece, play the [Bobby McFerrin](#) recording of *The Flight of the Bumblebee*. Ask the students what picture comes to mind when listening to the piece; when the piece is finished, ask them to share their ideas with other students. (Create groups of 2 or 3 students for sharing).
2. Reveal the title of the piece. Explain that this is *program music*: music that is created to express a particular story, person, place or thing. Have the students discuss what aspects of the piece depicted a bumblebee. Record their observations.
3. Using Joy2Learn Piano Music, go to the section on Rimsky-Korsakov *Flight of the Bumblebee*. Go to “Alan’s Performance.” Guide students to pay close attention to the pianist’s hand motions as they listen. Have the students mimic these motions (younger students - full body movement; older students - hand movement)
4. Discuss (in small groups or as a large group) the differences in the two performances. Address dynamics, articulation, and tempo. What can the voice do that the piano cannot, and vice versa? Is one a better “interpreter” of a bumblebee? Watch the section in Joy2Learn Piano Music on “about *The Flight of the Bumblebee*”, then briefly discussion “Things to Think About.”



[4a. If time permits and resources are available, repeat #4 with a different recording of *The Flight of the Bumblebee*.]

5. Listen to the first movement of *Spring* from Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. Can you hear the bees in this movement? How are the bees "expressed"? Compare the sounds heard to the previous recordings.

6. Using the hand held percussion instruments, or any instruments at hand, in groups (4 or 5) create a 60-second programmatic piece that would describe a particular insect or animal. Pay particular attention to dynamics, tempo, articulation and instrumentation to create a musical picture of the chosen insect/animal.

7. Perform the pieces for each other and have students guess what insect/animal is being depicted.

Additional Activities:

Create a longer programmatic piece about a particular animal/insect. Notate your piece.

Read more about Rimsky-Korsakov and his connection to the "Russian Five." Report on findings.

Attend a live concert of program music. Discuss/write a report on the concert.

Read/listen to the book *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Discuss how the music creates pictures of the pictures.

Read/listen to the John Lithgow *Carnival of the Animals*. Discuss how the music creates pictures of the animals. Compare this book to other performances of the same piece.

Learn a portion of (or the entire) piece on your instrument.