

Lesson Plan for teaching “In the Hall of the Mountain King”

[Music history, appreciation, & theory]

Note to teachers: The book *In the Hall of the Mountain King* by Allison Flannery is based loosely on the characters and events from the segment of Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* that is set to Edvard Grieg’s “*In the Hall of the Mountain King*.” The information below is intended to introduce young students to this connection, thus familiarizing them with these classic works of music and literature. There are many ways to integrate the reading of the book into the lesson below, but I recommend reading the book after Step #3, then introducing the concepts of musical dynamics before playing Grieg’s “*In the Hall of the Mountain King*” in full. Acting out Peer’s actions from the story as the music plays brings these theoretical concepts to life through children’s innate love of movement, story, and adventure.

Background:

1. Edvard Grieg was born in Bergen, Norway, in 1843. He showed great musical ability at an early age and began piano lessons at age 6. His first piano teacher was his mother. He started composing music at age 9! He studied music as he grew up and knew that writing and composing music was what he wanted to do in life. What inspired Grieg most in his composing was nature. He loved to take long walks in his home country and write music that reflected what he saw, felt, and experienced. His hope was to paint a musical picture of the beautiful country in which he lived, Norway!

(Play one of the pieces included on the CD that comes with the book, such as “Morning Mood.” Ask students to listen and try to picture the natural beauty Grieg hoped to portray. *Ask: What do you picture?*)

2. Another Norwegian by the name of Henrik Ibsen wrote a play titled *Peer Gynt*. This play was to be set in Norway and tell a tale of a boy and his adventures. Ibsen asked Grieg to write the music for the play. Grieg took two years to write the music, but he was never quite satisfied, changing it up to the moment of production. Yet, it has probably contributed more to his fame than anything he ever composed.

(Play another of Grieg’s pieces from the CD. *Ask: Would you be happy if you wrote this? Why? Why do you think Grieg was not happy with it? Have you ever made something other people liked but you weren’t happy with? How important is it to keep trying to make something better once we create it?*)

3. One of the pieces of music for the *Peer Gynt* play that Grieg composed depicted a chase scene through the castle of the Mountain King. This piece, titled “*In the Hall of the Mountain King*,” has stood the test of time and remains one of Grieg’s most famous pieces of work. You can even hear this music today in commercials, movies, and television shows.

(Play the opening 15-20 seconds “*In the Hall of the Mountain King*.” *Ask: Have you heard this before? Where?*)

[Recommended place to read *In the Hall of the Mountain King* by Allison Flannery.]

Music Theory:

4. In the piece of music that goes with this story, Edvard Grieg made use of changing dynamics, increase in tempo, and a repeating musical pattern to create a musical masterpiece. Let's talk about those 3 elements of music and what they mean.
 - a. **Dynamics:** "Dynamics" normally refers to the volume or sound of a note. When the sound is very soft, we call that "piano" in musical terms. When the sound is very loud we call that "forte" in musical terms. "In the Hall of the Mountain King" begins as soft as possible and increases in volume until it is as loud as possible.
 - b. **Tempo:** "Tempo" refers to the rate or speed at which music is played. "In the Hall of the Mountain King" begins slowly and gradually increases in tempo throughout the piece until at the end it is very fast. There is a great tempo change in this piece.
 - c. **Repeating musical pattern:** A repeating musical pattern in music is called an "Ostinato." This word is derived from the Italian word that means "obstinate" (or "stubborn"). You can hear a repeating pattern in "In the Hall of the Mountain King" that gets faster and louder as the piece progresses.
5. Now we are going to listen to the music written by Edvard Grieg to depict the story that we just read. As we listen for the dynamic change, tempo change, and ostinato we are going to act out the scene with our fingers on our lap. Pretend your hand is Peer, and let your fingers be his legs. Follow the story as you hear the music and we will tiptoe, sway, spin, skip, run and clap our hands together when the doors "slam" in the music.

(Play the music in full. Lead students in acting out Peer's actions as he enters and begins exploring the Mountain King's castle. After acting out Peer's adventure in this way, Ask: *When did Peer run into the Mountain King? How do you know? What are the musical terms that describe what happened to the music at this point? What pictures in your head were created when the music was "piano"? What did you see when the music became "forte"? Where did you hear the tempo change? How did this affect the pictures in your mind? Who can hum for us the "Ostinato" in this piece of music?*)

6. Now we are going to stand up and listen to the music again interacting with our whole bodies. Again, listen for the dynamic change, tempo change, and ostinato. Pretend that you are on the adventure through the castle.

(Repeat any of the concepts from #5 that you wish to reinforce.)

As an alternative to Step #5 above or as a further extension of this lesson, have students create popsicle-stick puppets from the downloadable coloring sheet provided in the link below where you found this lesson plan. Have the students use the puppets in small groups to act out the story as the music plays.