



## Body Percussion Theme and Variations

Benjamin Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* is in the musical form theme and variations. In this lesson, students begin to understand this musical form by using body percussion to compose and perform variations on a given theme.

### Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Identify different ways to vary a short musical idea.
- Create their own variations on a simple musical phrase using body percussion.
- Perform variations on a given theme using body percussion.

### Standards

#### Missouri Learning Standards:

- MU:Cr1A.1-8 – Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

#### Illinois Learning Standards – Music:

- MU:Cr1.1.1-8 – Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

### Materials

- Recorded music or backing track of your choosing (optional)

### Procedure

- Perform a short (4- or 8-beat) musical pattern using body percussion. For example, pat four quarter-notes on your thighs, then clap four quarter-notes above your head. Indicate for students to repeat the pattern you performed. Then do the same pattern again, having them

repeat it. Do this as many times as necessary to give students the opportunity to internalize the pattern.

- Once students have learned the pattern, ask them for ideas of ways to vary that musical idea. Explain that when a composer varies a musical idea, they create a new musical idea that is both similar to and different from the original. Some ideas that students might come up with or that you could suggest:
  - Vary the volume by performing louder or softer; by using less fingers to pat and clap; or by adding a crescendo or decrescendo to gradually increase or decrease the volume.
  - Change the rhythm by performing half-notes or eighth-notes, either to fill eight beats or to shorten or lengthen the phrase. (While composers frequently vary the tempo in theme and variations, doing so will not work later in this lesson when the class performs successive variations without break, keeping a steady beat.)
  - Invert the theme. There are several ways to do this. They could clap above the head four times, then pat the lap four times. Or they could pat the lap four times then clap low to the ground (or stomp feet) four times.
  - Change the “instrumentation” by performing the rhythm with different parts of their body or by using different styles of body percussion (rubbing, snapping, etc.)



### Procedure (continued)

- Increase the alternation by keeping the quarter note rhythm but performing pat – clap – pat – clap, etc.
- Keep one half of the phrase, but completely change the other half of the phrase.
- Embellish the phrase by adding new “notes” between the original ones.
- Now that students understand the process and the possibilities, perform this exercise alternating between a theme and variations on it. First present a new theme and give students a minute to think about the variation they might perform. Then try to perform the theme and variations in succession (coming back to the theme between each variation), keeping a steady beat throughout.
  - Class performs the 4- or 8-beat theme
  - Student 1 performs a variation on that theme
  - Class performs the theme
  - Student 2 performs a variation on that theme, etc.
- If you have a large class, you may choose to pause and change the theme after a number of students have had a turn so no one feels like they’re running out of ideas. Once students are comfortable with the format of this activity, you could add recorded music in the background to provide the steady beat.
- If your students are ready for more challenging rhythms, try performing this activity with a theme that uses rhythms heard in Britten’s *Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*. Some examples include:

♩=40



♩=40



♩=40



# Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra

## Lesson Plan



ST. LOUIS  
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### Assessment

**Use the following rubric:**

- Student contributed ideas to the discussion about ways to vary the theme. (1 point)
- Student performed an original variation on the given theme that was in some way similar to the theme. (1 point)
- Student performed an original variation on the given theme that was in some way different from the theme. (1 point)