



MUSIC FUNDAMENTALS: What is FERMATA?

Age Range: Elementary, Middle School

Learning Objective: Students will learn what a fermata is and go on a fermata scavenger hunt through several musical examples.

ENGAGE students

ASK. "Have you ever wondered what [this symbol](#) means?" (*Pause.*) "It's called a fermata (fer-MAH-ta)."

EXPLAIN. "When a musician sees this symbol over a note or a group of notes, that means they should hold that note longer than usual.

If one musician is playing alone, they get to decide how long to hold it. If an orchestra is playing, the conductor gets to decide how long to hold the fermata. If a small group of musicians is playing together without a conductor, they use eye contact and body language to signal how long to hold a fermata.

Composers use fermatas for many reasons. Holding a note or group of notes might build suspense, create a feeling of anticipation, or make music sound more expressive and dramatic."

EXPLORE sounds

PLAY A GAME. Use the following three pieces of music for a fermata scavenger hunt. Introduce each piece and tell students how many fermatas to look for. While the video plays, students can watch for the fermata sign in the music and listen for the hold. Ask them wiggle to their fingers when they notice a fermata. Or, print out the [Fermata Scavenger Hunt Worksheet](#) and have them draw a fermata each time they notice one. Time markers for each fermata scavenger hunt are listed for each video.

Fermata Scavenger Hunt No. 1: [Fantasia in D Minor, by Mozart](#) (6 min.)

- 9 fermatas (00:47, 2:08, 2:44, 3:19, 4:18, 4:25, 5:10, 5:16, and 5:39)

Fermata Scavenger Hunt No. 2: [Amar \(Nocturno\) by Felipe Villanueva](#) (5 min.)

- 6 fermatas (4 right away, 2 later on) (0:11, 0:16, 0:20, 0:23, 3:05, and 4:40)

Fermata Scavenger Hunt No. 3: [The Great Gate of Kiev, by Mussorgsky](#) (6 min.)

- 2 fermatas (Tip: This is a challenge scavenger hunt! The fermata in the middle is hard to find. It doesn't last long, and there are a lot of instruments playing. The second is way at the end.) (3:48 and 5:39)

EXTEND learning

SING. Put students into groups of 2-3 and invite them to try the following activities:

- Sing a song you know well. Try adding a fermata someplace.
- Sing it for your classmate and see if they can tell where you add a fermata.
- Make a fermata flashcard by simply drawing the symbol on a notecard. Ask your classmate to sing a song for you and flash the card every time you want them to hold a note.