

‘Enigma’ Variations – Theme (Enigma), Variations 11 (G. R. S.), 6 (Ysobel) & 7 (Troyte)

SECONDARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN

For:

- Key Stage 3 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Third and Fourth Level, S1-S3 in Scotland

Written by Rachel Leach

Background

The composer: Edward ELGAR (1857 - 1934)

- English composer
- Took many years to find fame but then, with Enigma Variations, he found himself suddenly very famous

The music: ‘Enigma Variations’

- Written in 1899
- Uses one theme to describe 14 of his friends
- ‘Variation’ means the same as ‘version’
- The ‘enigma’ remains a mystery - no one can work out the origin of Elgar's theme

Learning outcomes

Learners will

- Listen and reflect on a piece of orchestral music
- Learn to play a tune
- Create pieces inspired by Elgar
- Perform as an ensemble

Curriculum checklist

- play and perform in ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music

Glossary of music terms used

Drone	One long, continuous sound (pitched or unpitched) that is present throughout a piece, usually at the bottom of the texture
Motif	A very short musical 'idea'
Pitched percussion	percussion instruments that can play different pitches ('notes') – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars etc.
Theme	another word for 'tune' or 'melody'. A linear line of notes, like a musical sentence
Unpitched percussion	percussion instruments that make sounds that don't have a specific pitch (or 'note') – drums, shakers, woodblocks, tambourine etc.

Resources required

- Paper and pens
- Classroom percussion instruments and any other instruments your students might be learning

This scheme of work is plotted out over six lessons. Feel free to adapt it to suit your children and the resources you have available.

The six lessons at a glance

Lesson 1

Activities: Listen to a piece of music and describe it
Watch the film and discuss

Curriculum link: Listen with increasing discrimination to a wide range of music from great composers and musicians
Develop a deeper understanding of the music that they perform and to which they listen and its history

Lesson 2

Activities: Listen a theme and orchestrate it (or develop it)

Curriculum link: Listen with increasing discrimination to a wide range of music from great composers and musicians
Play and perform in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using their voice, playing instruments musically, fluently and with accuracy and expression

Lesson 3

Activities: Listen and analyse Elgar's music
Create musical motifs and structure them into a piece

Curriculum link: Listen with increasing discrimination to a wide range of music from great composers and musicians
Play and perform in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using their voice, playing instruments musically, fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, styles, genres and traditions

Lesson 4

Activities: Create musical motifs and structure them into a piece

Curriculum link: Play and perform in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using their voice, playing instruments musically, fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, styles, genres and traditions

Lesson 5

Activities: Create musical motifs and structure them into a piece
Develop a theme

Curriculum link: Play and perform in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using their voice, playing instruments musically, fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, styles, genres and traditions

Lesson 6

Activities: Structure pieces into a concert
Perform in front of an audience

Curriculum link: Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music




LESSON I

Watching and listening

1. **Prepare your class.** Explain to your class that you are going to begin a 6-week music project focusing on an important piece of music by a composer called Elgar

Explain further that Elgar was from England and his most famous piece described his friends in music. He wrote (or borrowed) a simple tune and made lots of different versions of it - one for each of his friends. These versions are called 'Variations' and because Elgar left everyone guessing who was 'pictured within' and where the tune came from, the piece is called 'Enigma' Variations.

2. **Listening task.** Listen to Variation 7 (Troyte) without images. Ask your class to imagine the person being described and jot down their thoughts. You might like to give them the following categories to think about:
 - Man or woman, boy or girl? Or animal?
 - Age?
 - What do they look like?
 - What are they doing?
3. **Repeat this activity** as you listen to Variation 11 (G. R. S.), and 6 (Ysobel)
4. **Discuss their ideas** and perhaps create a 'picture' of each person on the board. Then reveal the real answers –

<p>Variation 7 (Tryote): Arthur Troyte Griffith</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male, aged about 40 – one of Elgar’s closest friends • This variation depicts him sheltering during a thunderstorm 	 <p><i>Image credit: The Elgar Foundation</i></p>
<p>Variation 6 (Ysobel): Isabel Fitton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female, aged about 30 – she was a beautiful violist • This variation depicts her practising her viola 	 <p><i>Image credit: The Elgar Foundation</i></p>
<p>Variation 11 (G. R. S.): A bulldog called Dan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog! • This variation depicts him doing ‘doggy’ things such as running, biting a bone and panting • G. R. S are the initials for Dr. George Robert Sinclair who owned Dan the dog 	 <p><i>Image credit: The Elgar Foundation</i></p>

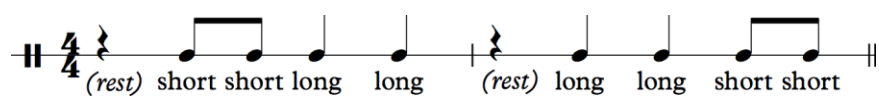
5. **FINALLY** - watch the Elgar Ten Pieces film and afterwards have a class discussion about what you have just seen. Perhaps listen to the Variations one more time or explore some of the others (particularly the theme in full and 9 Nimrod - the most famous)

LESSON 2

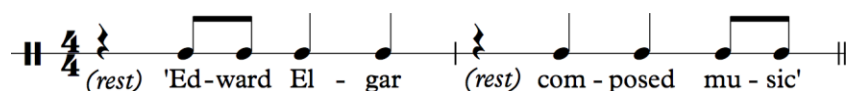
Elgar's theme

1. **Prepare your class** by listening to Elgar's theme once again. Remind them of the background to Elgar's piece and explain that you are going to spend a few lessons creating your own set of variations. To do this, you must first learn to play Elgar's theme

2. **Teach the following rhythm -**



Take some time to explain this shape a little - your students might spot that it is symmetrical. It may help to use words -



Perform this three times back to back

3. **Next, teach the full tune.** There are several ways of doing this; if your students can read notation, simply give out the following score and ask them to play it. If they are beginners you might like to break it down into sections and perhaps share it around so that no one has to play the whole thing. For complete beginners teach just the first two bars and then challenge the class to create the second two phrases, ending on a C (or, like Elgar an unexpected C#). The advantage with creating your own theme is that the students will feel more ownership over the music.



4. **Orchestrate the theme.** Create a full class version. You might like to include -

- **pitched** instruments on the full theme or part of it
- **unpitched** instruments on the rhythm or keeping a pulse
- a simple bassline*, moving in step and using just white notes
- a long, low **A drone**

*here is Elgar's real bassline –



5. **FINALLY** - finish off with a performance of your class theme and remember to write down what you've done and who plays what

LESSON 3

Elgar's Dog

1. **Warm-up.** Begin your session in a circle with a quick warm up activity and a recap of what you have done so far. Remind the class about the music they heard describing Dan the bulldog.
2. **Listening task:** Listen again to Variation 11 (G. R. S.). Ask your students to make a list of the musical events they hear, as follows -

Event Number:	Instruments used	Describe the music	Describe the dog!
1	Strings	Downward flurry	Running
2 (etc.)	Bassoon	Quick, even notes	Still running!

3. Listen a few times and encourage your students to write down as many ideas as they can. Challenge them to see if they can spot Elgar's original theme within the music.
4. **Then, working in pairs or small groups,** ask them to compile their thoughts and decide on with the three most important motifs in the piece. This might mean combining or discarding ideas.
5. **Discuss their ideas and see if there is any common ground between the groups. Explain** that you think Elgar's musical dog is made up of these three basic musical ideas –

- **RUNNING** – a quick downward flurry of notes (strings) followed by steady 'footsteps' (bassoon). The 'footsteps' are made up from the notes of the theme



- **BITING** – one loud chord played by the full orchestra followed by a short fanfare which is four notes from the theme



- **BREATHING** – Elgar uses this rhythm for his panting and it is played softly by the cellos and double basses. This is also derived from the theme



6. **Split into three teams.** Each team must make one of these elements - perhaps ask the students at this point to figure out which instruments are needed for each group/ element. Challenge them to use Elgar's ideas and the main theme but to make their own motif rather than just copy the real one.
7. **FINALLY - Bring the class back together** and structure these ideas into one big 'dog' piece.

LESSON 4

Composing your own Enigma Variation I

1. **Prepare your class.** Explain that today, like Elgar, you are going to describe someone in music. Have a class discussion about who this might be and decide on three or four candidates.

You need to choose people known to everyone and with distinct characteristics or actions. You also want to avoid offending anyone so it might be safest to choose celebrities or sports people that the class are unlikely to ever meet i.e. the Queen, David Beckham, Elgar! You could choose people you are studying in other curriculum areas. You don't even have to use people as inspiration - you could describe animals, insects, places, trees....

2. **Choose one person from your list.** Ask the class to describe this person or their job using three statements -
 - i.e. The Queen - shakes hands
 - waves
 - looks happy

Ask your students to create one sound (**musical motif**) for each of these things.

- i.e. The Queen - shakes hands (three short piano chords)
- waves (a shaking tambourine)
- looks happy (an upwards A major scale on flute)

Challenge the class to structure these motifs together to make a short piece

3. **Split your class into** small groups and ask them to make their own piece using this method -
 - i. Choose a 'subject'
 - ii. Three descriptive words
 - iii. Three motifs
 - iv. One piece
4. **When this is achieved**, bring the class back together, hear their pieces one by one and give a bit of gentle feedback
5. **FINALLY** - finish the session by giving the students a little time to write down what they have done. This will greatly speed things up next lesson

LESSON 5

Composing your own Enigma Variation 2

1. **Warm-up.** Begin with a short focusing warm-up then, back into groups and on instruments, spend a short amount of time putting the music from last session back together
2. As a full class **recap the theme** you made in lesson 2
3. **Remind the class that Elgar's portraits all feature his theme within them.** Ask your class to put some (or all) of the class theme into their group variation. To do this they should work out what the theme represents and adapt it accordingly. Challenge them further to adapt and disguise the theme so that it is hidden.
I.e. The first four notes of the theme become a fanfare to welcome the Queen
4. **Bring** the class back together and hear their pieces. Encourage feedback - do they sound like the person or animal they are describing? Can you hear the theme or is it well disguised?
5. **FINALLY** - try performing all the variations back to back without a pause and make sure the performers have kept a good record of what they have done this lesson

LESSON 6

Putting it all together

1. **Warm-up.** As usual, begin with a quick focusing warm-up. It might be fun to 'mime' the music silently

2. **Recap** - ask the students to remind you of the three sections of music that they have created. Hopefully they will say the following:
 - i. The full class theme
 - ii. Elgar's dog
 - iii. Their group variations

3. **Get out the instruments** and allow for a minute or two of chaos as everyone remembers their ideas. Give them time in groups to put their variation back together. Then put the 'theme' and 'dog' back together as a full class.

4. **Structure** – have a quick chat about order and make a list on the board. Practise in this order aiming to go from movement to movement without too much of a pause just as Elgar does

5. **FINALLY** – record your finished piece or perform it to another class

TAKING IT FURTHER

Cross-curricular activities

- **VISIT:** an art gallery and describe some of the portraits you see using the same method as above
- **LISTEN:** Scottish composer James MacMillan wrote a piece with a similar idea called '...as others see us...'. Take a listen. All of his subjects are in the National Portrait Gallery and their pictures can be seen online
- **LITERACY:** Write words to fit Elgar's tune or your own and make a singing variation

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