



Meet the Composer: Ludwig van Beethoven

Age Range: Elementary

Introduction: Composers write music, just like authors write books. In the Class Notes “Meet the Composer” series, we will learn a little bit about the achievements, backstory, and influences of a variety of composers. Get ready to learn about these influential composers and listen to some of their music.

BACKGROUND

Ludwig van Beethoven [BAY-toh-vehn] was born in 1770 in Bonn, Germany. He began receiving instrument lessons from family members and family friends when he was very young. He began composition lessons when he was around ten years old. When he was twenty-one, he moved to Vienna, Austria, hoping to make a living as a composer. He liked to go hiking in the woods near Vienna and found a lot of inspiration in nature.

Ludwig van Beethoven began to lose his hearing in his early thirties and was completely deaf by age 40. He could still compose music by hearing it in his head. He became well-known for writing symphonies and piano music, but he also wrote *chamber music*, or music for small groups of musicians. He died in 1827 at the age of 57. He is buried at the central cemetery in Vienna, Austria.

MUSIC

1. This piece of music for solo piano is called “Für Elise,” which means “For Elise.” If you were to write a piece of music for someone, who would it be, and why?

[“Für Elise”](#). Composed 1810. Video approx. 3 minutes.

2. Here is the first movement from Ludwig van Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5. It starts with a dramatic four-note pattern that comes back a few times throughout the piece. As you listen, notice each time that pattern returns.

[Symphony No. 5 – Mvmt 1](#). Composed 1808. Video approx. 8 minutes.

3. This is one of Ludwig van Beethoven’s pieces for a *chamber ensemble*, or a small group of musicians – in this case, piano and cello. Notice how sometimes the cello and piano take turns playing, kind of like a conversation, and at other times they play at the same time.

[Sonata No. 5 for Cello in D Major – Mvmt 1](#). Composed 1815. Video approx. 5 minutes.

4. By the time Ludwig van Beethoven wrote this piece, he was completely deaf. Before Beethoven’s time, symphonies were usually written just for orchestra. This is one of the first symphonies to include singers and a choir performing together with the orchestra.

[Symphony No. 9 – Mvmt 4 \(Excerpt\)](#). Composed 1824. Video approx. 1 minute (start at 3:17).



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CREATE, CONNECT, & RESPOND

1. Ludwig van Beethoven liked to take walks in the woods and got a lot of ideas from what he saw in [nature](#). Try taking a walk for yourself to get creative ideas! If you can't take a walk right now, watch [this peaceful video](#) of the woods where Beethoven used to walk.
2. Ludwig van Beethoven is well-known for writing heroic-sounding music. Learn more about what makes music sound heroic with our [Themed Lesson: Heroes](#) lesson. Try writing your own heroic music with our [Create Your Own Superhero Adventure](#) lesson!

Ludwig van Beethoven

Fast Facts

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in 1770 in Bonn, Germany.

He began composing when he was about ten years old.

Ludwig van Beethoven moved to Vienna when he was 21, and liked to go hiking in the woods nearby.

He began to lose his hearing in his early thirties and was completely deaf by age 40. He could still compose music by hearing it in his head.

Ludwig van Beethoven died in 1827 at the age of 57. He is buried at the central cemetery in Vienna, Austria.