

STUDY GUIDE – “The Bassoonist of Hamelin”



A Musical Program for Children presented by Jewel Winds

This study guide is prepared by Jewel Winds woodwind quintet, and intended for use by schools and centers to promote music education and participation in the arts. It is completely reproducible and free of charge.

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PROGRAM BACKGROUND

A Wind Quintet

Jewel Winds is a wind quintet. “Quintet” means that there are five players in the group. Wind instruments are those that require air to create the sounds. Instruments from the brass and woodwind families are wind instruments. In a wind quintet, four of the musicians play woodwind instruments: flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon. The fifth musician in the group plays the French horn, a brass instrument. See below for pictures of each instrument.



FLUTE



OBOE



CLARINET



BASSOON



FRENCH HORN

The modern wind quintet has been around for a long time, although in varying degrees of popularity through the years. Two composers, Reicha (“rye-kah”) and Danzi (“donn-zee”), wrote several pieces for wind quintet during the 1800’s that helped bring the ensemble into the mainstream of chamber music groups. The concert that Jewel Winds is planning to present for you highlights the two double reed instruments of the quintet: the oboe and the bassoon.

The Oboe

The oboe looks very similar to the clarinet, but sounds very different. Oboes are made of wood, and their sound is produced by blowing through a double reed at the upper end of the instrument. The oboe has a strong sound that is easily heard above many other instruments in a group. The oboe plays the tuning note for the other instruments to match at the beginning of rehearsals and concerts. Another double-reed instrument that is often played by an oboist is called the English horn. Surprisingly, the English horn is neither English, nor a horn! It is a bit longer than the oboe and has a more obvious, pear-shaped bell. It plays a sound that is a little lower than the oboe and adds great color to the sound of any group.



English horn

oboe

The oboe and the English horn are often used to play sad or emotional melodies, but they can also be playful and sweet. One of the most difficult parts of playing the oboe is making the reeds. Most oboe players make their own reeds to match their personal style of playing.

If your class has time, check out the ‘make your own double reed’ activity at the following web site: <http://www.reachoutmichigan.org/funexperiments/quick/woodwind.html>, and prepare to have fun with straws!!

The Bassoon

The bassoon is a double-reed woodwind instrument. It has almost 8 feet of wooden tubing, bent into a narrow U-shape. The reed is held in a curved metal tube called a bocal. When the player blows into the reed, it vibrates and creates the sound. Bassoons are the largest woodwind instruments in the orchestra, except for the contrabassoon, which is larger and plays an entire octave lower than the bassoon. Because it is so large, a bassoonist attaches the instrument to a seat strap or a neck strap to hold the bassoon while playing. The bassoon is nicknamed the ‘clown of the orchestra’ because it can change its musical moods very quickly – sounding solemn and melancholy one minute, jovial and comical the next.

Playing the bottom notes of woodwind chords is one of the most important jobs of the bassoon. Bassoons have a rich and mellow sound. A contrabassoon is so low in pitch that it seems to “buzz”. It can sound very funny! But playing it is no joke. It takes a lot of air to play bassoon and contrabassoon.



Bassoon and Contrabassoon

Bassoon

Contrabassoon

Activity #1: Focus on Double Reeds.

What do you know now? Complete the following after reading or listening to the pages in this guide about the oboe and bassoon. Each question can be answered with either “oboe” or “bassoon”.

1. Which instrument uses a bocal? _____
2. Which instrument sounds the tuning note at a concert or rehearsal? _____
3. Which instrument is closely related to the English horn? _____
4. Which instrument is known as the ‘clown of the orchestra’? _____
5. Which instrument uses either a seat or neck strap in order for the player to hold it while playing? _____
6. Which instrument is made of almost 8 feet of wooden tubing? _____
7. Which instrument is related to the contrabassoon? _____
8. Except for the contrabassoon, which instrument is the largest woodwind in the orchestra?

9. Which instrument looks similar to the clarinet? _____
10. Which instrument has a sound that can be heard easily in the orchestra? _____
11. Which instrument often plays the bottom notes of a woodwind chord? _____
12. Which instrument is which? Write their names below the following pictures.



The Pied Piper of Hamelin

“The Pied Piper of Hamelin” is a very old tale that has been re-told numerous times over the years. In many versions, the story is set in an old village that has begun to have a problem with rats. A musician (the Pied Piper) is hired to lure the rats away permanently from the village, but after he does so, the mayor of the village stiffes him on his promised payment! Angry about this broken promise, the Piper then starts to lure the children of the village away. The parents of the children and the villagers in general don’t like this one bit, and implore the mayor to give the Piper his promised payment so that he’ll return the children, which he does.

Teachers may want to share a version of the story with their classes before the students attend the concert. A few titles are listed below:

The Pied Piper of Hamelin by Browning, illus. by Greenway (recommended for Gr. 3 and up)

The Pied Piper’s Magic by Stephen Kellogg (recommended for K-3)

The Pied Piper of Austin by Salima Alikhan (K-2 picture book)

Freddy the Pied Piper (from *Freddy the Pig Series*) by Walter Brooks, illus. by Kurt Wiese (PK-1)

Teachers may wish to read more than one version with the class, including the synopsis of the musical version below, and then compare the different tellings of the story.

“The Bassoonist of Hamelin” by John Falcone - Synopsis

In the musical version, “The Bassoonist of Hamelin” presented by Jewel Winds, the town of Hamelin is once again the setting and it is once again, being over-run with rats. The mayor, who is portrayed by the French horn, offers a reward of three bags of gold to anyone who is able to rid Hamelin of the rats. A bassoonist answers this call, and in short order removes the rats from the town by playing a beautiful melody that lures them far away. The townspeople are overjoyed, but the mayor – who is a cheapskate – only gives the bassoonist one bag of gold, not the three that were promised. Of course this upsets the bassoonist, who starts playing yet another beautiful melody. This time, all of the children of the town begin following the music, being led away from their families! Their parents are frantic and they beg and plead with the mayor to give the bassoonist the three bags of gold that were promised. The mayor finally gives in, and pays the three bags of gold. The children return quickly to their parents. Hamelin is at peace, and all live happily ever after!

Activity #2 – Sequence the Story!

The order of events in “The Bassoonist of Hamelin” are listed below. Review the story order with students. Then have students cut the boxes apart and work independently or in pairs to put the story back in the correct order.

The townspeople of Hamelin realize they have a terrible rat problem.
The mayor of Hamelin offers a reward of three bags of gold to anyone who can get rid of the rats.
A musician comes to town playing a bassoon. He says he can help rid the town of the rats!
The bassoonist plays a lovely melody and all of the rats follow him out of town.
The bassoonist returns to the mayor for his pay: three bags of gold.
The mayor gives the bassoon player only one bag of gold.
Angry and upset, the bassoonist begins playing another beautiful melody.
The children of Hamelin begin following the bassoonist!
All of the parents of Hamelin beg the mayor to pay the bassoonist what was promised.
The mayor pays the bassoonist three bags of gold.
The children return to their parents.
The people of Hamelin live happily ever after!

When the students are familiar with the order of the story, extend the activity by having them work in groups to add sounds to the story. The sounds can come from classroom instruments, voices, found sounds or any other appropriate source. Give students time to practice their sound stories, and then perform them for each other. After the Jewel Winds performance of “The Bassoonist of Hamelin”, discuss with students ways in which their sound stories differed from the wind quintet version.

Activity #3: More Sequencing, and Perhaps a Play!

After reading one of the book versions of “The Pied Piper of Hamelin”, ask students to decide on an order of events in the story. Fill in the boxes together, placing events in order according to whichever version you have read. Later, cut apart the boxes, cut off the numbers and mix up the boxes. Challenge students to put the events back in the correct order. When students have had practice piecing the events of the story together, challenge them to work in groups and create an original play based on the story of the Pied Piper. Their play doesn’t have to mimic the story exactly; remember there are always different ways to tell a story! If time allows, have students perform their works for each other.

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More Resources for Teachers

Teachers can find online resources to support learning in preparation for this concert by visiting the following sites.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8a_DAr9fkY

Listen and watch "The Bassoonist of Hamelin", performed by the composer, John Falcone

<http://www.dsokids.com/listen/InstrumentDetail.aspx?instrumentID=26>

Read more about and listen to the bassoon

<http://www.dsokids.com/listen/InstrumentDetail.aspx?instrumentID=22>

Read more about and listen to the oboe

<http://www.dsokids.com/listen/InstrumentDetail.aspx?instrumentID=27>

Read more about and listen to the contrabassoon

<http://www.dsokids.com/listen/InstrumentDetail.aspx?instrumentID=23>

Read more about and listen to the English horn

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SEE YOU AT THE CONCERT!!

