



INSTRUMENT EXPLORATION: Bassoon

Age Range: Elementary

Learning Objective: Students will be able to identify the bassoon by sight and sound.

ENGAGE students

SHOW. Show students this [picture of a bassoon](#).

EXPLAIN. “The bassoon is the biggest instrument in the woodwind family, so that means it makes the lowest sounds. The body of the instrument is basically a long tube, but the tube is so long it folds over, so the player can sit and play it. Can you find the ‘U’ shape at the bottom? That’s the place where it folds. The bell is at the top of the instrument.”

EXPLORE sounds

LISTEN. “Listen to this piece of music called a sonata by Camille Saint-Saëns. There are two instruments: a piano and bassoon. When you hear the bassoon play, can you trace the melody (the high and low sounds) with me in the air?” (3 min.) *Note: The audio for this piece can be found on the [website-version](#) of the lesson.*

ASK. “How would you describe the bassoon’s sound?”

EXPLAIN. “The bassoon uses a double reed, which is two thin pieces of cane bound together with thread. [This picture](#) shows a bassoon double reed from the front and from the side. Bassoon players usually make their own reeds!”

WATCH. Watch [this video](#) by the Minnesota Orchestra featuring their bassoon section. If you are short on time, start the video at 1:40. Sample language to introduce the piece: “This is a very famous piece featuring the bassoon called The Sorcerer’s Apprentice, by the composer Paul Dukas. Maybe you have seen the cartoon with Mickey Mouse called Fantasia. In the video, the player on the far right is playing a contrabassoon, which is even bigger and lower than the regular bassoon.”

EXTEND learning

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

MOVE. Invite students to move like dinosaurs to [this piece](#). Brainstorm kinds of dinosaurs and how to move to look like that dinosaur. As a class, set boundaries for the movement. Will kids be able to touch one another? Make noises? Run? Discuss how to move safely with the kids, so everyone can have fun and still hear the music.

About this piece: ‘L’après-midi d’un dinosaure’ [la-pray mee-dee duh dee-noh-soar], means ‘afternoon with a dinosaur.’ It’s one of Four Short Sketches for the Bassoon, by Gordon Jacob. (2 min.)



EXTEND learning, continued

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- WATCH. "The bassoon is sometimes called the 'comedian of the orchestra' because it can play mischievous or even silly sounding melodies. But it can also play beautiful, singing melodies, like [this arrangement](#) of a prelude by the composer Claude Debussy." (3 min.)
- REFLECT. "What are three things you learned about the bassoon? Which piece of music was your favorite, and why?"