Erik Satie’s
Furniture Music

Grade(s): 4-8
Lesson length: 30-40 minutes

Instructional objectives:
- Students will become familiar with Erik Satie’s unique compositional ideas.
- Students will compose and create a sound piece using words and their voices.
- Students will organize, practice and present their compositions to the class.

Materials
- Furniture catalogs (IKEA, Crate and Barrel, etc.)
- Musical recordings of featured repertoire listed below.
- Sound system for musical excerpts of concert repertoire (e.g., laptop and speakers, iPhone® dock, Spotify®, etc.)
- Paper
- Writing utensil

Featured Repertoire*:
- Satie “Furniture Music” (Musique d’ameublement No. I, Tenture de cabinet préfectoral)

*Click on the links above to listen to these examples on Spotify. A free account is required to listen.

Students will learn about the French composer Erik Satie and his style of composing ambient music, particularly his “Furniture Music.” Students will compose their own furniture-inspired pieces.

Assessment Strategies
In this lesson, students should be able to successfully emulate the style of Erik Satie’s “Furniture Music” in composing a sound poem. Learn more about assessment strategies on page 5.

Learning Standards
This lesson uses Common Core and National Core Arts Anchor Standards. You can find more information about the standards featured in this lesson on page 4.
ABOUT THE COMPOSER*

Erik Satie [say: sah-TEE] was a French composer born in 1866. His work inspired many genres of 20th century music, including ambient music, and is considered to be minimalist** by today's standards.

Some of Satie’s compositions featured instruments that imitated noises found in various environments, such as animal sounds.

Many concert venues in France were forced to close during World War I, so composers moved their music to unexpected places such as cafés and art galleries. That’s where Satie met with other artists to push the boundaries of tradition, creating the avant-garde. For example, one day Satie and his friends were at an art gallery where they told everyone to ignore them while they played Musique d’ameublement, which means “Furniture Music” in English. It was the first time ever ambient music, a type of music designed to create or enhance a mood or atmosphere, was performed.

INTRODUCTION

1. **Introduce** the idea of background sounds. Direct students to **listen** to the sounds outside the classroom. (These might be sounds in the hall, outside the school, etc.) After a brief listening period, have them **share** what they noticed.

2. **Explain** that the composer Erik Satie wanted to create music that was intended to be used as background sound. Instead of being performed in a concert hall with focused attention from an audience, he thought of different places that it could be played as background noise. He called this series of pieces “furniture music.”

3. Before looking at Satie’s music and the ways that it influenced later composers, **tell** students that you have a project for them to first create their own “furniture music.”
TEACHING STEPS

4. Divide the students into groups of 4 or 5. Give each group a set of pages from a furniture catalog. Ask them to look through the furniture names and select the 5 most interesting sounding names and write them on a piece of paper.

5. Next have each team assemble the words into some kind of interesting order or pattern. It is ok to repeat some of the words and to be creative about how they are ordered.

6. In groups, have students practice this order. Then have them add dynamics, accents or anything else they decide upon. Encourage the students to do their best with pronunciation. Have the students practice so that they can say, speak, chant or sing this sequence as a group. Decide as a group on the number of repetitions you would like it to have, choosing from one to eight.

7. Have the groups perform their sequences. Enjoy the creative nature of the sequences and remark on interesting results that may have come from this experiment.

8. Discuss Satie’s idea for performing music in the background of different public locations. Why do you think he called it “Furniture Music”? (Perhaps he imagined it populating a physical space quietly like a piece of furniture?) Have you ever noticed music on in the background somewhere where you have been? Ask the students how it made them feel in that place.

9. Listen to Satie’s Furniture Music with the above concepts in mind.

Extension:

1. Tell students that Erik Satie influenced later composers such as John Cage and Brian Eno, and also influenced a modern genre known as ambient music.

2. Have students listen to excerpts of John Cage’s and Brian Eno’s music. Discuss how the Cage and Eno may have been inspired by Satie. How is their music different from “Furniture Music”?

Repertoire*

Satie Furniture Music (Musique d’ameublement: No. 1 Tenture de cabinet préfectoral)

Eno Music for Airports

Cage 4′33 No. 2: 0′00

*Click on the links above to listen to these examples on Spotify. A free account is required to listen.
VOCAUBRARY

• Ambient music: a type of music that emphasizes tone, atmosphere and mood over traditional structure or rhythms found in other styles of music. Contemporary ambient music originated in the 1970s, and notably featured electronic music.

• Avant-garde: new and unusual or experimental ideas, especially in the arts, or the people introducing them.

LEARNING STANDARDS

Common Core Standards:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

National Core Arts Standards

Anchor Standard 6a, 6b Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Anchor Standard 7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
ASSESSMENT

- Observe students’ ability to create “furniture music” while working in groups. Students should use varied words and use the natural rhythm of syllables to create their sound piece.

- Extension: through a guided discussion comparing and contrasting the work of Satie, Cage, and Eno, observe students’ understanding of Satie’s style of background music and the way he influenced other composers.