The Composer Is Dead

SLSO Learning Lab

ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

For Music Educators

Objectives

Students will:

- Learn new vocabulary through the telling of the story *The Composer Is Dead*
- Relate the idea of theme in literature to theme in music
- Identify the main literary themes from *The Composer Is Dead* book and the musical themes in Nathaniel Stookey's composition

Standards

Missouri Music Learning Standards

- MU: Re7B.4-5a
- MU: Cn11A.4-6a

Illinois Music Learning Standards

- MU: Re7.1.4-5a
- MU: Cn11.1.4-6a

Materials

- *The Composer Is Dead* book with CD
- *The Composer Is Dead* Vocabulary Cards

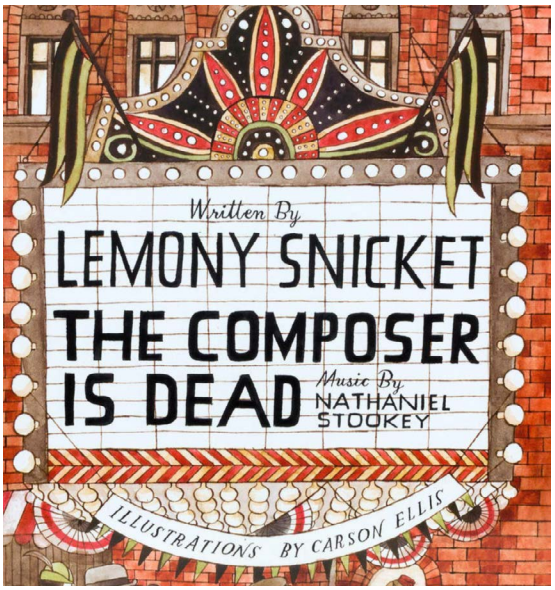
Vocabulary

- Composer
- Melody
- Theme

Assessment

The Composer Is Dead (3-point rubric)
Student successfully:

- Acts out and/or describes vocabulary words in the Vocabulary Builder activity
- Identifies the musical themes in *The Composer Is Dead*
- Participates in class discussion



The Composer Is Dead is a story with musical accompaniment. Author Lemony Snicket wrote the story and composer Nathaniel Stookey wrote the music.

Before watching or listening to *The Composer Is Dead*, use the title and illustration on the book cover to make some predictions about the story:

- Do you think this story has something to do with music? Why or why not?
- What is a composer?
- Where do you think the story takes place?
- Who might the main characters be?
- Do you think the story will be scary? Why or why not?

It's Just a Figure of Speech

After reading or listening to *The Composer Is Dead*, discuss the following:

- Did the orchestra murder the composer?
- What does it mean when an orchestra "murders" a composer?
- What does it mean when an orchestra "keeps a composer alive"?

The Composer Is Dead is a figure of speech—a word or phrase used in a non-literal sense for effect. It's like having a double meaning. Another common example of a figure of speech is "Break a leg." When you say that, you're not suggesting someone hurt themself. Instead, it is a message of good luck to a performer before they go on stage for a performance. Come up with a list of other figures of speech you have heard or used. What does each mean?

Vocabulary Builder

Using *The Composer Is Dead* Vocabulary Cards, create an action or illustration for each vocabulary word. Read the book and pause to act out each vocabulary word, or act the word out while listening to the audio recording on the CD.

Musical Themes

A melody is a sequence of notes that is musically satisfying. A musical theme is a recognizable melody upon which part or all of a musical composition is based. Literature also has themes. In literature the theme is simply the main idea of the story. What literary themes can you identify in *The Composer Is Dead*?

Composer Nathaniel Stookey uses a handful of musical themes in his accompanying music. Listen to *The Composer Is Dead* again, and follow along with the listening map to identify all the different musical themes.



Nathaniel Stookey (b. 1970) was first commissioned to compose a piece of music for a major symphony orchestra at age 17. Stookey has since collaborated with many of the world's greatest orchestras. The San Francisco Symphony commissioned, premiered, and recorded *The Composer Is Dead* (2006), a sinister guide to the orchestra with narration by Lemony Snicket. It has been performed by hundreds of orchestras worldwide and cited as one of the five most often performed orchestral works of the 21st century.

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Main Theme





Melody
Violin I & II



Accompaniment
Cello & Bass



Countermelody
Viola



Cadenza
Concertmaster



Waltz Theme
Strings

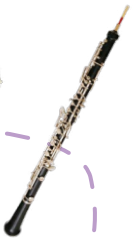
Main Theme





Sneaky Theme
Woodwinds







Marching Theme
Brass







Tango Theme
Brass & Percussion







Recapitulation



Main Theme



The End