

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

Grade Level(s): 3rd grade

Type(s) of music: 20th century **Subject area focus:** Music & Language Arts

Number of Lesson Plans: 3 to 5



Brief Summary: *Students experience the children's story Where the Wild Things Are on many different levels with numerous musical accompaniments created by contemporary American composers including those composed for a ballet, an opera, and an animated video. With this background, in small groups, they compose their own contemporary musical accompaniment for the story.*

Goals and Objectives:

To expose students to the music of living contemporary composers in a context to which they can immediately relate

To give students the opportunity to compose their own "film" music and to help them understand the thought process a composer goes through as he or she makes decisions about a piece they're writing.

General Description / Summary of Lesson: *As students experience various American composers' musical interpretation of Maurice Sendak's book Where the Wild Things Are they are inspired to create their own, making musical decisions that they feel will best tell this famous story.*

Evaluation and assessment: *Initially informal classroom discussion is used to evaluate the students' understanding of the composer's musical choices. A "Make Some Decisions" worksheet is completed as students show their understanding of the expression tools composers use to tell their story with an optional illustration of their own musical score ideas. The final assessment is of course the finished product—a PowerPoint slideshow of Where the Wild Things Are accompanied by the students' own musical interpretation. An optional written reflection is also suggested.*

Follow-up Activities: *This project lends itself to a myriad of creative extensions.*

Create your own "Wild Rumpus" music as The London Sinfonietta did in an educational project.

--Learn more about composers Randall Woolf, Oliver Knussen & Peter Schickele--listen to their music.

--Choose a different children's book to musically illustrate—Harold and the Purple Crayon, If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, you name it!

--Experience Really Rosie—a children's musical composed by Carole King based on Maurice Sendak's Nutshell Kids series (Pierre, Alligators All Around, Once Was Johnny, and Chicken Soup with Rice)

--Community Cultural Arts Centers may be offering a children's performance of Where the Wild Things Are. Take your students on a field trip to experience a live professional performance!

(Please note: The technology part of this project, should you choose to pursue it, is all done by the teacher outside of the regular music class time.)

RESOURCES USED

Audio resources used in lesson : *Where the Wild Things Are Ballet* composed by Randall Woolf performed by CAMP, with Ann Klein, electric guitar (not available in stores but you can find it online)
Alternate or additional recording: Oliver Knussen: Where the Wild Things Are. Higgelty Piggelty Pop! London Sinfonietta on the Deutsche Grammophone label and also *Where the Wild Things Are* through Arabesque Recordings. Multiple samples of different scenes are available online (search *Where the Wild Things Are –a Fantasy Opera*)

Video tape resources used in lesson:

Where the Wild Things Are video available through Scholastic Books
Where the Wild Things Opera (music by Oliver Knussen) likely available at your library
I also contacted various national ballet companies requesting a short video excerpt of their archived video recording of the Knussen production and was successful with one.

Visual resources used in lesson:

All are optional: Posters of *Where the Wild Things Are* (various available through many sources)
Where the Wild Things Are puppets or stuffed animals (available through many sources)

Text or song resources used in lesson:

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak (children's book) Multiple publishers: Scholastic, HarperCollins , Weston Woods, Bt Bound, Galison Books,, Buccaneer Books

Internet Resources:

There are plenty of online resources for this project including websites with sound samples of the sited composers' music as well as information about them. Various pictures of the characters from this story are also available online.

Other materials:

This entire project can be done in a "low tech" classroom without the use of any electronic recording devices but if you want to do the "high tech" part of this project you may want some of the following items if you don't already have them:

Any recording device, PowerPoint if your final project will be digital, and a scanner if you want to digitally project Sendak's pictures from the story.

Set Up Comments: Scan the pictures from the book (you need to own this book in order to do this legally) and insert one picture on each slide of a new PowerPoint project. You could use this slideshow to project as you read the story aloud to your students rather than using one book in front of them (although there's something cozy about "storytime" in music class ☺).



Lesson Plan Title: “Mildly Wild”

Lesson Plan # 1 of 5 plans. This plan describes a SINGLE CLASS PERIOD.

Objectives of this Lesson Plan: *Students will become familiar with the characters and plot of the children’s book Where the Wild Things Are. They will also begin to consider what kinds of choices composers can make when writing their music in order to create a feeling or tell a story.*

Materials used: Where the Wild Things Are book, Scholastic video of Where the Wild Things Are

Prior Knowledge and Experiences/Curriculum Content: *Students have experiences/labeled at least a little about music expressions (tempo, dynamics, articulation) and tone colors (instruments, body percussion)*

Procedures:

1. *Introduction: Play a brief piece of program music you may have been studying or your students are familiar with and discuss what choices the composer made regarding tempo, instruments, dynamics, and articulation.*

2. *Read aloud Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak.*

3. *Discuss the story including the characters and the plot. Make sure students are clear about the story order and the characters involved in each part. (Our discussion led to this: 1) Max being naughty 2)Max in his room where it changes 3)Max traveling to where the wild things are 4)the Wild Things roar etc. 5)The Wild Rumpus 6)Max becomes lonely... 7)Max sails back home*

4. *Show the Where the Wild Things Are video (music by Peter Schickele) encouraging students to pay particular attention to the music for each section and how it helps to tell the story. (If you have any extra time carry on a discussion about the choices the composer made.)*

Indicators of success: *Students can informally share “what happens” in the story Where the Wild Things Are. Students are also able to verbalize musical choices made by the composer to accompany this video version of the story.*

Supplementary Information: *This lesson can be completed in thirty minutes. It’s important that your students are clear about the story order and characters involved by the end of this lesson.*

Lesson Plan Title: “Wild Many Ways!”
Lesson Plan # 2 of 5 plans. (Optional)

Objectives of this Lesson Plan: *Students will become confident about the personalities of the characters and plot sequence of the children’s book Where the Wild Things Are. They will also learn the difference between a ballet and an opera with the same theme.*

Materials used: *Where the Wild Things Are book, mp3 excerpts, CD or video recording of the Where the Wild Things Are Opera, CD recording of the Where the Wild Things Are Ballet, optional video excerpt of a ballet performance*

Prior Knowledge and Experiences/Curriculum Content: *Students have read Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak or have had it read to them.*

Procedures:

1. Review the parts of the story and its characters. Talk briefly about how the music on the video viewed in the previous class helped to tell the story. Ask “What would we have to do to make it a ballet or an opera?”

2. BALLET (Be sure to define this art form if your students are not familiar with it.) *Predict what the music might sound like for different parts of the story’s plot using familiar music vocabulary. Listen to brief excerpts of CD for the different sections you’ve divided the story into. Were you right? Discuss the music and what decisions the composer, Randall Woolf made.*

3. OPERA (Be sure to define this musical art form if your students are not familiar with it.) *View excerpts of the opera video. What’s better or worse/ same or different from what we’ve experienced so far? (Depending upon the particular group of students, I have shown this entire opera rather than excerpts.) Again discuss the music and the composer, Oliver Knussen’s, musical decisions.*

4. *Share that next music class we’ll be composing our own music to accompany the Where the Wild Things Are story.*

Indicators of success: *Students can verbalize the difference between a ballet and an opera. Students begin volunteering more ideas about tools composers use to create a mood or tell a story.*

Supplementary Information: *You can do this project without Lesson Two if you choose not to obtain the optional materials listed above or want a shorter project.*

Lesson Plan Title: “It’s Going to Get Wild!”

Lesson Plan # 3 of 5 plans. This plan describes a SINGLE CLASS PERIOD.

Objectives of this Lesson Plan: *Students will become familiar with the characters and plot of the children’s book Where the Wild Things Are. They will also begin to consider what kinds of choices composers can make when writing their music in order to create a feeling or tell a story.*

Materials used: *“Make Some Decisions” handout, Where the Wild Things book available for student reference if requested, common classroom instruments (This can include as many different kinds as you like—on different occasions I have used simple percussion, less common items like a slapstick or sound tube, and/or Orff instruments set up in pentatonic.)*

Prior Knowledge and Experiences/Curriculum Content: *Students know the proper way to play common classroom instruments. Students are very familiar with the plot and characters of the children’s book Where the Wild Things Are.*

Procedures:

1. *Read the book one more time.*
2. *Divide into groups to compose based on the different parts of the story as we’ve determined earlier (Students determine the # of groups needed but I number them randomly to create groups.) Consider the following options: Should there be anything we all do together? Is there any part that we can use twice (repetition)? Should we add any words?*
3. *Planning (Make Some Decisions handout using reverse side to record plan) Show your plan to the teacher in order to begin practicing with instruments.*
4. *Practice/Try your ideas—make any changes you want—then rehearse some more. In order to be prepared to perform again at our next class, you’ll want to be sure that your written plan reflects your changes and final decisions. (I collect their “plan” so that it is available for our recording session next class.)*

Indicators of success: *Student plans clearly reflect their portion of the story’s plot and its characters. Students use a variety of instruments and music expressions in their plan and rehearsal.*

Supplementary Information: *Use all of the space in your classroom being sure to keep individual groups as separated as is possible so that they can work without too much distraction. It will be LOUD in your room! Have a “safety signal” like lights out to have all students freeze and look at you for additional direction.*

Lesson Plan Title: “Worth Wild”

Lesson Plan # 4 of 5 plans. This plan describes a SINGLE CLASS PERIOD.

Objectives of this Lesson Plan: *Students will rehearse and then perform their musical accompaniment for each part of the Where the Wild Things Are story.*

Materials used: *classroom instruments, optional recording device (audio only)*

Prior Knowledge and Experiences/Curriculum Content: *Students have planned and rehearsed a musical accompaniment for each part of the Where the Wild Things Are story.*

Procedures:

1. Practice: *Review what was planned before getting instruments. Practice one last time—don't allow too much time here.*

2. Performance: *Allow each group to perform their composition. This can be done without stopping if you set each group up in sequential order in the room or you can stop after each group's performance.*

Optional: Record each groups' composition using Sound Recorder or Audio Recorder as the other groups listen. Following each portion or the entire performance encouraging positive comments from listening groups and discuss the decisions the performing group made.

On Your Own if you're doing the "high tech" version of this project: *Use Audacity to rearrange, cut, splice, copy as needed until you've got one combined composition. Open your PowerPoint slideshow of the scanned pictures and on the first story slide choose Insert from the top Menu. Choose Audio and browse to where you stored your final sound file. Under Slideshow at the top menu choose Rehearse Timings and click the mouse each time you want to change slides. You'll need to do this a few times before you get it just the way you want it.*

Indicators of success: *Student performances/compositions clearly illustrate the intent of the characters and plot of the story. Students are able to verbalize what did and didn't work in their own or their peers' compositions.*

Supplementary Information: *This could be the final lesson for this project.*

Lesson Plan Title: “Where the Wild Things Were”

Lesson Plan # 5 of 5 plans. (Optional)

Objectives of this Lesson Plan: *Students will reflect on their composing experience.*

Optional: Students will view a digital production of their work.

Materials used: *Extended Response or Venn diagram handout, computer connected to video projector and external speakers*

Prior Knowledge and Experiences/Curriculum Content: *Students have completed and performed (and possibly recorded) their portion of the Where the Wild Things Are story.*

Procedures:

Share the final slideshow with your students.

OR

Consider a reflective writing opportunity where students can indicate what they liked best, compare it to the professional productions they viewed etc.

OR

Use the Venn diagram included with these plans to reflect on the experience.

Indicators of success: *Students verbalize and/or share in writing their understanding of what it takes to compose a piece of music to tell a story or create a feeling in the listener. Students provide positive feedback about this experience and indicate pride in their final project.*

Supplementary Information: *If your project is completed digitally, make a copy available on your school’s server, your school’s website, etc. so it can be shared with school staff and parents. (Perhaps you can time this project so that it is completed just prior to Parent Conferences!)*



You might also check out the motion picture soundtrack by Karen O for the 2009 movie version of this story.