

Mother Goose Suite - Piano Lesson Plans, Age 10-16

Lesson 1: "Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty"

Objective:

Understand the form and mood of a *pavane*, develop legato technique, and explore dynamic contrasts.

Piano duet: [▶ Martha Argerich and Lahav Shani - Ravel: Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant](#)

Orchestra: [▶ Marin Alsop -- Ravel: Mother Goose, I. Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant \(Le...](#)

Activities:

- **Listening & Analysis:**

Listen to *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* while following the score. Discuss the structure of the piece (e.g., ABA form) and the contrasts between the soft, dreamy sections and the more expansive middle section. Ask students what emotions or images the music evokes (e.g., sleep, magic, a fairy tale).

- **Discussion of Style:**

Explain what a *pavane* is — a slow, stately dance from the Renaissance era — and how Ravel adapted this style into a dreamy, orchestral piece.

- Watch a segment of dancers performing a pavane.

[▶ Pavane - Renaissance - Dance - Belle qui tiens ma vie -Thoinot Arbeau \(15...](#)

- Discuss the dancer's movements, tempo, and mood. Listen to a segment of *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* again. Discuss similarities/differences - tempo, mood

- **Piano Technique:**

Focus on legato playing and achieving smooth, connected phrases. Practice a short section of the piece, concentrating on phrasing and voicing. Introduce the concept of balancing melody and accompaniment in the left hand.

- **Interpretation Exercise:**

Have students play through the first 8-16 bars, experimenting with dynamic variation (e.g., starting very soft and gradually building to a slightly louder sound). Emphasize the lyrical, "floating" quality of the melody.


Listening Assignment:

Students will listen to *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* again at home, paying attention to the changes in dynamics and how the mood shifts throughout the piece. Encourage them to visualize the images of Sleeping Beauty in the palace as they listen.

Lesson 2: "Tom Thumb"

Objective:



Explore and analyze how Ravel portrays Tom Thumb wandering through the forest. Listen for and identify instruments used for "wandering" and for Tom Thumb's melody.

Piano Duet:  Martha Argerich and Pablo Galdo play Ravel Petit Poucet

Orchestra: [Tom Thumb, National Philharmonic Orchestra, Charles Gerhardt](#)

Activities:

Listening and Analysis:

- Listen to the first section of the orchestra performance linked above.
 - Point out or ask if they can hear the 2 layer texture - wandering, legato, continuous eighth note accompaniment and melody.
 - Ask them to name the instrument family that plays the accompaniment/wandering theme (strings)
 - Listen to the first section (0:00 - 1:45) Focus on the melody and how the melody is passed from one instrument to another.
 - Ask the student to indicate when a new instrument takes over the melody.
 - Ask the student if they can identify the instruments, and help as needed: oboe, English horn, clarinet, flute, strings.
 - If they are not familiar with the English horn, show these videos or assign for them to watch at home:
 -  What does an English horn sound like? (Ode to Joy)
 -  Oboe vs. English Horn with RPO musicians
- Listen for the birds in the second section of the orchestra performance (1:46-2:35). Can they hear the bird sounds? Can they name the instruments playing the bird sounds? (piccolo, flute, violin harmonics and trills)
- **Piano Technique:**
 - Focus on stepwise, legato playing. Play on the white keys or using a scale they know well. Try to create a "wandering" pattern by going up and down the white keys/scale in steps.
 - Change directions several times by skipping up or down to any note in the scale (or white key) and continuing with a stepwise pattern up or down.
 - Experiment with making bird sounds using the piano or vocal sounds. They can do this alone or over a teacher accompaniment (play the secondo from the piano duet or improvise).
- **Listening and Analysis Assignment:**

Listen to Tom Thumb while following the score.

- Tap the beat and notice the meter changes, observing how the shift in accent adds to the wandering feeling of the piece.
 - Focus on the dynamics and notice how this relates to the musical telling of the story.
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Lesson 3: "Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas"

Objective:

Introduce the exotic sound world of the piece, focusing on the use of the pentatonic scale and its use in Asian music, instrumentation, and achieving a delicate sound.

Piano Duet: [▶ Ravel's "Ma mère l'Oye": Martha Argerich and Daniel Barenboim | Carnegie ...](#)

Orchestra: [Ravel: Mother Goose Suite: III. The Empress of the Pagodas | Fabien Gabel](#)

Activities:

- **Listening & Discussion:**

Play *Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas* and ask students to describe the atmosphere of the piece. What kind of exotic or magical setting does the music suggest?

- Discuss the influence of pentatonic scales and how they create a sense of "foreignness" or mysticism.
 - Explain that the pentatonic scale is commonly used in Asian music, and we often associate music based on this scale with Asian cultures. During Ravel's time people did not travel widely or have the opportunity to experience art and music from distant cultures. Composers responded to non-Western music they heard in Paris at the World Exposition of 1889 - Moorish melodies in Spanish music, Javanese and Chinese orchestras. They embraced the rhythms, scales, and instrumental colors, offering enchanting contrasts to the familiar sounds of Western music.

- **Exploration of Pentatonic Scale and Piano Technique:**

Introduce the pentatonic scale (using black keys on the piano) and demonstrate how it is used in the piece. Practice pentatonic scale patterns with both hands separately and together.

- Practice playing the opening section, focusing on using the right touch to create a "shimmering" effect. Focus on achieving a light, bell-like sound. Work on playing with a relaxed hand and maintaining clarity in the high register.
- Ask students to improvise using the pentatonic scale on the black keys. They can do this alone or over a teacher accompaniment - play the secondo of the piano duet or improvise.

- **Imaginative Interpretation:**

Encourage students to imagine they are in an exotic garden, walking through a pagoda or a distant land. Have them play while visualizing this setting, incorporating lightness and grace into their touch.

- **Listening Assignment:**

Ask students to listen to the piece at home, imagining they are walking through a lush, foreign garden or temple, paying attention to the shimmering, otherworldly sound.

Lesson 4: "The Conversation of Beauty and the Beast"

Objective:

Explore contrasting characters and emotions in the music. Focus on expressive dynamics and playing with contrasting textures.

Piano Duet: [▶ Argerich and Galdo play Ma mère l'oye \(IV\) RAVEL](#)

Orchestra: [▶ Live from Royal Festival Hall: RAVEL Mother Goose – Conversations between ...](#)

Activities:

- **Listening & Emotional Analysis:**

Listen to *The Conversation of Beauty and the Beast*. Discuss how the music contrasts Beauty's gentle, lyrical theme with the Beast's powerful, tumultuous theme. Ask students to describe the different emotions conveyed by the music.

- **Form and Characterization:**

Identify the two main themes (Beauty and the Beast) and explore how Ravel uses harmony, rhythm and instrumentation to differentiate them. Discuss how Beauty's theme is more lyrical and calm, while the Beast's theme is more forceful and dissonant.

- **Piano Technique:**

Focus on playing with contrasting dynamics and articulations: soft and lyrical for Beauty, loud and strong for the Beast. Practice playing these two themes separately, then together, using appropriate articulation and dynamics.

- **Role Play:**

Have students act out the role of Beauty or the Beast while playing their respective parts. They should use body language to match the emotions in the music—graceful and delicate for Beauty, strong and intense for the Beast.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *The Conversation of Beauty and the Beast* at home, paying close attention to how the themes change to reflect the characters' emotions and interactions.

Lesson 5: "The Fairy Garden"

Objective:

Play with delicate phrasing and tone quality. Explore the themes of nature and magic in the music.

Piano Duet: [▶ Ravel's "Ma mère l'Oye": Martha Argerich and Daniel Barenboim | Carnegie H...](#)

Orchestra: [Ravel: Mother Goose Suite: III. The Empress of the Pagodas | Fabien Gabel](#)

Activities:

- **Listening & Imagery:**
Play *The Fairy Garden* and ask students to close their eyes while listening. Discuss the imagery of a magical garden and how the music evokes that atmosphere. How do the harmonies and textures contribute to the sense of enchantment?
- **Harmonic Analysis:**
Explore the harmonic language of the piece, focusing on how Ravel uses lush chords to create a dreamlike atmosphere. Discuss the chromaticism and gentle shifts in harmony that add to the feeling of mystery.
- **Piano Technique:**
Focus on achieving a light, even sound throughout the piece. Work on playing with even finger pressure and a smooth, flowing technique. Emphasize the importance of sustaining the sound and achieving a "dreamy" effect.
- **Interpretation Exercise:**
Have students practice playing the opening section, focusing on a slow, deliberate approach. Encourage them to experiment with tempo and dynamics to create a sense of drifting or floating, as if walking through a magical, serene garden.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *The Fairy Garden* at home and imagine themselves walking through a peaceful, magical garden. They should focus on the dreamlike quality of the music and how the sounds evoke this imagery.
