

Integrated Subject Areas:

- English Language Arts
- Social / Emotional Learning
- Fine Arts

Grade(s): 4–6

Lesson Length: 40 minutes

Instructional objectives:

- Students will listen to *La Mer* by Debussy.
- Students will respond to what they hear by writing or drawing.

“I can” statements

- I can express my imagination through music.
- I can visualize, interpret and describe sounds that I hear.

**Chicago Reading Initiative
Integration**

- Comprehension
- Word Knowledge
- Fluency
- Writing

Say: “DEB-you-see”

Claude Debussy’s *La Mer*

DESCRIPTION

In this lesson, students will listen carefully and critically to a beautiful work of orchestral music: Claude **Debussy’s** *La Mer*, which was influenced by the **Impressionist** movement in the visual arts.

Debussy composed this piece to invoke the sea. The third movement, subtitled "dialogue between the wind and the sea," allows the listener to imagine an evolving seascape or a story that may take place on water.

Students will respond to the music through writing or drawing.



THE INSTITUTE
LEARNING | ACCESS | TRAINING
at the CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Music Activity Partnership

Copyright © 2008 by Avo Randruut and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Music Activity Partnership.
This document may be duplicated without cost for educational use. Duplication must include the above copyright.

Materials

- Paper for drawing or writing
- Colored pencils, crayons, etc.
- Recording of Claude Debussy's *La Mer*
- CD Player

Supplemental Resources:

- For more information on Debussy, see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debussy>
- For more information about Impressionism, see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impressionism>

PROCEDURE

1. Supply each student with a blank paper and colored pencils, crayons, pastels, etc. for drawing.
2. Tell the students that they are going to listen to a piece of music by the French composer Claude Debussy (*La Mer*, third movement). Let them know that this piece was inspired by the ocean. While they listen, the students should try to imagine the story that is taking place in the music.
3. After listening for a minute or more, once they are beginning to imagine what this "place" looks like, have the students begin drawing the image they imagine.
4. As students draw, they should continue listening and responding to the changes in the music. Some students may need more prompts from the teacher to keep going, for example:
 - What is in the front in your picture?
 - What is in the background?
 - What is the sky like?
 - Who are the characters in your story?
 - Are there any ships, people, animals, or sea creatures?
5. After the music finishes, allow the students to continue their drawing until they seem ready to pause.
6. Once the students are finished, collect the drawings and display them. Give the students a few minutes to look at all the images and ask them to describe any interesting details that they notice.

7. Lead a discussion about the students' work and how it is derived from the music. Allow students to ask questions of the artist of any of the drawings that strike their curiosity. Remember that each student/artist has his or her own interpretation of the music. Prompting questions may include:

- What do you think this artist / author was hearing in the music?
- What part of the music inspired these lines?
- Do you see a story in this picture?
- How does this one differ from that one?

Students can write about their observations, comparing and contrasting two different drawings.

8. Explain that the music was written by French composer Claude Debussy (1862-1918). Mention that he was influenced by the Impressionist painters of his time. Originally, Debussy called the three parts of the composition "three symphonic sketches."

In French, *La Mer* means "the sea" and the title of this **movement**, "Dialogue du vent et de la mer," means "the dialogue between the wind and the sea."

You may want to show pictures of a few paintings from this era to discuss how visual artists (such as Edouard Manet or Claude Monet) affected musicians such as Debussy.

Extensions

- Instead of making drawings have the students write a description of the scene that they hear in the music. They should use descriptive words, and be able to explain the musical elements that helped set the scene.
- Return the students' drawings along with a new sheet of paper. While listening to the music again, ask them to write a short story about what happens in their picture. Are there characters? Is there a problem to solve? Is there a beginning, middle, and end to the story? Are there any surprises?
- Students can continue to elaborate on their stories if they merit additional work.
- Listen to all three movements of *La Mer* and discuss how the final movement relates to the first two. Is there anything familiar in the first movement? Why do you think Debussy divided the piece into three sections? Does it seem to have a beginning, middle and end?

NOTES

VOCABULARY

Impressionism – A term describing the distinctive characteristics of visual art by painters including Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, Camille Pissarro, among others. Impressionist painters influenced composers and authors to explore similar ideas in their own work.

Movement – A section of a long piece of music, usually separated by silence.

ILLINOIS LEARNING STANDARDS

FINE ARTS

Learning Benchmark 25B: Understand the similarities, distinctions and connections in and amongst the arts.

Learning Benchmark 26.B.2d: Demonstrate knowledge and skills to create works of visual art using problem solving, observing, designing, sketching and constructing.

Learning Benchmark 27.A.2a: Identify and describe the relationship between the arts and various environments (e.g., home, school, workplace, theater, gallery).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Learning Benchmark 3.C.3a: Compose narrative writings for a specified audience.



THE INSTITUTE

LEARNING | ACCESS | TRAINING

at the CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Music Activity Partnership