Night on Bald Mountain

SLSO Learning Lab

ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

For Music Educators

For grades 1–3, with adult help

Objectives

Students will:

- Explore Modest Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain* and the concept of tone-pictures
- Create a visual representation of Mussorgsky's tone-picture, *Night on Bald Mountain*

Standards

Missouri Music Learning Standards

- MU: Cn11A.1-3a

Illinois Music Learning Standards

- MU: Cn11.1.1-3a

Materials

- Recording of *Night on Bald Mountain*
- Google Maps
- KANDINSKY from Chrome Music Lab
- Drawing supplies

Vocabulary

- Tone picture/Tone poem
- Setting

Assessment

Tone Picture (2-point rubric)
Student successfully:

- Participates and completes the assigned activity
- Represents through a visual medium, their interpretation of Mussorgsky's musical intent

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Composer Modest Mussorgsky called his musical composition Night on Bald Mountain a "tone-picture."

Night on Bald Mountain is a piece of music based on a short story by Russian author Nikolai Gogol. In the story, St. John sees witches gathering on Bald Mountain. The witches have a party that lasts all night. When the sun rises, the witches vanish.

The story takes place on Bald Mountain near Kiev: a city in modern-day Ukraine. Start by taking a virtual walk through the streets of Kiev with street view on Google Maps.

- What do you notice about the city of Kiev?
- What do you think the term "tone-picture" might have meant to Mussorgsky?

Paint a Tone-Picture

Using KANDINSKY from Google's Chrome Music Lab, paint your own "tone-picture." This simple online program takes anything you paint virtually and turns it into sound. Listen to *Night on Bald Mountain* and start creating.

Create a Silent Play

Create your own silent play. For this activity, *Night on Bald Mountain* has been divided into four sections. Each section is a different scene, like in a play. The four sections or scenes are:

Spirits and Creatures of the Night Awaken and Assemble
Beginning – 3:28

Spirits and Creatures of the Night Celebrate
3:28–5:50

Sunrise: Spirits and Creatures Scatter
5:50–7:35

Morning over a Sleepy Town: The Sun Rises Over Bald Mountain
7:35 – end

Listen to each section. Imagine all the possible pictures or scenes Mussorgsky could have been trying to paint with his music. Pick one for each section (four in total) and act them out along with the music. Find or make props or costumes to use as you act out the different scenes.

Illustrate Bald Mountain

Every great story has a setting where the action takes place. Mussorgsky's musical story takes place on Bald Mountain. Having listened to the music, what three words would you use to describe Bald Mountain? Draw or paint a picture of the mountain, illustrating those three words.



Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881) began taking piano lessons from his mother when he was a child. Even when he was young, he was very good at it. Mussorgsky's parents sent him away to a military boarding school and when he graduated, he joined the Russian army. Eventually Mussorgsky left the army to do work that he was more passionate about: composing. Mussorgsky tried to make enough money as a composer, but it was difficult. So instead he took a job working for the Russian government and continued to compose in his spare time. Mussorgsky was part of a group called "The Five." This group of five Russian composers worked together to create music with a unique Russian sound. Nationalism, the movement to create music and art to represent one's country, was not a new idea. Throughout the history of music, many different composers have taken great pride in creating music that represents their homeland. *Night on Bald Mountain* does that by using a Russian folk story as the inspiration.