



CARNIVAL OF THE ANIMALS

Acknowledgements

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Background

The purpose of this resource

This Teaching and Learning Kit has been designed by Sydney Symphony Orchestra, in collaboration with registered educators, to assist you in building meaningful learning experiences around your concert attendance.

You may choose to use the existing lesson plans as they appear, or adapt them to align with the needs and interests of a particular group of students. Alternatively, go above and beyond and use the Resource Library to extend the students who really love to deep-dive into the world of orchestral music.

How will you use these flexible and adaptable resources? The choice is yours!

As always, we welcome all feedback and suggestions regarding the nature of our Teaching and Learning Kits. Please feel free to be in touch with our friendly Learning & Engagement team at schools@sydneyssymphony.com.

How curriculum is referenced in this resource

This resource is mapped to the NSW Curriculum. The beginning of each Lesson includes a matrix aligning the learning activities to the outcomes of the [K - 6 Creative Arts Syllabus \(2024\)](#) addressing listening, composing and performing.

Resource Library

Below is a curated selection of additional third-party resources you might choose to use in supporting your students to engage in concert preparation. The lesson plans in this resource will suggest you select from these in order to plan/undertake your lessons - alternatively, these resources may also be used for differentiation and extension.

Things to listen to

This Teaching and Learning Kit has been designed by Sydney Symphony Orchestra, in collaboration with registered educators, to assist you in building meaningful learning experiences around your concert attendance.

Discover this Spotify playlist featuring concert repertoire audio recordings where available.

- Spotify: [Carnival of the Animals Performed by the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra](#)
- Please note: At the time of publication, a recording of Alex Turley's *Animalia* is not currently available.
- Spotify: [Animals In Music \(NAXOS\)](#) Compilation of animals inspiring Classical Music Composers. Through the centuries composers have brought colour and panache to bear in their depictions of animals in music. Enjoy exploring the album!

Things to watch

- [Visual Journey Through Carnival of the Animals](#) Listen to the music by Camille Saint-Saëns accompanied by footage of real animals.
- [Meet Alex Turley](#) Australian composer of *Animalia*
- [Saint-Saëns: The Man and His Music](#)
- [Listener's Guide to Carnival of the Animals](#)
- [Who put so many animals in classical music?](#)
- [Orchestra Zoo - Recreating Sounds of Different Animals](#)

Things to explore

- [What are Graphic Scores?](#)
- [Compose a Graphic Score](#)
- [Carnival of the Animals \(Persons with Long ears\)](#) (Graphic Score Example)
- [Carnival of the Animals \(Aquarium\)](#) (Graphic Score Example)
- [Concepts of Music](#)
- [15 Weird Aussie Animal Names](#)
- [Our Animals \(ABC Education\)](#)
- [Australia Museum: Animal Factsheets](#)
- [Chrome Music Lab Song Maker](#)
- [Splice Beatmaker](#)
- [Virtual Musical Instruments](#)

Introduction to the concert theme

What better way to introduce children to the sounds of the orchestra than Saint-Saëns' beloved *Carnival of the Animals*?

With plodding double-bass elephants, pecking piano-and-string hens and graceful cello swans, this piece has all the fun and fascination of a family trip to the zoo.

Alex Turley's *Animalia* adds an Australian twist, weaving familiar sounds of our unique wildlife into a magical companion piece. Students will watch with eagle eyes as our musicians bring each animal to life using their instruments, expertly wrangled by Sydney Symphony Conductor in Residence Benjamin Northey in this captivating concert for primary-aged listeners.

Introduction to the repertoire

***Carnival of the Animals* – Camille Saint-Saëns**

Carnival of the Animals is a humorous and imaginative musical suite by French composer Camille Saint-Saëns, first performed in 1886 but published in 1922. Through fourteen short movements, Saint-Saëns cleverly brings a menagerie of animals to life, from the majestic lion and graceful swan to playful kangaroos and lumbering elephants. Using changes in tempo, dynamics, rhythm, melody and instrumental colour, each movement captures the unique personality and movement of its featured animal. Filled with wit and musical surprises, the work also includes playful references to other famous pieces of music. More than 130 years later, *Carnival of the Animals* remains one of the world's most beloved introductions to orchestral music and musical storytelling.

***Animalia* – Alex Turley**

Australian composer Alex Turley first wrote the contemporary suite *Animalia* in 2022 (updated in 2026), exactly 100 years after Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals* was published (1922). Inspired by Australia's unique wildlife, the work features 6 movements: *Flight of the Emu*, *Koala Song*, *Crocodile*, *Glow Worms*, *Quokka Heist* and *Plankton*. Each movement uses the expressive colours of the orchestra to capture the movement, behaviour and environment of these iconic Australian animals. While paying tribute to Saint-Saëns' idea of portraying animals through music, Turley creates a distinctly Australian sound world that celebrates the country's landscapes and biodiversity. *Animalia* encourages audiences to listen closely, use their imagination and discover how music can tell stories about the natural world.

Lesson 1: Animal Poster Challenge

Intended Learning Outcome

Students will explore the animals that feature in the orchestral works *Carnival of the Animals* by Saint-Saëns and *Animalia* by Alex Turley by creating an artwork.

NSW Curriculum Links

The activities in this resource are mapped to the outcomes of the K - 6 Creative Arts Syllabus (2024).

Stage	Outcomes
Stage 2 Years 3 and 4	CA2-MUS-01 – performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate musical ideas, and describes ways the elements of music are used to convey musical ideas. CA2-VIS-01 – makes artworks using art forms to represent subject matter and ideas, and describes ways artists convey ideas about their world to audiences through artworks.
Stage 3 Years 5 and 6	CA3-MUS-01 – performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate musical ideas using the elements of music, and explains how musical ideas are conveyed and ways contexts influence music. CA3-VIS-01 – makes artworks in intentional ways to represent ideas about their world, and explains ways artists are influenced by contexts and how artworks are interpreted by audiences.

Materials

- A4 or A3 Blank Sheet of paper
- Black marker (Sharpie) for outline of animal
- Colour pencils, pens, crayons...
- Spotify: [Carnival of the Animals Performed by the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra](#)
- Audio player

Special Message for Teachers

We encourage all students to participate in this activity. The intention is for Teachers to submit PDF versions of their students' artworks so they can be displayed around the Sydney Opera House during the Schools and Families concerts. Please submit the PDF version of the works to auditions@sydneysymphony.com by **5pm Friday 4 September 2026**.

Lesson Plan

1. Introduce the idea of the concert and the repertoire to the class. See the sections; “Introduction to the concert theme” and “Introduction to the repertoire”. There are also useful links in the “Resource Library” section.
2. Students choose one animal from either *Carnival of the Animals* (Saint-Saëns) or *Animalia* (Turley). Create a large poster including:
 - a bold drawing of the animal (preferably outlined in black marker)
 - the habitat or environment
 - the animal in action. Examples: lion roaring; kangaroo jumping; crocodile hunting; glow worms lighting a cave; koala sleeping; swan gliding.
 - colour that reflects the mood of the music

Selection of Animals Featured in *Carnival of the Animals* and *Animalia*

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| ● Lion | ● Cuckoo |
| ● Hens | ● Birds (Aviary) |
| ● Roosters | ● Swan |
| ● Donkey | ● Emu |
| ● Tortoise | ● Koala |
| ● Elephant | ● Crocodile |
| ● Kangaroo | ● Glow Worm |
| ● Fish (Aquarium) | ● Quokka |

3. While students are drawing, play the music of *Carnival of the Animals* in the background announcing the different animals as you go.
4. Ask students: If your animals could sound like any instrument of the orchestra, what would it be? Encourage students to explain why. For example, my lion would sound like a trombone because it has a low sound and can play loudly.

Lesson 2: Compare & Share: Listening Through Graphic Notation

Intended Learning Outcome

Students translate what they hear into graphic notation, using lines, shapes, colours, symbols and patterns. Students identify concepts of music through listening. Students compare and explain musical ideas, identifying similarities and differences in how composers use musical concepts to communicate ideas.

NSW Curriculum Links

The activities in this resource are mapped to the outcomes of the K - 6 Creative Arts Syllabus (2024).

Stage	Outcomes
Stage 2 <i>Years 3 and 4</i>	CA2-MUS-01 – performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate musical ideas, and describes ways the elements of music are used to convey musical ideas.
Stage 3 <i>Years 5 and 6</i>	CA3-MUS-01 – performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate musical ideas using the elements of music, and explains how musical ideas are conveyed and ways contexts influence music.

Materials

- **Worksheet:** Graphic Notation Compare & Share
- Spotify: [Carnival of the Animals Performed by the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra](#)
- Audio player

Lesson Plan

1. Introduction to graphic scores. Discuss: What is a graphic score? Explain that pictures, symbols and shapes can represent music instead of traditional notation.

Here's a handy resource explaining what a graphic score is: [What are Graphic Scores?](#)

Here's a handy example of a graphic score created for [Carnival of the Animals \(Persons with Long ears\)](#)

2. Explain that there are many elements that make up music. By listening carefully, you can start to identify these parts. We often call these the [Concepts of Music](#). The concepts of music that we will focus on for this activity include:
 - **Tempo:** The speed of the music
 - **Dynamics:** How loud or soft the music sounds
 - **Tone colour:** The instruments you hear and the way they are played (techniques)
3. Listen to select movements from *Carnival of the Animals* by Saint-Saëns. Using graphic notation, draw what you hear for each concept of music. Repeat the exercise with another movement. Students should use lines, shapes, colours, symbols, patterns that reflect the musical features that they have identified.

Suggested comparison **Kangaroos & Aquarium** (Optional: use only one movement.) Listen several times.

Musical Feature	Kangaroos	Aquarium
Tempo (Fast/Slow)		
Dynamics (Loud/Soft)		
Tone Colour (Instruments)		

4. Find a buddy and share your ideas. Ask: How are the two pieces similar? How are they different? Explain how your graphic notation represents the sound.

Worksheet: Graphic Notation Compare & Share

Name: _____

<i>Carnival of the Animals</i> by Camille Saint-Saëns	Movement:	Movement:
Tempo Fast/Slow 		
Dynamics Loud/Soft 		
Tone Colour Instruments 		

Lesson 3: Create an Australian Animal Song (Part 1)

Intended Learning Outcome

Students explore how an animal's characteristics, movement, sounds and environment can be represented through musical ideas. Their research becomes the starting point for an original composition.

NSW Curriculum Links

The activities in this resource are mapped to the outcomes of the K - 6 Creative Arts Syllabus (2024).

Stage	Outcomes
Stage 2 <i>Years 3 and 4</i>	CA2-MUS-01 performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate musical ideas, and describes ways the elements of music are used to convey musical ideas
Stage 3 <i>Years 5 and 6</i>	CA3-MUS-01 – performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate musical ideas using the elements of music, and explains how musical ideas are conveyed and ways contexts influence music.

Materials

- **Worksheet:** Australian Animal Research

Lesson Plan

1. Explain that students will become composers. Unlike Saint-Saëns and Turley, they must choose an Australian animal that has **not** already appeared. Possible animals:
 - Wombat
 - Platypus
 - Kookaburra
 - Echidna
 - Bilby
 - Spider
 - Possum
 - Sugar glider
 - Dingo
 - Cassowary
2. Research your chosen animal. Each student should complete the **Australian Animal Research Worksheet**. Here are some handy links to get your class started:
 - [15 Weird Aussie Animal Names](#)
 - [Our Animals \(ABC Education\)](#)
 - [Australia Museum: Animal Factsheets](#)

Students investigate:

- Where does it live?
 - Is it a mammal, reptile, bird, fish or insect?
 - How does it move?
 - What does it eat?
 - What colours or features does it have?
 - Is it endangered?
 - Why is it important to the ecosystem?
 - How can people help protect it?
3. Students present their animal to the class. (Optional)

Australian Animal Research Worksheet



Name & Class

.....

My Animal

.....

Where does it live?

Where in Australia can you find this animal? Think about its habitat. What does its home look and feel like?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Put it on the map

Place a dot and name the State/Region of its habitat.



How does it move?

Select from the options below:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ☐ Walks | ☐ Crawls |
| ☐ Runs | ☐ Slithers |
| ☐ Jumps | ☐ Climbs |
| ☐ Hops | ☐ Swims |
| ☐ Flies | ☐ Other: |

Does it move quickly or slowly?

.....

What kind of animal is it?

Select from the options below:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ☐ Mammal | ☐ Insect |
| ☐ Bird | ☐ Amphibian |
| ☐ Reptile | ☐ Marsupial |
| ☐ Fish | ☐ Other: |

.....

What does it eat?

My animal is...

Select from the options below.

- ☐ ...a herbivore. It only eats plants.
- ☐ ...a carnivore. It eats meat.
- ☐ ...an omnivore. It eats both plants and meat.

How does it find or catch its food?

.....
.....
.....

What does it look like?

Describe your animal's features.

.....

.....

.....

Size:

Colours:

Special features: *feathers, scales, claws, beak, tail, spots, stripes, large ears, sharp teeth*

.....

.....

.....

My Australian Animal

Draw or paste a picture of your animal here.

How does it sound?

Select from the options below:

- ☐ Roar – loud and powerful
- ☐ Growl – low and rumbling
- ☐ Hiss – long and breathy
- ☐ Chirp – short and high-pitched
- ☐ Tweet – light and musical
- ☐ Squawk – loud and sharp
- ☐ Call – a repeated sound
- ☐ Buzz – a continuous humming
- ☐ Click – short, repeated clicks
- ☐ Croak – low and throaty
- ☐ Chatter – lots of quick sounds
- ☐ Silent – no sound at all

Why is it important?

Is it endangered? Select your answer.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| ☐ Not endangered | ☐ Vulnerable |
| ☐ Endangered | ☐ Critically endangered |

What are the biggest threats to this animal?

.....

.....

.....

Why is it important to the ecosystem? *For example, does it spread seeds, pollinate plants, control other animal populations, provide food for other animals or help keep the environment healthy?*

.....

.....

.....

How can people help protect it?

.....

.....

Lesson 4: Create an Australian Animal Song (Part 2)

Intended Learning Outcome

Students create lyrics and a melody inspired by their Australian animal research to communicate ideas about their animal. Students use symbols, graphic notation or staff notation to represent and document musical ideas.

NSW Curriculum Links

The activities in this resource are mapped to the outcomes of the K - 6 Creative Arts Syllabus (2024).

Stage	Outcomes
Stage 2 <i>Years 3 and 4</i>	CA2-MUS-01 performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate musical ideas, and describes ways the elements of music are used to convey musical ideas
Stage 3 <i>Years 5 and 6</i>	CA3-MUS-01 – performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate musical ideas using the elements of music, and explains how musical ideas are conveyed and ways contexts influence music.

Materials

- **Worksheet:** Create an Australian Animal Song
- Classroom Instruments
- Devices (optional) to access [Chrome Music Lab Song Maker](#) or [Note Flight](#)

Lesson Plan

1. Students create lyrics for a four-line song. Encourage students to create rhyming couplets or rhyme line 1 & 3 or 2 & 4. Each lyric line should be similar in length.

Line 1 Tell us what animal the song is about.

Line 2 Describe what it looks like.

Line 3 Share one interesting fact.

Line 4 Share another fact or explain why it is important.

Here's an example. (*It fits the tune of *Twinkle Twinkle*)

*Lorikeets in the gum trees high,
Red, green, blue wings fill the sky,
Flocking round the flowers sweet,
Banksias, grevilleas, what a treat!*

2. Compose a Melody. Students create a simple tune to match this animal.
 - What musical ideas could represent your animal? Encourage students to match the music to the animal's movement/action/distinguishing features. Examples: quick notes, slow melody, heavy drum beat, fluttering sounds
 - Suggestions:
 - invent an original melody or adapt a familiar melody (such as *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star**)
 - use pentatonic notes (e.g. C D F G A)
 - experiment using classroom instruments.
 - Experiment using [Chrome Music Lab Song Maker](#) or [Note Flight](#)
3. Encourage students to write their melody down using non-traditional or traditional notation.
4. Reflection: Does your melody sound like your animal? Why?

Create an Australian Animal Song



Name & Class

My Animal

Create song lyrics

Create a 4- line song about your animal.

Here's a suggested structure to get you started.

Line 1 Tell us what animal the song is about.

Line 2 Describe what it looks like.

Line 3 Share one interesting fact.

Line 4 Share another fact.

Here's an example of a 4- line song.

*Lorikeets in the gum trees high,
Red, green, blue wings fill the sky,
Flocking round the flowers sweet,
Banksias, grevilleas, what a treat!*

Give it a go!

[illegible]

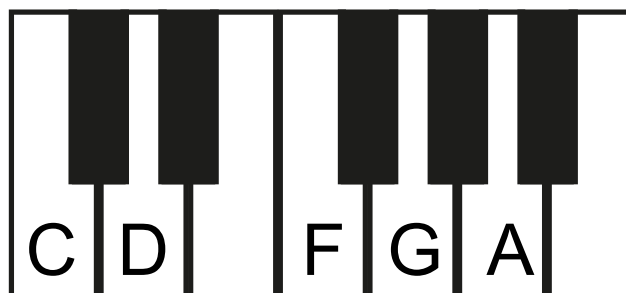
Create a melody

You can fit your lyrics to an existing melody or create your own using the notes of the pentatonic scale.

Experiment with the notes and sounds that you like at a piano or other classroom instruments.

Write your idea down using graphic or traditional notation.

Pentatonic scale



Write your melody down

Graphic
Notation
Space

Traditional
Notation
Space

Graphic notation space with four sets of five horizontal lines for drawing.

Traditional notation space with four sets of five horizontal lines for writing musical notation.

Lesson 5: Create an Australian Animal Song (Part 3)

Intended Learning Outcome

Students collaborate to arrange and perform an original composition. Students make deliberate choices about their roles in a band as well as the use of concepts of music (pitch, duration, dynamics, tempo, tone colour, texture and structure) to communicate a musical idea.

NSW Curriculum Links

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Stage 3 <i>Years 5 and 6</i>	CA3-MUS-01 – performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate musical ideas using the elements of music, and explains how musical ideas are conveyed and ways contexts influence music.

Materials

- Classroom Instruments
- Devices (optional) to access digital instruments

Lesson Plan

1. Band Jam Challenge! Students work in groups of 3–4. Choose one group member's song. Create a band arrangement. Suggested roles:
 - Vocalist
 - rhythm (drums or percussion)
 - harmony (piano, guitar or ukulele)
 - melody (recorder, violin, flute, xylophone)
 - Digital instruments and music apps may also be used. e.g. [Splice Beatmaker](#), [Virtual Musical Instruments](#) or [Chrome Music Lab Song Maker](#)
2. Rehearsal: Students should:
 - practise together
 - improve balance
 - decide on an introduction and ending
 - rehearse transitions.
3. Performance: Perform for the class, another class, a school assembly or a music showcase.
4. Final Reflection. Students reflect on:
 - What inspired your composition?
 - Which musical ideas best represented your animal?
 - What was challenging about working as an ensemble?
 - How did studying *Carnival of the Animals* by Camille Saint-Saëns and *Animalia* by Alex Turley influence your own music?