

Mother Goose Suite - Piano Lesson Plans, Age 4-9

Here is a lesson plan outline for five piano lessons using the pieces from Maurice Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite* designed for children aged 4–9. The goal is to engage young learners through a combination of listening, playing, movement, and imaginative activities. Each lesson introduces one of the five movements from the *Mother Goose Suite*, combining creative play, musical appreciation, and simple technique exercises.

Lesson 1: "Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty"

Objective:

Introduce the concept of a "pavane" and express the dreamy, slow nature of the piece. Develop an understanding of phrasing and dynamics.

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:** Play *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* for the students (linked above). Discuss the mood of the piece. Ask the students how it makes them feel (e.g., sleepy, peaceful, magical).
- **Exploration and Movement Activity**
 - Explain what a "pavane" is (a slow, graceful dance from the 16th century). Demonstrate how to move slowly and gently, like a ballerina.
 - Watch a segment of dancers performing a pavane. Discuss the dancer's movements, tempo, and mood. Listen to a segment of *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* again. Discuss similarities/differences - tempo, mood, style.
[▶ Pavane - Renaissance - Dance - Belle qui tiens ma vie -Thoinot Arbeau \(1...](#)
 - Ask students to move to the music and stay with the slow tempo. Have students pretend they are Sleeping Beauty, slowly waking up to dance like a ballerina. As they move, encourage them to imagine floating or drifting, which corresponds to the slow, graceful nature of the music.
- **Piano Technique:** Focus on smooth, legato playing (connecting notes). Practice simple hands together or hands separately on a short phrase from the piece.

Listening together or Assignment:

Ask the student to listen to *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* at home or in the car. Encourage them to imagine being in a magical palace as they listen.

Lesson 2: "Tom Thumb"

Piano Duet:  [Martha Argerich and Pablo Galdo play Ravel Petit Poucet](#)

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

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.

Activities:

- **Listening and Exploration:** Play *Tom Thumb* for the students (linked above). Ask the student to describe what they hear.
 - Is the music fast, slow, quiet, smooth (legato), choppy (staccato) loud, busy, calm, sad, happy? What do they hear that helps them to know how Tom Thumb is feeling? How does the music create the image of Tom wandering through the forest?
 - **Younger students:**
 - Ask students if they can hear something in the music that depicts Tom wandering through the forest on a winding path (continuous eighth note accompaniment in the secondo of the piano or the strings of the orchestra).
 - Ask students to walk to the music and change directions several times, pretending they are Tom Thumb on a winding path, trying to find his way home. They can change directions at will, or you can clap to let them know when to change.
 - 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)
 - **Older students:** Listen to the first section 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 (younger) or a scale they know well (older). 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.
 - **Listening Assignment:**

Ask students to listen to Tom Thumb and imagine themselves wandering through the woods trying to find their way home, or wandering through their house trying to find something they lost (a favorite toy, book, or maybe their hat). How would this make them feel?
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Lesson 3: "Laideronette, Empress of the Pagodas"

Objective:

Introduce the theme of "exotic" sounds and textures. Explore the use of the pentatonic scale and the "pagoda" feel.

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:** Play orchestra video *Laideronette, Empress of the Pagodas* and ask the students to listen for instruments that add to the "foreign" or unusual sounds in the music. See if they can name some instruments by just listening first, without seeing the video. (such as harp, celesta, gong, xylophone, orchestra bells)
- **Exploration:** Explain the concept of a "pagoda" (a tower-like structure from Asia). Discuss how the piece uses the pentatonic scale, commonly used in Asian music, to immediately bring our imagination to a scene in Asia
 - Compare the major pentascale with the pentatonic scale - have students listen to examples of both, then try to identify examples played by the teacher.
- **Piano Technique:** Show students the pentatonic scale on the black keys.

- Practice some pentatonic scale exercises. Ask students to improvise a melody using gentle, flowing motions to create a delicate sound. Students can improvise over an accompaniment played by the teacher - play from the piano score or improvise an accompaniment.
- **Movement Activity:** Have students imagine they are in a faraway land, walking through a garden or around a pagoda. Encourage them to move softly and gracefully to the music.

Listening Assignment:

Ask the students to listen to *Laideronette* at home and think about what kind of place they would like to visit if they could walk through a pagoda.

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

Objective:

Explore contrasting characters and emotions in the music. Focus on expressive playing and the use of dynamics.

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:** Play *The Conversation of Beauty and the Beast* and discuss the emotions in the music. Ask the students: How does Beauty feel? How does the Beast sound?
- **Exploration:** Explain that the piece tells a story of a conversation between Beauty and the Beast. Play the piece again and point out the different themes for each character.
- **Piano Technique:** Work on playing both soft (piano) and loud (forte) to match the characters' feelings. Focus on expressive dynamics.
- **Imaginative Play:** Have the students act out being Beauty or the Beast while playing their respective parts. For Beauty, they can imagine being soft and kind, and for the Beast, they can act out strong and intense movements.

Listening Assignment:

Ask the students to listen to *Beauty and the Beast* and think about the emotions the music brings up. What does Beauty feel when she talks to the Beast?

Lesson 5: "The Fairy Garden"

Objective:

Introduce the concept of a fairy garden and play with delicate, lyrical phrases. Focus on playing with ease and calmness.

Activities:

- **Listening:** Play *The Fairy Garden* for the students and discuss the imagery it evokes. What kind of creatures might live in a fairy garden? What does the garden look like?
- **Exploration:** Discuss the idea of a magical, hidden garden where fairies play. Ask students to imagine themselves in this space, interacting with the fairies.
- **Piano Technique:** Focus on light, flowing finger movement to produce a soft, magical sound. Practice short, lyrical phrases from the piece.
- **Art Activity:** After listening, have the students draw their interpretation of a fairy garden. They can use colors and images that come to mind while hearing the music.

Listening Assignment:

Ask the children to listen to *The Fairy Garden* and close their eyes while imagining a magical place where fairies live. What does the place look like? What sounds can they hear?
