

Mother Goose Lesson Plan: Strings Age 4-9

Lesson 1: "Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty"

Objective:

Introduce legato bowing, basic bow control, and dynamic contrasts while evoking a calm, dreamy atmosphere.

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 & Imagery:**

Play *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* and ask students to close their eyes and imagine a peaceful scene, like a fairy tale or a garden. Encourage them to think about how the music makes them feel—relaxed, calm, or sleepy.

- **Younger: 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.

- **Older: 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.

- **Legato Bowing Practice:**
Demonstrate a smooth, connected bow stroke (legato) on open strings. Have students practice drawing the bow slowly across the strings, focusing on creating a smooth, continuous sound without breaks. Encourage slow, controlled movements.
- **Dynamic Exploration:**
Teach students to play quietly (piano) and gradually get louder (crescendo) in a soft, smooth manner, and then fade back to soft (decrescendo). Use a visual (such as hand movements) to show the increase and decrease of volume.
- **Imaginative Play:**
Ask students to pretend they are walking through a peaceful garden or floating in a dream. As they play, encourage them to focus on keeping the bow smooth and light to match the calm mood of the piece.


Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* at home, imagining a peaceful, dreamy scene. Encourage them to hum along and notice the way the music changes in volume.

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](#)

- **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)

- **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?

Lesson 3: "Laideronette, Empress of the Pagodas"

Objective:

Introduce the concept of high notes, bell-like sounds, and an exotic character through light bowing and new tonal colors.

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 & Imagery:**
Play *Laideronette, Empress of the Pagodas* and ask students what kind of place the music reminds them of. Does it sound like a magical temple or a beautiful garden with bells?
- **Listening & Analysis:** 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)
- **Younger Students: 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.
- **Older Students: Exploring the Pentatonic Scale:**
Introduce the pentatonic scale and explain its use in the piece to create an exotic sound. Have students play through the pentatonic scale on the violin or cello, focusing on smooth, even bowing.
 - 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.
- **High String Practice:**
Introduce playing on the higher strings (A and E strings), and help students find a clear, soft sound in the higher register. Demonstrate how to play gently but clearly in the higher positions. Focus on maintaining a clean sound and smooth bowing.
- **Creating a Bell-Like Sound:**
Encourage students to think of the music as the sound of chimes or bells. Have them practice playing on the high strings using a light bow stroke to make a bell-like sound. Use imagery like "ringing bells" to help them play lightly and clearly.

- **Pentatonic Scale:**

Introduce a simple version of the pentatonic scale using open strings or basic fingerings. Explain how this scale creates an exotic, magical sound. Let students play this scale slowly, focusing on smooth bowing and lightness.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *Laideronette* at home, imagining the sound of bells in a magical garden or temple. Encourage them to focus on the bell-like quality of the music.

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

Objective:

Develop contrasting bowing techniques, dynamics, and character interpretation by exploring Beauty's gentle theme and the Beast's more dramatic theme.

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 & Character Exploration:**

Play *The Conversation of Beauty and the Beast* and ask students what they imagine when they hear the music. What do they think Beauty might sound like? And what about the Beast? How do the two themes sound different?

- **Bow Stroke Contrast:**

Teach students how to play Beauty's theme gently, with a smooth, flowing bow stroke, and the Beast's theme more forcefully, with a heavier, more intense bow stroke. Practice both themes with students, focusing on the contrasts in bowing and sound.

- **Dynamic Exploration:**

Show students how to play Beauty's theme softly (piano) and the Beast's theme loudly (forte). Discuss how the volume changes help to bring out the contrasting characters in the music.

- **Role Play:**

Encourage students to "become" Beauty or the Beast while playing. When playing Beauty's theme, they should sit gracefully and play smoothly; when playing the Beast's theme, they should use a stronger, more dramatic stance and bowing.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *The Conversation of Beauty and the Beast* at home and think about how the two characters (Beauty and the Beast) might sound through the music. Encourage them to notice the different dynamics and bow strokes for each character.

Lesson 5: "The Fairy Garden"

Objective:

Develop soft, delicate bowing, and create a dreamy, magical atmosphere while interpreting the peaceful character of the music.

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 & Imagery:**
Play *The Fairy Garden* and ask students to imagine walking through a beautiful, magical garden. What might they see, smell, and hear? Encourage them to think about how the music feels—peaceful, gentle, and calm.
- **Soft Bowing Practice:**
Teach students how to create a soft, flowing sound with the bow. Start by practicing on open strings, focusing on light bow strokes that produce a smooth, continuous sound. Encourage them to keep their bow light and relaxed, creating a soft, dreamy effect.
- **Dynamic Control:**
Show students how to play quietly (*pianissimo*) and gradually get louder (*crescendo*) and then fade back to soft (*decrescendo*). Practice these dynamic shifts slowly, focusing on maintaining a smooth, flowing sound throughout.
- **Expressive Play:**
Encourage students to experiment with phrasing by imagining that they are walking through the fairy garden. Have them play with a relaxed, flowing bow stroke, using dynamics to match the peaceful mood of the music.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *The Fairy Garden* at home and imagine themselves walking through a magical garden. Encourage them to focus on how the music feels and how it creates a sense of calm and peace.
