Instrument Exploration: Saxophone

Age Range: K-6

Learning Objective: Students will identify the saxophone by sight and sound.

ENGAGE 🎵

ASK. “Have you ever heard of an instrument called the saxophone? Can you predict what it will sound like?”

EXPLAIN & EXPLORE 🎵

WATCH. Listen as a saxophone player named Russ describes four different kinds of saxophones.

ASK. “Can you name the four saxophones Russ played? Can you explain how the size of each saxophone affects its register (how high and low it can play)?”

PREDICT. “You might already know that there are four instrument families: percussion, brass, woodwind, string. Look at a picture of the saxophone. To what instrument family does the saxophone belong?”

EXPLAIN. “The body (or main part) of the saxophone is made of brass, so you might guess the brass family. However, the mouthpiece is a reed, or a thin piece of wood. A player makes sound by blowing wind, or breath, through the wood of the reed, so the saxophone belongs to the woodwind family.”

LEARN. “The saxophone was invented in the 1800s – much later than some instruments of the orchestra. It is used in many genres, or styles, of music. It is popular in jazz and blues music.”

WATCH. Watch famous jazz saxophone player John Coltrane. Ask students to identify the other instruments played. The video is 9 minutes. Students can practice their audience skills while watching.

EXTEND 💡

Choose one or more of the following activities to extend learning.

WATCH. Listen to this energetic piece by composer Shelley Washington featuring the baritone saxophone and some great stomping.

JOURNAL. “Write down (or tell someone) three things you learned about the saxophone.”

CONNECT. Look at a picture of a tenor sax mouthpiece and reed (scroll down on the webpage). Think about how the saxophone makes its sound. Can you think of another instrument that has a reed?

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✓ Need help adapting a lesson? Link no longer working? Contact Katie Condon, music education specialist