SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

2026 SEASON

Teachers Resource Kit

HOLST

The Planets

READY, SET, LISTEN!

Early Stage 1 – Stage 1

Ready, Set, Listen! *The Planets*

Gustav Holst

Early Stage 1 and Stage 1 – Teaching Resource

Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Acknowledgements

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Simone Young Chief Conductor, Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Craig Whitehead Chief Executive Officer, Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Resource Development

Writer: Sonia de Freitas

Editor and Producer: Daniella Garnero

Design: Amy Zhou

Contact

For information concerning the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Learning & Engagement program, contact:

Email: schools@sydneysymphony.com

Online: www.sydneysymphony.com

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. This kit has specifically been designed for post-concert learning, to expand on what students experienced in the concert.

You may choose to use the existing lesson plans as they appear, or - using our handy differentiation hints - 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@sydneysymphony.com.

How curriculum is referenced in this resource

This resource is mapped to the NSW Curriculum.

Each Lesson includes learning activities for students Early Stage 1 and Stage 1 aligned to the outcomes of the new Creative Arts K – 6 Syllabus (2024).

Each lesson focuses upon a work from Holst's orchestral suite *The Planets* which was featured in the Ready, Set, Listen! Concert. This Teacher Resource Kit includes several activities in performing, composing and listening. Each of the learning experiences is integrated into the lesson.

Each activity suggests an indicative age group, however teachers should use their knowledge of their class to select activities relevant to their stages of development and music learning.

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

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

Spotify Playlist

Things to watch

- The Planet Song
- How many planets are in the solar system (National Geographic)
- Planets in Our Solar System
- Gustav Holst's The Planets- Mars Move along
- Super Solar System (ABC)

Things to explore

- Tasha Soars: Tasha goes on a night time adventure visiting all the planets in our solar system (Story)
- Space Place: Solar System (NASA)
- Solar System Scope (Online Interactive)
- Passport to Space (National Geographic Kids)

Introduction to the concert theme

Holst's iconic *The Planets* is one of the best-loved pieces of music ever written. Full of memorable melodies and dramatic moments, you can almost see our solar system spinning around you as you listen.

Designed to engage children aged 0–5 in active live music listening, these 30-minute interactive performances feature the extraordinary musicians of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra performing music arranged for a small ensemble by composer Tim Hansen alongside leading children's entertainer Emily Who.

These performances offer comfortable floor seating for students. Sit, listen, and move around with your children as they explore classical music in a fun, relaxed and welcoming environment. **Ready, Set, Listen!** is the perfect first concert experience to ignite your child's imagination and spark a love of music.

Introduction to the repertoire

Holst's The Planets: Mars, Mercury and Jupiter

Mars, The Bringer of War

Mars is powerful, dramatic and tense. Holst uses a strong, repeating five-beat rhythm to create a sense of marching and unstoppable movement. Heavy percussion, brass and strings build a threatening atmosphere, making Mars sound like an approaching army.

Mercury, The Winged Messenger

Mercury is light, playful and quick. The music moves rapidly between different instruments and musical ideas, creating a feeling of flight and constant movement. Holst uses delicate sounds and changing rhythms to suggest Mercury, the swift messenger of the gods.

Jupiter, The Bringer of Jollity

Jupiter is joyful, energetic and grand. The music begins with lively, dancing themes before growing into a majestic melody. The famous central theme has a warm, noble character and is later developed into the hymn-like melody often known as "I Vow to Thee, My Country." Overall, Jupiter creates a feeling of celebration, generosity and joy.

Lesson 1: Mission Blast Off! A Journey Through Space

Intended Learning Outcome

Assess prior knowledge and introduce students to the solar system and learn planet names through rhythm games. Students explore beat, rhythm and syllables through planet names.

FOCUS: Listening, Performing

NSW Curriculum Links

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

Stage	Outcomes
Early Stage 1 *Kindergarten*	**CAE-MUS-01** experiments with and identifies ways sound is organised in music through singing, moving, playing instruments and using listening skills
Stage 1 *Year 1 and 2*	**CA1-MUS-01** performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate ideas through sound, and describes ways musical ideas are conveyed

Materials

- Audio player
- Spotify Playlist

Lesson Plan

1. Begin by inviting students to share what they already know about space.
   Ask:
   a. What planet do we live on?
   b. What can you see in the sky at night?
   c. What do you think is in space?
   d. How many planets are in our Solar System?
   e. Have you ever seen the Moon through a telescope?
   f. What do you think it would be like to travel into space?

2. “Today we are going on a musical mission through space! Put on your imaginary astronaut helmets, climb aboard our spaceship and get ready to explore the Solar System. Blast off!”

   Explain that the Solar System has eight planets and that you are going to explore three planets through music: Mars, Mercury and Jupiter, from Gustav Holst's orchestral work *The Planets*.

   Optional: At this point the teacher could share short excerpts of each piece.

3. **Find the Beat.** Have students sit in a circle.

   Ask: “Can we find the steady beat?”
   a. Teacher establishes a simple steady pulse by tapping knees (patsching): Tap – Tap – Tap – Tap
   b. Students join in.
   c. Explain: “The beat is the steady pulse we can feel underneath the music. Rhythm is made up of different sounds and silences that happen over the beat.”

4. **Echo the Rhythm.** Teacher claps a simple rhythm. Students listen and echo. Try several different patterns, gradually introducing planet names.
5.
   a. Say the planet name and ask students to clap its syllables.
      Mars (1 beat) 👏
      Sa-turn (2 beats) 👏👏
      Mer-cu-ry (3 beats) 👏👏👏
      Ju-pi-ter (3 beats) 👏👏👏

6. Now invite students to think of other words that fit the same rhythmic patterns.

   One beat: Earth • Moon • Sun • Star • Space
   Two beats: Ve-nus • So-lar • Plu-to • Co-met
   Three beats: As-tro-naut • Rock-et-ship • Sat-el-lite

Extension and differentiation ideas

Students create their own short rhythm using one or more space words. Encourage students to keep a steady beat as they do this. For example: Moon👏 Sun👏Ju-pi-ter👏👏👏Co-met 👏👏

Lesson 2: March like Mars

Intended Learning Outcome

Students will listen and respond to Holst's Mars, the Bringer of War through movement and rhythm activities. They will explore the strong beat, changing dynamics, repeated rhythms and 5/4 metre in the music.

FOCUS: Listening, Responding

NSW Curriculum Links

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Materials

- Audio player
- Spotify Playlist

Lesson Plan

Part 1: March Like Mars

1. Listen & Move. Tell students: "We are landing on Mars! What do you think Mars might sound like?"

2. Play a short excerpt of Mars. Ask students to listen carefully for the strong, steady pulse. Invite them to march around the room as if they are exploring the surface of Mars.

Try different characters:

a. giant robots
b. space explorers
c. marching soldiers
d. giant Martians with very heavy footsteps

3. Freeze! When the music becomes quieter, students freeze like statues. When the music becomes strong again, they continue marching.

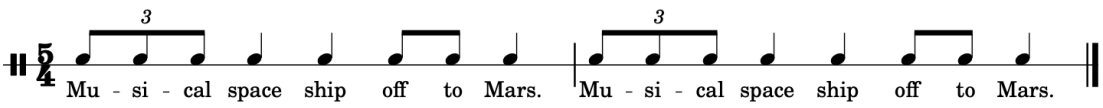
4. Talk About What You Heard. Ask:
    a. Did the music sound strong or gentle?
    b. Did it sound friendly or fierce?
    c. How did the music make your body want to move?
    d. What did you imagine while you were listening?
    e. Can you hear a rhythm that keeps coming back?

Teacher note: Introduce the word ostinato as a short musical pattern that repeats. “Holst uses a repeated rhythm in Mars. Can you hear it coming back again and again?”

Part 2: Mars Rhythm

1. Have students sit in a circle with claves, rhythm sticks, drumsticks or pencils. Establish a steady pulse together by tapping gently on the floor or desk. Say: “Our musical spaceship is getting ready to blast off to Mars!”

2. Speak the phrase: “Musical spaceship, off to Mars!”. Try saying the phase along with the music.



3. Break the phrase down into its syllabic rhythm. Have students say it slowly, then say and tap it together. Repeat several times until the class can maintain the rhythm together.

4. Rhythm Challenge. Ask: “Can we keep our tapping going without saying the words?”

5. For older/Stage 1 students, explain that Mars is written in an unusual 5/4 metre, meaning there are five beats in each bar.

   Count along with the music: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Part 3: Move to the 5/4 Ostinato

1. Explain: “Mars has a strong, repeating rhythm. Can we make our own Mars movement to go with it?”

2. Work together to create a 5-beat movement pattern.

   For example:
   1 2 3 4 5
   Step – Step – Clap – Clap – Tap

   Repeat:
   Step – Step – Clap – Clap – Tap
   Step – Step – Clap – Clap – Tap

3. Try performing the pattern while listening to Mars.

4. Create Your Own Mars Pattern.
   Inform students they are going to create their own movement patterns. Before they do their own, create a pattern together as a class. Have students suggest movements for each of the 5 beats and write them up on the board and practice as a class.

   They could use:
   a. clap
   b. stamp
   c. tap knees
   d. tap shoulders
   e. click fingers

   Their challenge: “Can you create a movement or body percussion pattern with five beats that you can repeat along with Mars?” Students can work in pairs or small groups for this exercise.

5. Perform the patterns for the class and see if everyone can join in.

Part 4: Listening Challenge

1. Play the excerpt again. Ask students to listen for:
    a. The beat: Can you feel the steady pulse?
    b. The ostinato: Can you hear the repeated rhythm?
    c. Dynamics: Does the music become louder or quieter?
    d. 5 Five beats: Can you count five as you listen?

Lesson 3: Mercury - Guided Listening

Intended Learning Outcome

Students will listen closely to Mercury, the Winged Messenger and identify different instruments and orchestral sections. They will use descriptive words to talk about the sounds they hear and compare Mercury with Mars, the Bringer of War.

FOCUS: Listening

NSW Curriculum Links

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Stage 1 *Year 1 and 2*	**CA1-MUS-01** performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate ideas through sound, and describes ways musical ideas are conveyed

Materials

- Audio player
- Spotify Playlist
- **Worksheet: Mercury (Guided Listening)** including all images of instruments

Lesson Plan

Part 1: Meet Mercury

1. Tell students: “Today we are travelling to Mercury! Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun. In Greek and Roman mythology, Mercury was a messenger who could travel very quickly.”

2. Ask: “If you were a musical messenger who could fly very quickly, what might your music sound like?” Invite students to suggest ideas. Would it be:
    a. fast or slow?
    b. heavy or light?
    c. loud or soft?
    d. smooth or jumpy?
    e. gentle or fierce?

3. Explain that Holst called this movement *Mercury, the Winged Messenger* and created music that can sound light, quick and constantly moving.

4. Play the opening of *Mercury*. Ask students to listen without trying to identify the instruments yet. Ask: “Does this sound like something heavy walking along the ground, or something light flying through the air?” Encourage students to use their hands to make a flying movement as they listen.

5. Think – Pair – Share Ask: “What words would you use to describe this music?”

    Build a class word bank:
    light • quick • soft • gentle • bouncy • smooth • jumpy • spiky • glittering • flying • busy • quiet • loud

Part 2: Meet the Orchestra

1. Explain: “Holst uses a whole orchestra to create Mercury's sound. An orchestra is made up of different families of instruments. Today we are going to become musical detectives and see if we can hear who is playing.”

2. Introduce the main instrument families that feature in *Mercury, the Winged Messenger*. Show students a picture of each instrument as you introduce it.

    a. Woodwinds: Flute • Oboe • Clarinet • Bassoon
    b. Strings: Violin • Viola • Cello • Double Bass

c. Other instruments: Celesta • Harp • Timpani

Part 3: Mercury (Guided Listening)

1. Use the **Worksheet: Mercury (Guided Listening)** Play selected sections of the music. Pause between sections to give students time to identify what they hear.

2. As the music plays, show students a picture of the instrument or orchestral section when it appears.

3. After each section, ask simple questions such as:
    a. Who did you hear?
    b. Was that sound high or low?
    c. Was it smooth or jumpy?
    d. Was it loud or soft?
    e. Did the instrument play the melody or accompany it?

For younger students, give them two picture choices: Was that a flute or a violin? Students can point to their answers.

Part 4: The Celesta, A Special Sound

1. When you reach the celeste section, pause and focus on its distinctive sound.

2. Tell students: “Listen to this special instrument. It is called a celesta (or celeste). It sounds a little bit like a tiny piano, but it has a sparkling, magical sound.”

3. Play the section again. Ask: “What does this sound remind you of?”. Possible responses: Stars, magic fairies, glitter, tiny bells, flying through space. There are no wrong imaginative answers!

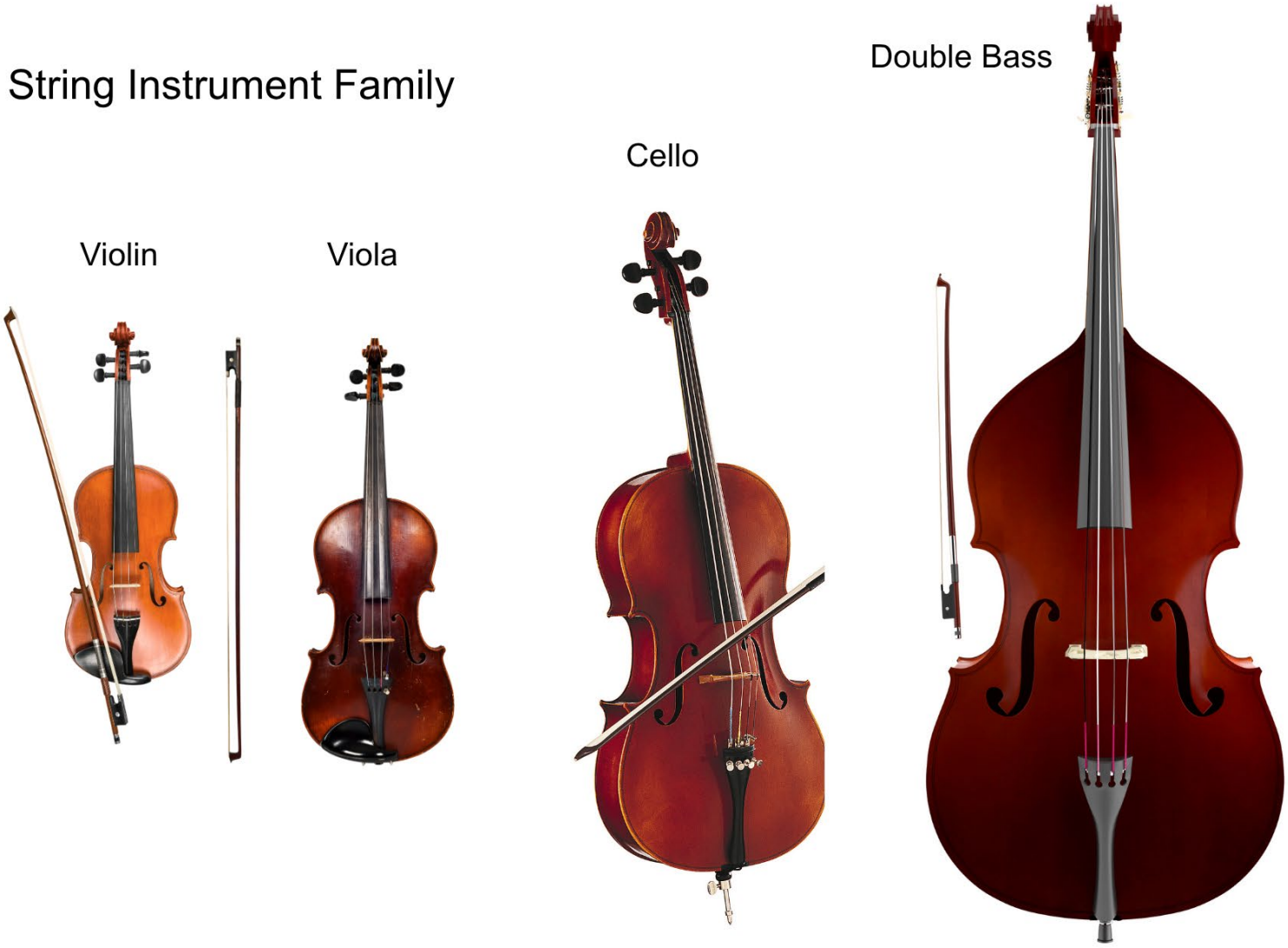
Worksheet: Mercury (Guided Listening)

Refer to this listening guide as you listen to Mercury, the Winged Messenger. As the music plays share images of the instruments that are heard.

Listening point	What to listen for	Instruments
0:00–0:30	A low sound begins the piece. Listen for light, quick musical ideas that seem to dart and fly around.	**Bassoon, flute, clarinet, woodwinds**
0:30–1:02	Listen for a sparkling, glittering sound. Notice how the musical ideas move between different sections.	**Celesta, strings, woodwinds**
1:02–1:36	Listen carefully as different instruments take turns playing the melody. Who can hear a violin? What comes next?	**Violin, oboe, clarinet, celeste**
1:36–2:02	The music gradually becomes bigger and louder. Can you hear the orchestra building?	**Orchestra / strings and woodwinds**
2:02–2:31	The music becomes softer again. Listen for the oboe carrying the melody.	**Oboe**
2:31–3:15	Listen for lots of quick notes moving up and down. Which section can you hear most clearly?	**Strings, woodwinds**
3:15–3:30	Listen carefully — can you hear the drums? What happens next?	**Timpani, celesta, woodwinds**
3:30–3:52	One instrument plays the melody, followed by another. Listen for the music moving downwards at the end of the section.	**Flute, violin, harp, celeste, woodwinds**
3:52–4:16	Listen for sounds that remind you of the beginning. Can you hear the very low bassoon? How does the piece finish?	**Bassoon, violins**

Worksheet: Mercury (Guided Listening)

String Instrument Family



Worksheet: Mercury (Guided Listening)

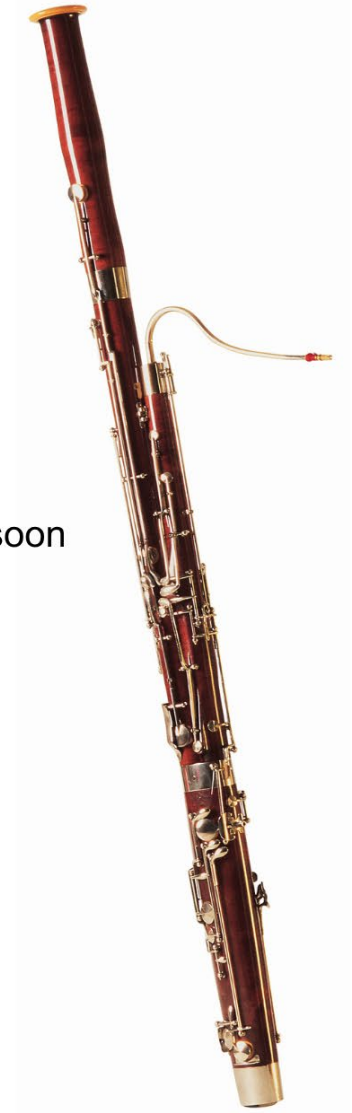
Woodwind Instrument Family

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet

Bassoon



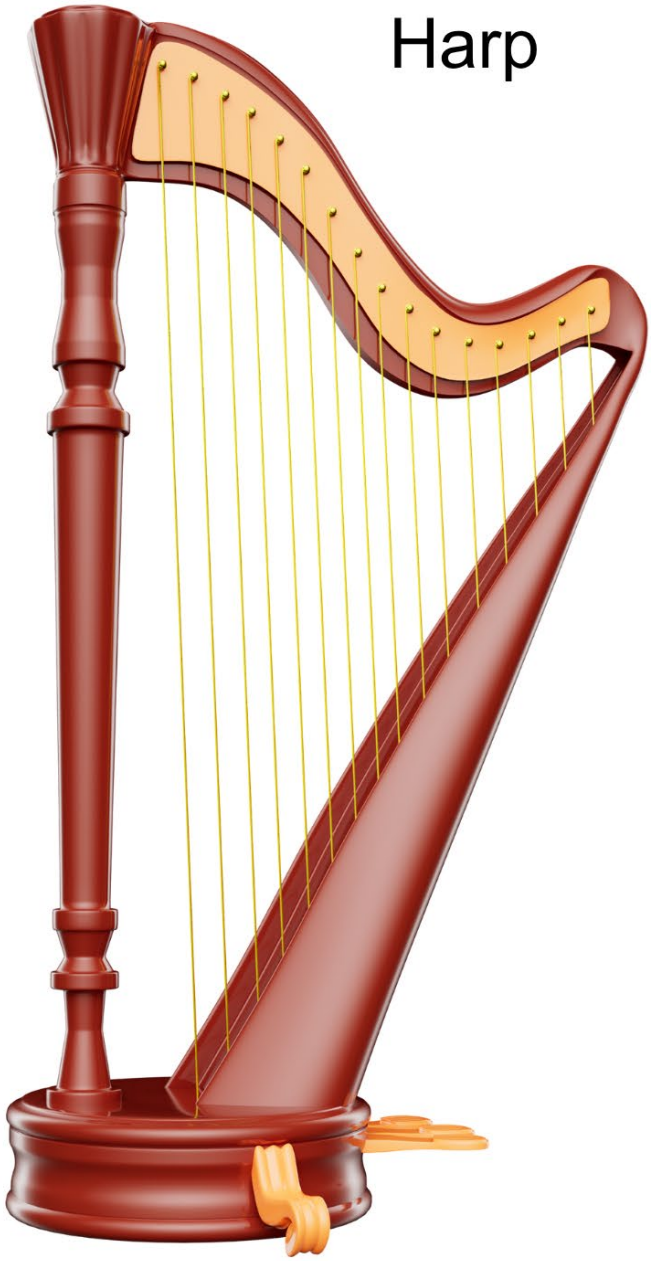
Worksheet: Mercury (Guided Listening)

Timpani or Kettle Drums

Worksheet: Mercury (Guided Listening)

Celesta

Worksheet: Mercury (Guided Listening)



Lesson 4: Jolly Jupiter Melodies

Intended Learning Outcome

Students will listen to and sing along with the memorable melody from *Jupiter.* They will explore the melody through singing, movement and classroom instruments, developing their awareness of pitch, melodic direction and musical phrasing.

FOCUS: Listening, Performing

NSW Curriculum Links

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Materials

- Audio player
- Spotify Playlist
- **Worksheet: Jupiter Jolly Melody (Notation)**
- Classroom Instruments: C major Tuned percussion, Piano

Lesson Plan

Part 1: Meet Jupiter

1. Tell students: “Today our spaceship is travelling to Jupiter! Jupiter is the largest planet in our Solar System. Holst called his music *Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity*. Jollity means being happy, cheerful and full of fun.”

2. Ask: “If you were writing happy music for Jupiter, what might it sound like?” Invite students to suggest words:
   happy • joyful • big • exciting • warm • peaceful • grand • bright • bouncy

   Explain that Holst's *Jupiter* contains a beautiful, memorable melody that sounds almost like a song or hymn.

3. Listen to *Jupiter*. Play the *Jupiter* theme from approximately 2:58’. Ask students to listen for the main melody

4. First listen: “Just listen. What do you notice about the music?” Ask:
   a. Does the melody sound happy or sad?
   b. Does it sound smooth or jumpy?
   c. Does the music move mostly up, down or stay around the same notes?
   d. Does it sound like something you could sing?
   e. How does the music make you feel?

Part 2: Jupiter Echo Song

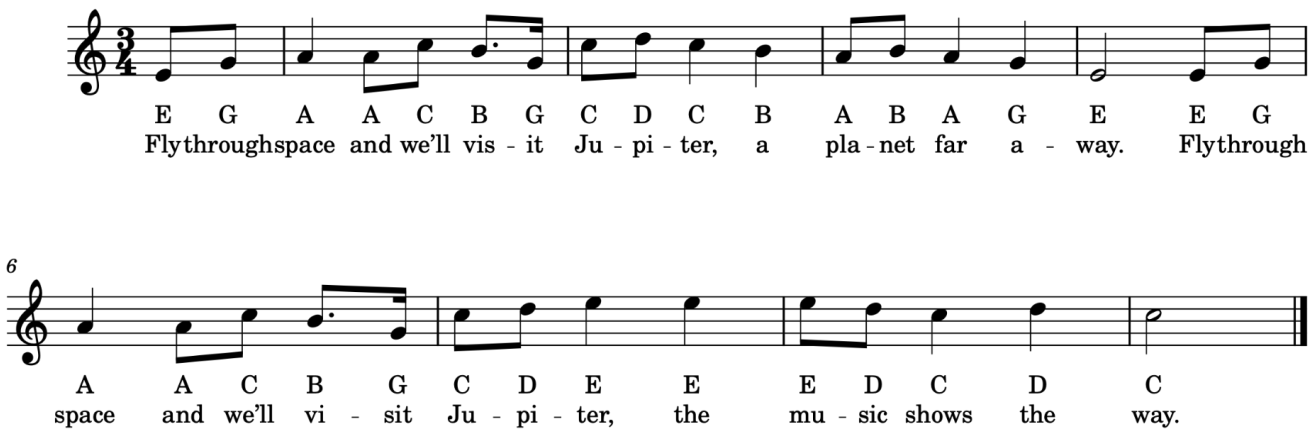
1. Use the Worksheet: Jupiter Jolly Melody (Notation)

2. Teach students a simple song inspired by the Jupiter theme. Echo Song
   Teacher:
   Fly through space and we'll visit Jupiter, a planet far away.

   Children echo.

   Teacher:
   Fly through space to visit Jupiter, the music shows the way.

   Children echo.



3. Repeat the song together several times.

4. Add Movement. Invite students to make gentle flying movements with their arms as they sing.

   On the words “Jupiter”, students can make a big circular movement with their arms to represent the enormous round planet. On “far away”, stretch their arms out wide.

5. Listen for the Melody. Return to Holst's Jupiter theme. Ask: “Can you hear the melody we have been singing?” Play the theme and invite students to hum or sing along.

6. Encourage students to listen for when the melody:
   a. moves higher,
   b. moves lower,
   c. stays around the same pitch.

   Teachers could indicate pitch by moving their hand higher and lower to match the contour of the melody.

   For Stage 1 students, draw a simple line showing the shape of the melody while they listen.

Part 3: Play the Jupiter Melody (Extension)

1. Now transfer the melody from voice to instruments. Explain: “We have sung Jupiter's melody. Now let's see if we can play it!”

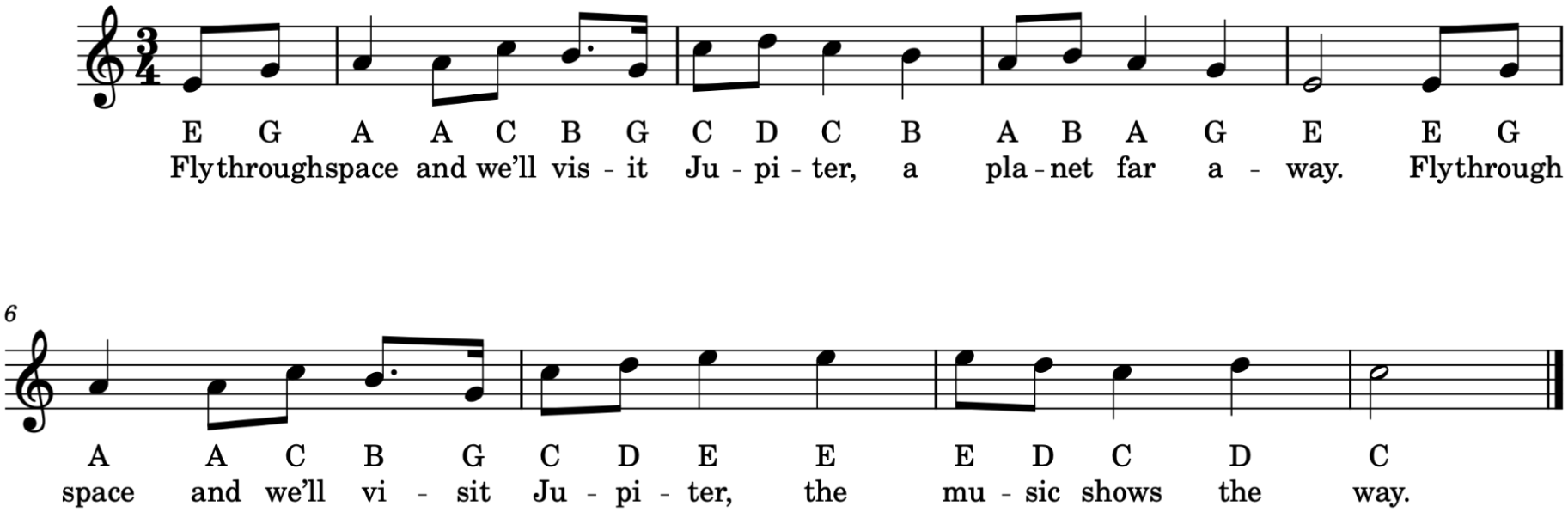
2. The Jupiter theme can be explored using the notes of C major, making it accessible on classroom instruments with the appropriate notes selected. Use classroom instruments such as:
    a. piano/keyboards
    b. xylophones
    c. metallophones
    d. glockenspiels
    e. tuned bells.

3. Find the Notes
    a. For younger students, place stickers or labels on the required notes.
    b. Say the note names together before playing.
    c. Teacher: “Can you find C?” Students: Find and play C. Repeat with the other notes required for the melody.

4. Echo Playing
    a. Teacher plays a short melodic phrase. Students echo it.
    b. Start with 2 - 3 notes, then gradually extend the phrases.

5. Play Together. Once students are familiar with the melody, play the Jupiter theme together. Students can:
    a. play the melody on piano/keyboards
    b. play selected notes on xylophone
    c. sing the words (lyrics)
    d. keep a gentle pulse

Worksheet: Jupiter Jolly Melody (Notation)



Lesson 5: Mission Complete: Musical Planets

Intended Learning Outcome

Students will reflect on their musical journey through Mars, Mercury and Jupiter by listening to short excerpts and identifying each planet through its distinctive musical character.

FOCUS: Listening, Responding

NSW Curriculum Links

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Materials

- Audio player
- Spotify Playlist
- **Worksheet: Colour In The Planets**

Lesson Plan

Part 1: Mercury vs Mars

1. Remind students about their previous musical journey to Mars. Play a short excerpt of *Mars,* followed by a short excerpt of *Mercury*. Ask:
    a. *Mars*: How does Mars move? Possible answers: Heavy, Strong, Marching, Powerful, Big

    b. *Mercury*: How does Mercury move? Possible answers: Light, Quick, Sparkly, Flying, Jumpy

2. Ask: “If *Mars* were walking and *Mercury* were flying, how would their movements be different?” Invite students to demonstrate:
    a. Mars: heavy marching movement
    b. Mercury: light, quick flying movements

3. Listening Challenge: Can You Spot the Instrument? Play a short section of *Mercury* again. Give each student or pair a small set of instrument picture cards. As they listen, students hold up the instrument they think they hear.

    You can make this easier for Early Stage 1 by offering only two or three choices at a time.

Part 2: Jupiter's Big Sound

1. Play the *Jupiter* theme once more and ask students to listen to how the music grows and becomes bigger. Ask:
    a. Does *Jupiter* sound small or enormous?
    b. How does Holst make the music sound grand?

2. Invite students to gradually make their movements bigger as the music grows. Start: tiny movements. Then: bigger movements. Finally: huge, expansive movements to match the music

3. Explain: “Jupiter is a huge planet, and Holst uses a big, rich orchestral sound to help create that feeling.”

Part 3: Listening and Colour In

1. Mars, Mercury and Jupiter. Ask students to remember the three planets they have explored through music.

Planet	Musical character	How could we move?
Mars	Strong, powerful, marching	Heavy marching
Mercury	Light, quick, flying	Fast, light movements
Jupiter	Joyful, grand, warm	Big, expansive movements

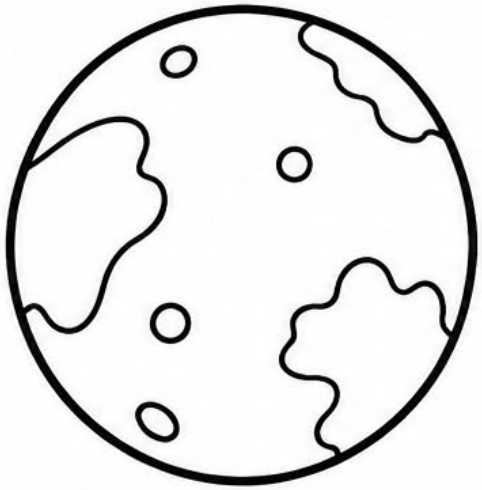
2. Listen to each piece and colour in the picture to match the planet.

3. Display the students' pictures in the classroom or school

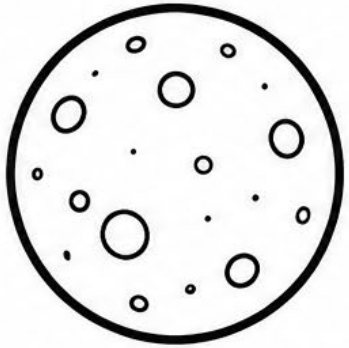
Worksheet: Colour In The Planets

The Planets

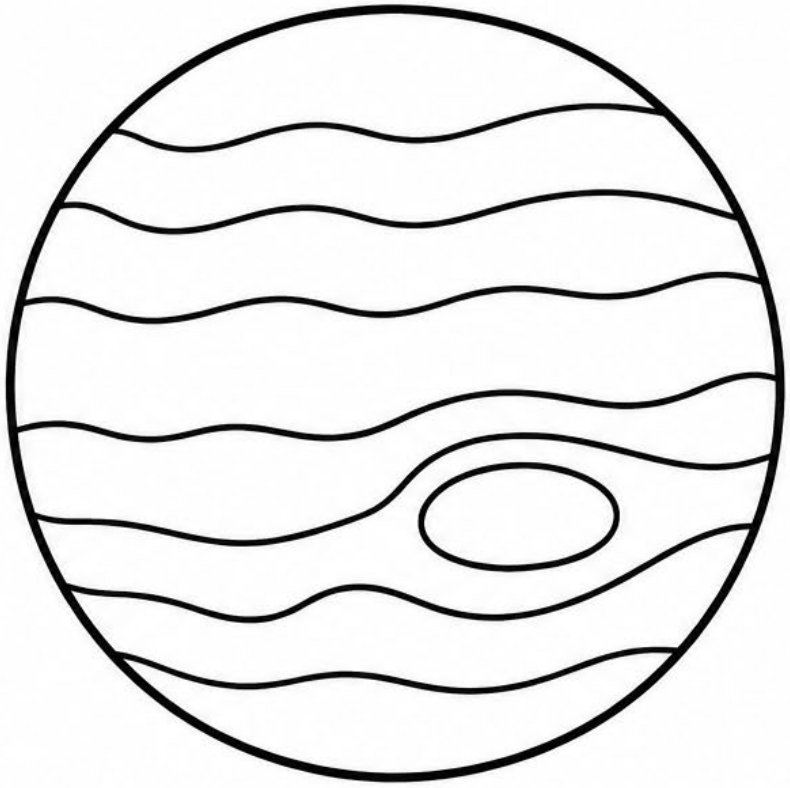
Colour Mars, Mercury and Jupiter



Mars



Mercury



Jupiter