# Enigma Variations

SLSO Learning Lab

ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

## For Music Educators

For grades 3–5

### Objectives

Students will:

- Illustrate their own analysis of Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, citing context from the musical selection to support their creative decisions
- Apply their knowledge of the elments of music to make musical decisions

### Standards

Missouri Music Learning Standards

- MU: Re7B.3-5a
- MU: Cn10A.3-5a

Illinois Music Learning Standards

- MU: Re7.1.3-5a
- MU: Cn10.1.3-5a

### Materials

- Recording of *Enigma Variations*

### Vocabulary

- Theme
- Theme and Variations

### Assessment

**Create Your Own Character** (3-point rubric)
Student successfully:

- Outlines their own musical composition for a character of their choosing
- Uses the elements of music appropriately in describing their composition
- Provides support for their musical decisions from their own interpretation of the character's appearance, behaviors, and/or personality

## Every great story has strong and vivid characters. Who is one of your favorite characters from a story? What do you like most about this character?

Listen to the beginning (0:00-1:56) of composer Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. The opening theme or melody is written out below.




After the first statement of the theme, Elgar repeats it many times, varying it in some way each time. This musical form is called theme and variations. Elgar wrote fourteen variations on this main theme. That's a lot of variations! Each of the fourteen variations represents a different character or person in the composer's life.

### Character Exploration

Here are a few ways to explore Elgar's variations. For each variation:

1. Use adjectives to describe the music. Choose adjectives that could also describe a character's personality or mood. For example, is the variation/character friendly or mean? Happy or sad? What musical elements make it sound this way?
2. Move like the character. Choose movements that match what you hear in the music. You can even dress up as the character and act out what you think they might be doing. What musical elements influenced your movement decisions?
3. Draw a picture of the character. What would they look like? What would they be doing? How might they be dressed? What musical elements influenced how you imagined each character to look?
4. Elgar provided initials for each character. Use these initials to create a name for each character.

This recording of *Enigma Variations* includes timings for each variation and the initials of the character that the variation represents.

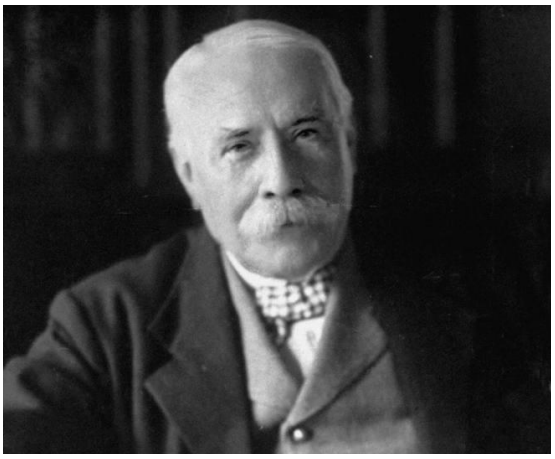
### Create Your Own Character

After exploring Elgar's characters, create your own. Take your favorite character from a story, television show, movie, or a person in your life and describe what that character's variation might sound like using the elements of music. For example, will the tempo be fast or slow? Will the tonality be major or minor? Use any of the musical elements you have learned about. For each musical decision, share something about the character that influenced that decision.

**Free Digital Download from the YO**

Enjoy a free digital download of the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra (YO) performing Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. Create a login and enter YPC2016 in the "search or redeem" field to redeem your free digital download. Learn more about the YO.





**Sir Edward William Elgar** (1857-1934) was born and raised in Broadheath, a village near Worcester, England. His father was a musician and ran a music store. Elgar's family did not have the money to provide him with formal musical training, so he was mostly self-taught. He played the violin and worked as a church organist. Elgar is best known as a composer, despite never having studied music composition at a university. His success as a composer led him to being knighted in 1904, and in 1905 he became the University of Birmingham's first professor of music. Elgar started composing at the end of the Romantic period. Music composed in this period is often characterized as being very expressive, with intense energy and passion.