

# Musical Timbre

## Identifying and distinguishing the different instruments heard in a concert

### Teaching Objective:

Students will demonstrate the ability to distinguish, both physically and sonically, between the different instruments heard in the New Bedford Symphony's "Learning in Concert" program.

### Resources Needed:

Webpage PDF with pictures of the following instruments: Violin, Viola, Cello, Double Bass, Clarinet, Xylophone, Vibraphone, Wood Blocks, Crotales, Cymbal, and Recorder.

Access to the New Bedford Symphony's "Bird Flight Patterns and Music" Concert Video.

The Bird Flight Patterns and Music webpage video with instrument sound demonstrations provided by Southeastern Massachusetts Youth Orchestra

The Bird Flight Patterns and Music webpage video with recorder demonstrations provided by composer, Jamie Allen

### Pre-Assessment:

Show the pictures of the instruments to the students. For each of the instruments, have students share what they know about each instrument. Include descriptive elements such as the following:

- The name of the instrument
- How the sound is made
- What materials the instrument is made of
- What family of instrument each particular instrument belongs to (Violin, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass – Strings; Xylophone, Vibraphone, Wood Blocks, Crotales, and Cymbal – Percussion; Clarinet, Recorder – Woodwinds)
- Any other visual or physical descriptors the students might think of (size, shape color, etc.)
- Thoughts about how each instrument sounds

### Teaching Sequence:

1. Have students listen to the following excerpts from the concert, and ask them to focus their listening on the indicated instrument(s):
  - *The Lark Ascending*, by Ralph Vaughan Williams – Violin [34:40]
  - *The Acceleration Waltz*, by Johann Strauss II – Clarinet [4:20], Cello [5:05]
  - Andante from the String Symphony in C minor, by Felix Mendelssohn – Violas [18:53 - m. 35]

- “Sunburnt Mirth” from *The Nightingale Concerto*, by Jamie Allen – Xylophone [47:48 - m. 37-41], Wood Block [49:25 - m. 85-91], Soprano Recorder [47:33 - m. 29-33]. Also all stringed instruments, from low to high [46:47 - m. 10]
  - “Wings of Poesy” from *The Nightingale Concerto*, by Jamie Allen – Vibraphone [52:05 - m. 53-55], Crotales [53:26 - 101-103], Cymbal (bowed) [51:14 - m. 30-31], Alto Recorder [50:51- m. 21-26].
2. When the students are able to identify the indicated instruments by their sound, have them play a “Who Am I?” game. Each student takes a turn by choosing an instrument, and then gives hints to the rest of the class about which instrument they have chosen (such as “my instrument has tuning pegs,” or “I have the highest voice in my family,” or “my bars are made of metal,” etc.). They can even try to mimic the sound of their chosen instrument with their voice. Then the rest of the class tries to guess the correct instrument in the smallest number of tries.
  3. Using your audio library of instrument sounds, play examples of the different instruments your class has studied, and have them identify the different instruments without giving any clues. This can be done as a class or individually. Share with the class that the unique character and sound quality of each instrument is known as that instrument’s *timbre*.
  4. Then go back to the NBSO concert video, and have the class listen to one of the musical selections in its entirety. With a well-honed ability to identify the timbre of the different instruments, many students will find themselves listening with more focus and enjoyment.

**Lesson Assessment:**

Are students able to correctly identify the instruments heard in the New Bedford Symphony’s “Learning in Concert” program by both sight and sound?