This guide accompanies a virtual program inspired by *The Music in George’s Head*; a whimsical picture book biography of George Gershwin, written by Chicago author Suzanne Slade, with illustrations by Stacy Innerst. It features narration by Kurt Elling and a 2015 CSO recording of *Rhapsody in Blue*, conducted by Marin Alsop with Jon Kimura Parker as soloist.

The video is found here on the CSO’s website. A demonstration of the unmistakably recognizable opening theme of *Rhapsody in Blue* by Stephen Williamson, principal clarinet of the CSO, and Chicago jazz legend Kurt Elling is at this link.

In this document, you will find fun activities that will enhance your children’s experience of *The Music in George’s Head*.

**Connect with Quick Ideas**

- Watch The *Music in George’s Head*, found on the CSOtv video portal.
- Use this listening guide video to learn about the musical themes in *Rhapsody in Blue*.
- Listen at this video link to the famous opening theme of *Rhapsody in Blue*.
- After viewing the videos, ask your children to identify the theme they like best. Provide your children with the opportunity to respond to their favorite theme in one of the following ways:
  - Sing your favorite theme.
  - Play the rhythm of your favorite theme using rhythm instruments or whatever you can find in your home (spoons, pots & pans, clapping hands).
  - Write a short paragraph sharing your thoughts about your favorite theme.
  - Create a piece of artwork inspired by your favorite theme.
  - Choreograph a dance to your favorite theme.

George Gershwin was inspired by the sounds of trains and used that inspiration when composing *Rhapsody in Blue*. Have your children find sounds from around your home to compose a piece of music. Follow the steps below:

- Walk around your house or neighborhood and listen for different sounds.
- Write down, draw or record the audio of the sounds you hear.
- Identify the sounds you like best.
● Arrange these sounds to create a piece of music.
● Perform your composition using “found” instruments (pots & pans, spoons, glasses filled with water, shoeboxes, bicycle bell, etc.) or play back your recording.

Please share your children’s responses by emailing them to Katy Clusen, manager of school and family programs at clusenk@cso.org.

Connect with Music

Composer, conductor and music educator Leonard Bernstein said this of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*:

“You can cut out parts of it without affecting the whole in any way except to make it shorter. You can remove any of these stuck-together sections, and the piece still goes on as bravely as before. You can even interchange these sections with one another, and no harm done. And in fact all these things are being done to it every day. It's still the *Rhapsody in Blue*.”

The music that accompanies *The Music in George’s Head* reflects Bernstein’s quote; however, your children can experience the entire *Rhapsody in Blue* from start to finish as Gershwin originally envisioned it in any of the following ways:

● Watch a performance of the piece performed in 1976 by the New York Philharmonic conducted by Leonard Bernstein at this link.
● Introduce your children to the musical themes by viewing this listening guide.
● Disney Studios included *Rhapsody in Blue* in their full-length feature *Fantasia 2000*. With artwork inspired by New York artist Al Hirschfeld, Disney animators shared four different stories of New York residents in the 1920s. Information for viewing is at this link.*

Connect with Language Arts

George Gershwin got his inspiration for *Rhapsody in Blue* while on a train ride, and American poet and social activist Langston Hughes created his first published poem while riding a train. Both men lived in New York in the 1920s and were actively creating in their own genres, incorporating the characteristics of jazz! Learn about Langston Hughes with the activities below. The detailed lesson plan is at this link.*

*Find this lesson plan and other great Gershwin connections at the website of Judy Meyer Hays: http://www.makejoyfulsound.org/rhapsody.html*
● Read the book “Langston’s Train Ride” by Robert Burleigh and talk about how the poet came to believe in himself as a writer. Extend the conversation by sharing some of your own dreams and asking your children about theirs.

● Study the poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” the work that launched Hughes’ career. Listen to the author talk about it at this link. Encourage your children to compose their own poem by using the ABA form of this piece or illustrate the original by using “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” illustrated by E.B. Lewis, as inspiration.

● Learn more about jazz music through the work of Langston Hughes. You may find “The First Book of Jazz” or a recording of “The Story of Jazz” at your local library.

**Connect with Visual Art**

In addition to being a musical genius, George Gershwin was quite a talented painter! Both he and his brother Ira loved doodling when they were children. In fact, a 1934 article about George’s artistic talent noted, “If his family had presented him with an easel and some paints when he was a child, instead of with a piano, he would be a professional painter today rather than a musician.” Learn how Rhapsody in Blue is connected to art with the below activities. The detailed lesson plan is at this link.*

● George and his older brother, Ira, often teamed up together. Ira wrote the words for many of George’s popular tunes and encouraged him to compose music that was both classical and jazzy for their friend Paul Whiteman’s concert “An Experiment in Modern Music.” In fact, Ira suggested that George change his original title of American Rhapsody to Rhapsody in Blue after he made a visit to a gallery exhibition by artist James McNeill Whistler, who titled his paintings by combining musical forms with colors. Learn about the life of James McNeill Whistler by reading Mike Venezia’s James McNeill Whistler from his “Getting to Know the World’s Greatest Artists” series.

● Just as Gershwin was inspired to name his concerto after the paintings of James Whistler, other visual artists have been inspired to create art using Gershwin’s title Rhapsody in Blue. Compare and contrast the works of these artists: Miguel Covarrubias (1925), Arthur Dove (1927), Earl Horter (1928), Diana Ong and Michael Humphries (2001). To facilitate your discussion, a PowerPoint slideshow of these works is available at this link. Encourage your children to create their own interpretation of Rhapsody in Blue using any visual art medium. Listen to the music while creating the artwork.

● The single clarinet line that introduces Rhapsody in Blue is one of the most recognizable beginnings of any classical work. Watch and listen to Stephen Williamson, principal clarinet of the CSO, perform the opening line at this link. The classic children’s book “Harold and the Purple Crayon” by Crockett Johnson also starts with a single line. Read the story or watch the Weston Woods or HBO animated version and ask these questions: Why did Harold draw? What did Harold need besides his purple crayon? Do you like to draw? Why do you think artists draw?

● American caricaturist, Al Hirschfield, began his career in New York in the 1920s just like George Gershwin. His distinctive style, characterized by a pure line drawing in black ink, had an important
influence on contemporary artists, cartoonists and illustrators. His work was the inspiration for Disney artists’ rendition of *Rhapsody in Blue* in *Fantasia 2000*. Show your children a *Gershwin caricature* drawn by Hirschfield and discuss the style. Ask your children to create their own caricature. Finally, watch the 1996 documentary “*The Line King: The Al Hirschfeld Story*” together.

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**
The Negaunee Music Institute at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra acknowledges with gratitude the development of these materials by:

Judy Meyer Hays, Retired General Music Teacher, Adjunct Professor, Illinois Wesleyan University