

‘Enigma’ Variations – Theme (Enigma), Variations 11 (G. R. S.), 6 (Ysobel) & 7 (Troyte)

PRIMARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN

For:

- Key Stage 2 in England and Wales
- Second Level, P5-P7 in Scotland
- Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2 in Northern Ireland

Written by Rachel Leach

Background

The composer: Edward ELGAR (1857 - 1934)

- English composer
- Took many years to find fame but then, with Enigma Variations, he found himself suddenly very famous

The music: ‘Enigma Variations’

- Written in 1899
- Uses one theme to describe 14 of his friends
- ‘Variation’ means the same as ‘version’
- The ‘enigma’ remains a mystery - no one can work out the origin of Elgar's theme

Learning outcomes

Learners will

- Listen and reflect on a piece of orchestral music
- Learn to play a tune
- Create pieces inspired by Elgar
- Perform as an ensemble
- Begin to learn simple staff notation
- Learn musical language appropriate to the task

Curriculum checklist

- play and perform in ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
- listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory

Glossary of music terms used

Drone	one long, continuous sound (pitched or unpitched) that is present throughout a piece, usually at the bottom of the texture
Motif	a very short musical 'idea'
Pitched percussion	percussion instruments that can play different pitches ('notes') – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars etc.
Theme	another word for 'tune' or 'melody'. A linear line of notes, like a musical sentence
Unpitched percussion	percussion instruments that make sounds that don't have a specific pitch (or 'note') – drums, shakers, woodblocks, tambourine etc.

Resources required

- A4 paper and pens
- Classroom percussion instruments and any other instruments your children might be learning

This scheme of work is plotted out over six lessons. Feel free to adapt it to suit your children and the resources you have available.

The six lessons at a glance

Lesson 1

Activities: Listen and describe music using words and pictures
Watch the film and discuss

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians
Develop an understanding of the history of music

Lesson 2

Activities: Learn and perform a melody
Create an ending to the melody and orchestrate it

Curriculum link: Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression
Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory

Lesson 3

Activities: Create musical motifs and put them together to make a piece

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music

Lesson 4

- Activities: Create musical motifs and put them together to make a piece
- Curriculum link: Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 5

- Activities: Develop a theme and structure musical motifs around it
- Curriculum link: Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 6

- Activities: Structure all ideas into a piece
Perform the piece to an audience
Use technical terminology where appropriate
- Curriculum link: Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music

LESSON I

Watching and listening

1. **Prepare your class.** Explain to your class that you are going to begin a 6-week music project focusing on an important piece of music by a composer called Elgar

Explain further that Elgar was from England and his most famous piece described his friends in music. He wrote (or borrowed) a simple tune and made lots of different versions of it - one for each of his friends. These versions are called 'Variations' and because Elgar left everyone guessing who was 'pictured within' and where the tune came from, the piece is called 'Enigma Variations' (an enigma is a puzzle.)

2. **Listening task.** Listen to Variation 7 (Troyte) without images. Ask your class to imagine the person being described and jot down their thoughts. You might like to give them the following categories to think about:
 - Man or woman, boy or girl? Or animal?
 - Age?
 - What do they look like?
 - What are they doing?
3. **Repeat this activity** as you listen to Variation 6 (Ysobel) and Variation 11 (G. R. S.)

4. **Discuss their ideas** and perhaps create a 'picture' of each person on the board. Then reveal the real answers:

<p>Variation 7 (Tryote): Arthur Troyte Griffith</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male, aged about 40 – one of Elgar’s closest friends • This variation depicts him sheltering during a thunderstorm 	 <p><i>Image credit: The Elgar Foundation</i></p>
<p>Variation 6 (Ysobel): Isabel Fitton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female, aged about 30 – she was a beautiful violist • This variation depicts her practising her viola 	 <p><i>Image credit: The Elgar Foundation</i></p>
<p>Variation 11 (G. R. S.): A bulldog called Dan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog! • This variation depicts him doing ‘doggy’ things such as running, biting a bone and panting • G. R. S are the initials for Dr. George Robert Sinclair who owned Dan the dog 	 <p><i>Image credit: The Elgar Foundation</i></p>

5. **Now that your children know the answers**, play the variations again and challenge them to draw each person (or dog..) as they listen. These are short pieces of music, so urge them to work quickly
6. **Have a look** at their pictures and perhaps display them on the wall.
7. **FINALLY** - watch the [Elgar Ten Pieces film](#) and afterwards have a class discussion about what you have just seen. You might like to ask the following questions –
- Did you like the film?
 - What was your favourite part?
 - Who would you make a musical selfie of?

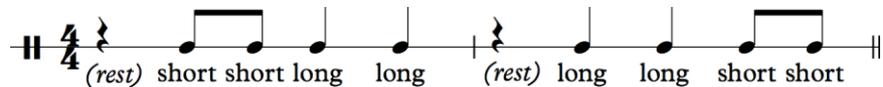
LESSON 2

Elgar's theme

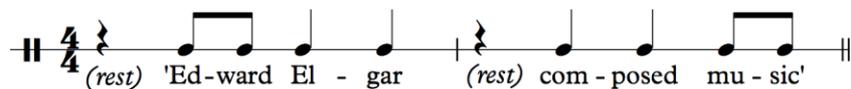
The creative project below is outlined for classroom percussion but voices and body percussion can also be used. As always, please feel free to adapt the project to suit your class. The tasks can be achieved with the whole group working together or by splitting into smaller working groups and putting the pieces together at the end.

- Warm-up.** Clear the classroom and ask your children to stand in a circle. To wake them up, pass a quick clap around. Remind them about the work you did with Elgar's piece and tell them that you are going to spend a few lessons creating your own set of variations. To do this, you must first learn to play Elgar's theme

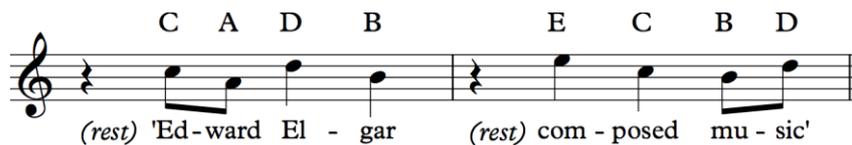
2. Teach the following rhythm



Take some time to explain this shape a little - your children might spot that it is symmetrical. It may help to use words -



- Play the tune** on a xylophone and encourage volunteers to come forward and have a go -



Others can join on unpitched percussion or continue to clap along

4. **When this is fully understood** and perhaps you have found a couple of good players, challenge someone to invent a second part with the same rhythmic shape and ending on an A.

5. **Write your full theme on the board** (perhaps just as a list of notes) and spend the rest of the lesson creating a full class version of this theme. For this, you might like to include -
 - **pitched** instruments on the full theme or part of it
 - **unpitched** instruments on the rhythm or keeping a pulse
 - a long, low **drone on A**

6. **FINALLY** - finish off with a performance of your class theme and remember to write down what you've done and who plays what

LESSON 3

Elgar's Dog

1. **Warm-up.** Begin your session in a circle again with a quick warm up and recap of what you have done so far. Remind the class about the music they heard describing Dan the bulldog and perhaps listen to it again.
2. Ask your class if any of them have a dog as a pet and discuss the dog's name, appearance and personality. Talk about the things that dogs like to do - chase sticks, bark, run around, chew furniture!
3. Elgar's musical dog is made up of three basic ideas –

SCAMPERING

– have a go at making scampering sounds by patting your knees quickly

CHOMPING

– make some chomping sounds by all clapping once together on your signal?

PANTING

– Elgar uses this rhythm for his panting



'long short short long short short'

...have a go at some panting with your class by tapping this rhythm on your knees (be careful that it doesn't get out of control by making a clear stop sign at the end)

4. After you've demonstrated these body percussion ideas to the class and had a go at them, **make a piece of 'dog-music'** by deciding on an order for your sounds and appointing a conductor (or signaler) to keep everyone together. If you have a large class you might like to split it into three teams – scamperers, panters and chompers!

5. **Take a look at your instrument collection.** Can anyone spot an instrument that can make a good scampering sound? Elgar makes his **scampering** sound by using a quick downward flurry of notes followed by a series of low even (footstep) notes. Like this –



(Notice that the end of this uses the notes from Elgar so theme)

Using a xylophone or glockenspiel, this might become -



6. How about the **chomping** sound? Elgar's is simply one big, loud chord made by a lot of instruments playing at exactly the same time. Any loud instruments will do but you might need a conductor to ensure it's completely together.

7. Finally, the panting sound. Here's Elgar's rhythm again -



Which instrument, or groups of instruments could do this? This is the quietest sound in the piece.

8. **Split into three teams.** Each team must make one of these elements

9. When this is achieved, **bring the class back together** and decide on an order for these ideas to make your 'dog' piece

10. **FINALLY** - end this lesson with a performance of your finished piece and ask the children to keep a record of its shape and who does what.

LESSON 4

Composing your own 'Enigma' Variations I

1. **Warm up.** Begin this session by recapping your musical dog piece – you could create a quick body percussion version of it again
2. **Explain** that today, like Elgar, you are going to describe someone in music. Have a class discussion about who this might be and decide on three or four candidates.

You need to choose people known to everyone and with distinct characteristics or actions. You also want to avoid offending anyone so it might be safest to choose celebrities or sports people that the class are unlikely to ever meet i.e. the Queen, David Beckham, Elgar! You could choose people you are studying in other curriculum areas i.e. Queen Victoria, the Egyptians, Martin Luther King. You don't even have to use people as inspiration - you could describe animals, insects, places, trees....

3. **Choose one person from your list.** Ask the class to describe this person or their job using three statements
i.e. The Queen - shakes hands
- waves
- looks happy

Ask your children to create one sound (**musical motif**) for each of these things.

- i.e. The Queen - shakes hands (three short hits on a drum)*
- waves (a shaking tambourine)
- looks happy (a scale going upwards)

Challenge the class to structure these motifs together to make a short piece

4. **Split your class into** small groups and ask them to make their own piece using this method -
 - i. Choose a 'subject'
 - ii. Three descriptive words
 - iii. Three motifs
 - iv. One piece
5. **When this is achieved,** bring the class back together, hear their pieces one by one and give a bit of gentle feedback
6. **FINALLY** – finish the session by giving the children a little time to write down what they have done. This will greatly speed things up next lesson

LESSON 5

Composing your own 'Enigma' Variation 2

1. **Warm-up.** Once again begin the session with an empty classroom and with the children sitting in a circle on the floor. After a short warm-up and chat about last lesson, split the children back into groups and get the instruments out. Give them a few minutes to put their piece from last lesson back together
2. As a full class **recap the theme** you made in lesson 2
3. **Remind the class that Elgar's portraits all feature his theme within them.** Ask your class to put some (or all) of the class theme into their group variation. Challenge them further to adapt and disguise the theme so that it is hidden. They should work out what the theme represents and adapt it accordingly.

I.e. The first four notes of the theme become a fanfare to welcome the Queen

4. **Bring** the class back together and hear their pieces. Have a class discussion about each one - do they sound like the person or animal they are describing? Can you hear the theme or is it well disguised?
5. **FINALLY** - try performing all the variations back to back without a pause and make sure the performers have kept a good record of what they have done this lesson

LESSON 6

Putting it all together

1. **Warm-up.** As usual, begin with a quick focusing warm-up. It might be fun to 'mime' the music silently

2. **Recap** - ask the children to remind you of the three sections of music that they have created. Hopefully they will say the following:
 - i. The full class theme
 - ii. Elgar's dog
 - iii. Their group variations

3. **Get out the instruments** and allow for a minute or two of chaos as everyone remembers their ideas. Give them time in groups to put their variation back together. Then put the 'theme' and 'dog' back together as a full class.

4. **Structure** – have a quick chat about order and make a list on the board. Practise in this order aiming to go from movement to movement without too much of a pause just as Elgar does

5. **FINALLY** – record your finished piece or perform it to another class

TAKING IT FURTHER

Cross-curricular activities

- **ART:** draw the people you are describing or listen to the other variations from Elgar's Enigma and draw them
- **VISIT:** an art gallery and describe some of the portraits you see using the same method as above
- **LISTEN:** Scottish composer James MacMillan wrote a piece with a similar idea called '...as others see us...'. Take a listen. All of his subjects are in the National Portrait Gallery and their pictures can be seen online
- **LITERACY:** write words to fit Elgar's tune or your own and make a singing variation

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