

Teacher Guide 2025/26

Picture the Music

Inspire Creativity!

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**St. Louis Symphony
Orchestra**

Stéphane Denève, Music Director



A special invitation for teachers of student artists

Showcase your students' imagination and creativity with **Picture the Music**, now in its 36th year of celebrating artwork by students in public, private, parochial, and homeschools throughout the region. This year, this FREE cross-curricular art competition invites students in grades K-8 to discover "**Codes**" (Mvt. II) from Kevin Puts' **Contact** and respond with paintings and drawings that express creative thought and emotion inspired by the music.

Art and music offer powerful strategies for emotional exploration and regulation.

- Engaging in art is cathartic when individuals express their feelings, thoughts, and experiences.
- Listening to music connects us with and validates our own emotions.
- Experiencing beauty, wonder, and awe—whether through music, art, or the natural world— improves our mental and physical health.

Picture the Music gives your students a learning activity that goes beyond the curriculum with new ways to understand, process, and express their emotions.

Below are some resources to make your students' Picture the Music experience the most memorable ever!



How it Works

Students listen, explore, create, and share. Teachers encourage creativity and imagination, then choose nine (9) pieces of art to submit.



Don't share the title or background of the piece! Give your students the opportunity to react to the music first. The title and background should be a fun surprise for your students after they've completed their artwork.

Listen: Using good quality audio equipment, listen to "Codes" (Mvt. II) from Kevin Puts' *Contact*. Allow time for students to listen more than once to explore the emotions and thoughts that form in their minds. The musical selection is just over four minutes long, and students will become more familiar and comfortable with it through repeated listening. Some schools have found success when their students listen in music class and then create their artwork in art class.

Explore: Invite students to share any thoughts that come to mind while listening. Encourage them to reflect on the feelings, images, and memories the music evokes. Use the following discussion questions, provided by the Saint Louis Art Museum, to guide your conversation:

- Close your eyes as you listen. What colors, shapes, or images come to mind?
- What words would you use to describe the music?
- What does the music feel like?
- What emotions does the music inspire?
- What do you imagine is happening? What story is the music telling?
- If you were to dance to this music, how would you move? If you are comfortable, move to the music in place or in a safe spot.

Create: After students are familiar with the music, they should begin creating their own works of art inspired by the musical selection. Continue to listen to the music periodically, while students create.

Share: Teachers choose and submit up to nine (9) students' artwork per school, preferably one from each grade K-8. Each homeschool network may enter one (1) piece of art per student, up to nine (9) students.

Where to Find the Music

1. [YouTube](#)
2. [Spotify](#)

Artwork Requirements

Each artwork entry must fulfill these requirements:

- Artwork must be created on **12" x 18"** paper.
- Acceptable media include crayon, oil pastels, pen, ink, paints, batik, or mixed media collage. If using collage, use only firmly glued, flat materials.
- The art must be as flat as possible. Please minimize the use of embellishments such as gemstones, beads, etc. that would add weight to the artwork.
- Students' names should NOT appear on the front of their artwork (names on the back of artwork are okay).

Please consider the following when creating artwork:

- Mounting is not required for entry into the competition. If you choose to mount artwork, do not use white glue as it will warp the paper.
- Do not mount on foam core or cardboard.
- Do not use soft pastels or powdered chalk because they may smear and ruin the artwork.
- Consider that the artwork will be viewed from a distance as you choose your media.
- Do not mat your artwork.

Photographing Artwork for Submission

Digital photographs of the artwork will be uploaded via an online submission platform. Please take extra care when photographing student artwork.

- Take the photograph in a well-lit room.
- Avoid photographing the art from above.
- Place the artwork on an easel or something similar.
- Put a solid background behind the art (preferably white).
- Determine whether the photograph should be taken in landscape or portrait mode.

How to Submit Entries

Visit s|s|o.org/picture to access the online submission form.

- Complete one Submission Form for each school. On this form, you will be able to submit up to nine (9) student entries. If multiple teachers participate from your school, collaborate to decide which nine works to submit. If you are entering artwork for more than one school, submit a separate Submission Form (with up to nine entries) for each school.
- **Double check the spelling of all student names.** Names will be reproduced on certificates, programs, and artwork exhibit cards exactly as teachers submit them.

- **Double check artwork titles and the orientation of the file uploads before hitting submit.**

Titles and artwork will be reproduced exactly as submitted.

- Acceptable image file types are .jpg, .png, .gif, .bmp, .tiff, .webp.
- Please name each file using the following naming system: **StudentLastName_FirstInitial_Grade** (K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8)
- If you are unable to access the online platform, please contact education@s|s|o.org.

All entries must be submitted online by Wednesday, January 14, 2026.

Questions? Email education@s|s|o.org.

Judging

- A panel of judges—experts in art, music, and art education—will judge the students' art on originality, creativity, and imagination.
- Artwork must meet all requirements to be entered into the competition.
- Judges will not see any information about the student or their school. They will only see the artwork.
- Judges select 100 finalists who are invited to an awards ceremony and will have their artwork showcased in a traveling art exhibit.

Finalist Artwork Submission

Teachers will receive results via email in early February. Instructions for mounting finalists' artwork and a deadline for artwork mailing and/or drop-off later that month will be included in the email. Physical artwork from all 100 finalists must be received by February 20, 2026.

Awards Ceremony

An awards ceremony honoring the 100 finalists will take place at Powell Hall at the Jack C. Taylor Music Center on March 25, 2026 at 7:00pm. Finalists' parents, relatives, friends, teachers, principals, and district superintendents are encouraged to attend. The following awards will be presented:

Maestro Award: Awarded to one student artist from grades K–2, one student artist from grades 3–5, and one student artist from grades 6–8 whose works were identified as best capturing the essence of the music and spirit of Picture the Music.

St. Louis Symphony Orchestra Award: Awarded to one student artist from each grade whose works were identified as best capturing the essence of the music.

Awards Ceremony (con't)

Blue Ribbon Award: Awarded to 25 student artists for works of excellence.

Special Recognition Honorees: Awarded to 63 student artists for outstanding work.

Each finalist will have their artwork on display in the Picture the Music traveling art exhibit. The traveling exhibit showcases students' artwork at several public locations throughout St. Louis following the awards ceremony.

Every student whose artwork is submitted to Picture the Music will receive a Certificate of Merit. Certificates for finalists will be handed out at the awards ceremony; certificates for all other entries will be emailed to teachers following the ceremony.

Artwork Pickup

For the 100 finalists, physical artwork pickup will be arranged after the completion of the traveling art exhibit. Teachers with finalists will be emailed directly with information on artwork pickup in spring 2026.

Dates to Remember

- Artwork submission deadline: January 14, 2026
- Emails to top 100 finalists sent out: Early February 2026
- Finalist artwork postmark deadline: February 11, 2026
- Finalist artwork drop-off deadline: February 20, 2026
- Awards ceremony: March 25, 2026
- Traveling art exhibit: March and April 2026

State Standards for Visuals Art and Music

Picture the Music fulfills many components of the Missouri Learning Standards in music and visual arts, as well as the Illinois Fine Arts Learning Standards, including the following:

[Missouri Learning Standards](#)

Visual Art Grade-Level Expectations: VA:Cr1A, VA:Cr1B, VA:Cn10A

Music Grade-Level Expectations: MU:Re7A, MU:Cn10A, MU:Cn11A

[Illinois Fine Arts Learning Standards](#)

Visual Arts: VA:Cr1.1.K-6, VA:Cr2.1.K-6, VA:Cn10.1.K-6

Music: MU:Re8.1.K-6, MU:Cn10.1.K-6, MU:Cn11.1.K-6

About the Composer and Composition

Note: Discuss the composer's life, culture, and world events that happened during their lifetime **ONLY AFTER** students have completed their artwork to ensure that the students' work reflects their own personal emotions and thoughts about the musical selection.

Kevin Puts, *Contact*

Kevin Puts was born in St. Louis, MO. His family moved to Alma, MI, when he was 10 years old. He studied music composition and piano at the Eastman School of Music and Yale University. Puts is the composer-in-residence of the SLSO's 2025/26 season. Many of his pieces, including *Contact*, will be featured on SLSO concerts this season.



Puts composed *Contact* after being asked to write a concerto (a piece for solo instruments and orchestra) for the string trio [Time for Three](#). The trio consists of two violinists, Nicholas Kendall and Charles Yang, and bassist Ranaan Meyer. Puts was inspired by Time for Three's energy and the joy he felt during their performances.

Originally called *Triple Concerto*, Puts later changed the name of the piece to *Contact* as it had developed a deeper meaning. Puts wrote *Contact* during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the need for social distancing at the time, the piece evolved into a reflection on how deeply humans rely on each other. Puts worries that loneliness is very common in today's world, and he hopes that *Contact* is heard as a call for human connection. The second movement, "Codes," has rapid notes throughout that sound like Morse code. Perhaps the performers are sending a radio transmission to someone far away.