

Tocatta and Fugue in D minor by Johann Sebastian Bach

PRIMARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN

For:

- Key Stage 2 in England and Wales
- Second Level, P5-P7 in Scotland
- Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2 in Northern Ireland

Written by Rachel Leach

Background

The composer: Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750)

- German composer
- Wrote his music during the Baroque period when composers were poorly paid servants
- One of the all-time best composers, an absolute genius who inspired everyone who followed

The music: Tocatta and Fugue in D minor

- Originally written for solo organist, this orchestral version was made by a conductor called Leopold Stokowski in 1927
- No one really knows when Bach wrote it. It was published in 1833 after it was found by a composer called Mendelssohn
- Tocatta means 'touch'. A tocatta is a piece with a lot of fast notes
- Fugue is a musical shape similar to a round but much more complex

Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- listen and reflect on a piece of orchestral music
- invent their own musical motifs and structure them into a piece
- perform as an ensemble
- learn musical language appropriate to the task

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
- listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory

Glossary of music terms used

Fugue	a complex musical shape similar to a round
Graphic score	a diagrammatic representation of music
Orchestrate	choose which instruments play which parts
Pitched percussion	percussion instruments that can play different pitches – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars etc.
Round	a music shape with several groups performing the same music but starting at staggered intervals
Tempo	another word for speed
Toccata	means ‘touch’ and is typically a piece with many fast notes
Unpitched percussion	percussion instruments that can only make a limited number of sounds – drums, shakers woodblocks, tambourine etc.

Resources required

- Art materials (big paper, at least A3)
- Classroom percussion instruments and any other instruments that your children 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 and describe a piece of music
Watch the orchestral performance and discuss
Create graphic scores inspired by the music
- Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians

Lesson 2:

- Activities: Use graphic scores to recreate the opening of Bach's piece
- Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 3:

- Activities: Use Bach's musical motifs to create a toccata
- Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 4:

- Activities: Learn about and create a body percussion fugue
- Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 5:

Activities: Orchestrate a fugue

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

Lesson 6:

Activities: Structure sections into a bigger piece
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 1

Watching and listening

1. Prepare your class

Explain to your class that you are going to begin a 6-week music project focusing on a fantastic piece of music by a composer called **Bach** and watch the introductory film with James May

2. Have a class discussion

about what you have just heard and seen. Play the very beginning of the full orchestral performance (0'00 – 0'50) and ask your class to imagine they are watching a movie. What are the images on screen during that epic opening? Write some of their ideas on the board.

3. Listening task

Give out A3 paper (or bigger) and art materials. Ask your children to place the paper landscape on their table. As you listen to the opening again ask them to draw the shape of the musical phrases they hear. The first 50 seconds feature:

- 3 downward phrases
- a build-up with a rumble
- three big chords

Can your class draw shapes and squiggles to represent these musical ideas? Perhaps ask them to do this using pencil and then play the extract again as they fill in the colours that the music makes them think of. They are creating a graphic score

4. When this is achieved,

ask your children to turn over their paper and draw a small aeroplane in the middle of the page. You can play them the rest of the Toccata as they do this (0'50 – 3'58)

5. Explain that they just

heard a piece called Toccata. A toccata is a piece with lots of fast notes. They are now going to hear a Fugue. This is related to the toccata but has a different shape. Fugue means flight so as they listen, ask your class to imagine their little plane is flying around the page. Challenge your children to draw its journey using one continuous line – they must not take their pencil off the page until the music stops.

You are not looking for lovely artwork here. The fugue is long so you'll probably just end up with a messy page, but the idea is to keep the children's attention and focus while they listen to this complex music.

The fugue runs from **3'58 – end**

- 6. Finish this lesson** by taking a look at your children's ideas. Explain that Bach was a very clever man to have imagined all this music and that he was actually following a set of very difficult rules. For Bach, writing music was a bit like doing a complicated maths puzzle, he had to fit all the right notes in the right places to make it work. If you have any time left, play the full orchestral recording again and allow your children to just listen. If you have space, let them lie on the floor with their eyes closed as they do so. Keep the artwork for later in the project

LESSON 2

Iconic opening

1. **Warm-up.** Begin with your class sitting in a large circle. Remind your children of Bach's piece and the work they did last lesson. Challenge them to sing the opening three phrases of the toccata and make simple downward gestures with your hands as you do so. (You could play the opening to them again but it might be more fun to see if they remember it – it is very famous!)
2. **Look at some of the art** from last week (the toccata side of the paper). Choose just a few examples that clearly show that opening phrase. Discuss how the first phrase begins with a little wobble and then falls down rapidly. At the bottom it turns and comes up one step. It moves from A down to D

This is the real phrase:



3. **Place a xylophone in the middle of the circle.** Make sure it has the notes C, D, E, F, G, A on it (or C# if you have one). Ask a volunteer to come forward and play a similar gesture to Bach's on the xylophone. Try out a few versions until you have a good one. **Then focus on the 2nd phrase;** it begins with the wobble again but then has just four steps down. Can someone play this on a xylophone? Again, it starts on A and ends on D

Here's Bach's version:



4. **The third phrase is the same as the first.** Try phrases 1, 2 and 3 back to back?
5. After this there is simply a big shimmering build-up and three loud sounds. **Can your children make these ideas using unpitched percussion?**
6. **Make a class version** of this opening using whatever instruments you have available. It should look something like this:

Wobble Fall Turnaround	Wobble 1,2,3,4	Wobble Fall Turnaround	Build-up Three loud notes
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... don't worry if it sounds nothing like Bach's piece!

7. Finish this lesson by writing down carefully what you have done and who played what.

LESSON 3

Toccatà

1. **Warm up.** Start the lesson with a quick clap around the circle and then put your 'iconic introduction' back together just as it was at the end of the last lesson.
2. **Remind your children** that a Toccatà is a piece with lots of fast notes. It is a chance to show off. In this toccata, Bach uses two ideas. Demonstrate these ideas to the class:

Idea 1: shimmering sounds that move up and down. Bach's shimmers look like this –



Can your children make a similar sound using unpitched instruments?

Idea 2: a tune with an alternating note. Bach chooses one note (below it's A) and alternates others around it like this:



Can your children make a similar tune on their xylophones (or whatever pitched instruments they may be learning)

3. **Split into four groups** and ask each group to make a short piece using these two ideas. Bach rarely has the two ideas going at the same time, he alternates between them.
4. **Bring the class back together** and hear their pieces one by one. Ask your children to come up with an order for these pieces so that they make one big toccata.
5. **When this is decided,** write the structure on the board and practise it until it is neat. **Finish this lesson** by playing the iconic introduction you made last week followed by this new toccata section. (Don't worry if it's a bit messy at this point, its only lesson 3!)

LESSON 4

Body Fugue

1. **Warm up.** Begin again in a circle and remind your class of the elements they have explored so far. This lesson is all about understanding what a fugue is. The best way to understand the complexity of a fugue is to make one – on body percussion!

2. **Teach the following body percussion pattern to your class:**

PATTERN 1

Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Knees Knees

3. **When everyone can perform this neatly,** split into two teams and start the second team half way through the first, like this:

PATTERN 1 (grp 1)

Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Click Stamp Clap
Stamp Click Stamp Clap
Stamp Click Stamp Clap

Stamp Knees Knees
Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Knees Knees

Explain that this is a round - everyone is performing the same thing, they are just starting at different times (just like when you sing Frere Jacques or London's Burning.)

To make a fugue, the musical ideas develop and each group of performers can make different music to the others.

4. Teach this to the class:

PATTERN 2

Stamp Click click Stamp Clap clap Stamp Click click Stamp Clap clap Stamp Click click Stamp Clap clap Stamp Knees knees Knees

...and practise performing it straight after Pattern 1.

5. Split into **four** teams (the same teams as in lesson 3) and perform these two patterns back to back with each group starting two bars after the last, like this:

6.

START NEXT
GROUP HERE:

Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Knees Knees

Stamp Click click Stamp Clap clap Stamp Click click Stamp Clap clap

Stamp Click click Stamp Clap clap Stamp Knees knees Knees

7. **Now, challenge** each group to make a new pattern. It must last for a total of 16 beats (just like these patterns). To make the new ideas easy to remember encourage your groups to make just four new gestures and repeat them four times over

8. **Hear the new patterns and check they are just 16 beats long.** Challenge your groups to perform Patterns 1, 2 and the new 3 back to back at the same time.

9. Teach Pattern 4 below:

PATTERN 4

Shhh! Shhh! Shhh! Shhh!

...and add it onto the end of Patterns 1, 2, new 3, and 4.

10. Finally put your fugue together like this, each new team enters when the previous team moves to Pattern 2:

Pattern 1

Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Click Stamp Clap Stamp Knees Knees

START NEXT
GROUP HERE:

Pattern 2

Stamp Click click Stamp Clap clap Stamp Click click Stamp Clap clap Stamp Click click Stamp Clap clap Stamp Knees knees Knees

Pattern 3 (new)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

Pattern 4

Shhh! Shhh! Shhh! Shhh!

Explain that this is a fugue because the ideas develop and each group has different material to the others.

LESSON 5

Instrumental fugue

1. **Warm-up.** Begin this lesson by performing your body fugue again, in four groups just as it was at the end of the last lesson.
2. **Get the instruments out,** making sure everyone has the same instrument that they used during your toccata lessons. Split back into four teams and challenge each team to orchestrate the body percussion fugue – i.e. choose which instruments perform which parts.

As your class are working in this, check that they are all using roughly the same tempo (speed) and keeping their 3rd section just 16 beats long.

3. **Hear each group one by one** and make any tweaks needed, then try all four groups at exactly the same time. So most of the music will be exactly the same, just pattern 3 will be different for everyone. The groups should finish at the same time.
4. **Now, try putting the groups together to make your fugue.** The easiest way to do this is to start each group after pattern 1, but your children might suggest doing it a different way. Bach didn't always stick to the rules so your children don't have to either.
5. **Finish this lesson** with a performance of your Fugue and write down carefully what you have done.

LESSON 6

Structure and performance time!

- 1. Warm up.** Begin with a quick focusing game and then recap, just using body percussion and voice, the three big sections you have made. For example:
 - You could **'sing'** the iconic opening with added gestures
 - You could **'mime'** through the 'showing-off' toccata
 - You could **perform** the body fugue
- 2. Put these sections back together on instruments.** Begin by encouraging each group to put their sections together separately first and then work with the full class.
- 3. Have a discussion about the order.** Should you copy Bach's order and perform: **Iconic opening: Toccata: Fugue** or something else? Should you perform anything twice?
- 4. When you have decided on a structure,** write it up on the board and practice your full piece sorting out any logistical problems along the way.
- 5. Finally,** invite another class in to hear your finished Toccata and Fugue

TAKING IT FURTHER

Cross-curricular activities

- **MOVEMENT:** Bach's music is so lively and rhythmic, why not dance to it?
- **LITERACY:** Research Bach's life and career and write a story about him (he was very interesting, he had 20 children and he loved coffee!). A lot of his music was lost for over 100 years until a composer called Mendelssohn found it and started performing it. Write the story of this discovery or make an advert for the first concert of long-lost music

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