

Mother Goose Suite Lesson Plans: Voice - All Ages

Lesson 1: "Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty"

Objective:

Introduce smooth, legato singing and basic breath control, focusing on creating 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 discuss what the music makes them imagine. Ask them to think about a peaceful scene, like a fairy tale or a dream. What emotions do they feel? Discuss how the music is slow, gentle, and soft.

- **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
- **Vocal Warm-up:**
Start with gentle humming to encourage relaxation and breath support. Show them how to use deep belly breaths by placing a hand on their belly and feeling it expand as they breathe in. Practice humming, then transition to long, smooth vowels (like "ah" or "oo") to create a relaxed, calm sound.
- **Legato Singing:**
Teach them to sing in a smooth, flowing style. Encourage them to connect each note without breaks, as if singing one long, flowing sentence. Use easy songs or simple phrases from *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* for practice. Focus on steady airflow and relaxed throat muscles.
- **Expressive Phrasing:**
Encourage students to sing as though telling a story. Ask them to think about how they would sing if they were telling a bedtime story or singing to someone sleeping. Focus on soft dynamics and relaxed, smooth transitions between notes.


Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* at home, imagining a peaceful and dreamlike setting. Encourage them to try singing along softly, focusing on smooth and connected sounds.

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)

● **Legato Singing:**

Teach them to sing in a smooth, flowing style. Encourage them to connect each note without breaks, as if singing one long, flowing sentence. Use easy songs or simple phrases from *Tom Thumb* for practice. Focus on steady airflow and relaxed throat muscles.

- **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: "Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas"

Objective:

Introduce delicate, bell-like vocal tones and soft, high-register singing.

Piano Duet: [YouTube](#) 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 *Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas* and ask students to imagine a magical, beautiful garden. What do they think of when they hear the music? Explain that the piece uses light, tinkling sounds, much like bells.

- **Listening & Analysis:** Play orchestra video *Laideronnette, 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.
 - **Older Students:** 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.

- **Vocal Warm-ups for High Notes:**
Start with gentle sirens (sliding from low to high notes smoothly) to help students feel comfortable in the upper range. Practice singing higher pitches on an easy, light “ee” or “oo” vowel sound, focusing on keeping the voice light and bright.
- **Light, Bell-like Singing:**
Encourage students to sing softly in the higher range, imagining that their voice is like the sound of delicate bells or wind chimes. Practice simple scales or lines from the piece, making sure to keep the tone clear, bright, and not forced.
- **Expressive Articulation:**
Focus on clear articulation, especially in the higher notes. Help students understand how the lightness and clarity of their voice can represent the delicate and graceful nature of the Empress.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *Laideronette* at home, imagining a magical garden filled with beautiful sounds. Encourage them to sing softly in the upper range, focusing on light, clear notes.

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

Objective:

Develop contrasting vocal expressions for two different characters—Beauty’s softness and the Beast’s intensity.

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 discuss the characters. How does the music change between Beauty and the Beast? Have the students think about how Beauty sounds gentle and kind, while the Beast sounds gruff and strong.
- **Vocal Warm-ups for Contrast:**
Start with breath exercises that encourage flexibility between soft and loud dynamics. Practice soft, breathy tones for Beauty’s theme (like a whisper) and stronger, louder tones for the Beast’s theme.

- **Character-Specific Singing:**
Have students practice singing both Beauty and the Beast's parts. For Beauty, focus on soft, flowing tones with gentle dynamics. For the Beast, encourage a more dramatic sound with louder, more intense dynamics, using strong breath support.
- **Expressive Phrasing & Dynamics:**
Work on using dynamics to contrast the characters. Teach students to shape phrases by starting soft and growing louder for the Beast's theme, and keeping things soft and controlled for Beauty's theme.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *The Conversation of Beauty and the Beast* at home. Encourage them to think about how they would express the two characters—Beauty's softness and the Beast's strength—through their voice.

Lesson 5: "The Fairy Garden"

Objective:

Create a smooth, flowing vocal line with soft, gentle dynamics to reflect the magical, serene atmosphere of a fairy garden.

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 describe how it makes them feel. Discuss the peaceful, magical nature of the music and what kind of sounds might come from a fairy garden.
- **Smooth, Flowing Singing:**
Practice singing long, legato phrases with smooth transitions. Focus on breath control to maintain a steady, relaxed sound. Use simple, slow exercises to develop a smooth, connected sound between notes.
- **Gentle Dynamics:**
Encourage students to sing softly (piano) and with a smooth, controlled sound. Practice gradual dynamic changes (crescendo and decrescendo) to reflect the gentle ebb and flow of the music.

- **Visualization & Expression:**

Have students close their eyes and imagine walking through a serene, magical garden. As they sing, encourage them to think about how the music would sound if they were floating through the garden—calm, serene, and gentle.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *The Fairy Garden* at home, imagining a peaceful, magical garden. Encourage them to sing along, focusing on creating a smooth, flowing sound and gentle dynamics.
