



SLSO At Home Learning

Variations on a Shaker Melody

In music, form refers to the structure of a piece of music. A piece of music is created by putting together different sections. These sections are labeled with upper case letters, for example the "A Section" or "B Section." Each section has different musical ideas, and often composers will repeat certain sections.

Theme and Variations is a type of musical form where a composer takes a musical theme or statement (the A Section) and then repeats it many different times. Each time the composer repeats the A Section, they change or vary it only slightly. These varied re-statements of the original theme are the variations. Because each re-statement is only a variation of the original A Section, these variations are labeled A1, A2 and so forth.

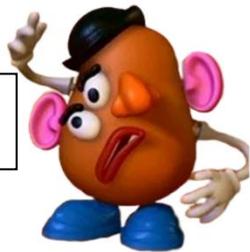
Theme and Variations is a lot like a Mr. Potato Head toy. The musical theme is the potato. No matter how we dress up the potato, it is still a potato. All the body parts and accessories added to the potato create different variations of the same potato.



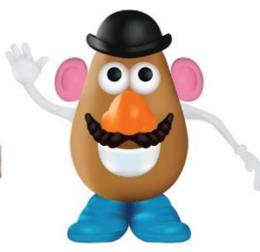
Theme
A



Variations



A1



A2



A3



A4

What other examples of theme and variations can you find in your everyday life? (Pizza, books, movies)



Clap and say the following rhythmic phrase together. This will be your theme.

Ta	ta	ti - ti	ti - ti		ta	ti - ti	ta	
Joy	love	friend-ship	free-dom		These	are my	gifts	

Changing no more than two things at one time, how many variations of this rhythmic phrase can you create? Share your different ideas and try performing them together. If you get stuck, here are a few suggestions:

- 1) Vary the tempo (how slow or fast)
- 2) Vary the dynamics (how loud or soft)
- 3) Vary it by using body percussion other than clapping (stomp, pat, clap, snap)
- 4) Change a rhythm or two
- 5) Change the lyrics



Simple Gifts is an old Shaker melody. Listen to this [recording by Yo-Yo Ma and Alison Krauss](#). Shakers are a religious group whose lifestyle emphasizes simplicity. A handful of Shakers immigrated from England to America in 1774 and within five years had grown to several thousand members. Today, very few Shakers remain, however their memory is carried on through their music such as the tune *Simple Gifts*. American composer, Aaron Copland took the melody from *Simple Gifts* and wrote

Variations on a Shaker Melody in 1944, forever preserving this folk song and a piece of Shaker culture. The piece was originally part of a ballet titled *Appalachian Spring*. The ballet told the story of a newlywed couple living on a pioneer settlement in Pennsylvania during the 1800s.

Listen to a recording of Aaron Copland's [Variations on a Shaker Melody](#). Do you recognize the Simple Gifts melody? Raise your hand each time you think you hear a new variation on this melody. How many variations did you hear? There should have been five variations on the theme, not counting that first statement of the theme.





**St. Louis Symphony
Orchestra**

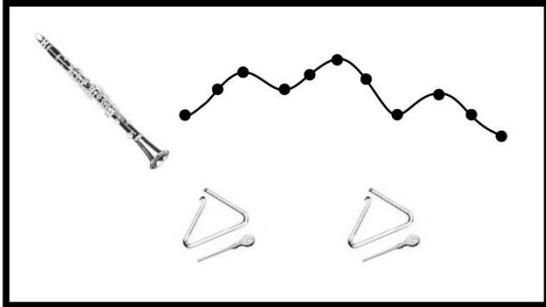
stéphane denève : music director

Using the listening map puzzle pieces, look for patterns on the pieces and begin to decipher the symbols together. What do you think each piece represents musically? (Puzzle piece number one is the theme and the remaining five puzzle pieces (2-6) each represent a different variation. The puzzle pieces are numbered in the order they appear in the composition. Do NOT give children the numbers along with the puzzle pieces.)

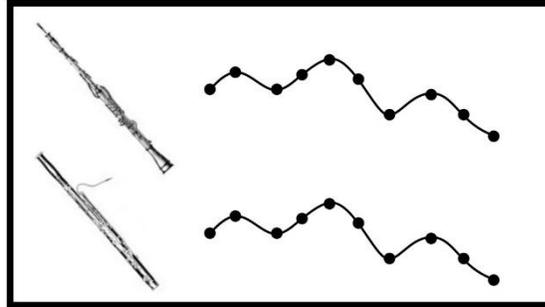
Listen to [Variations on a Shaker Melody](#). This time work together to put the puzzle pieces in order, matching what you hear in the music. After, discuss what you heard and why you chose to put the cards in the order you did.



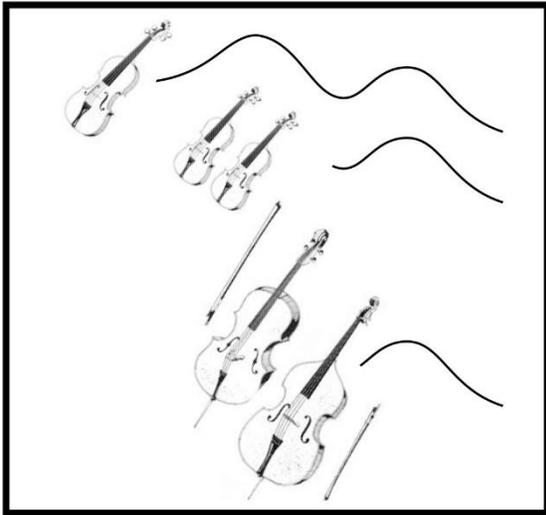
1.



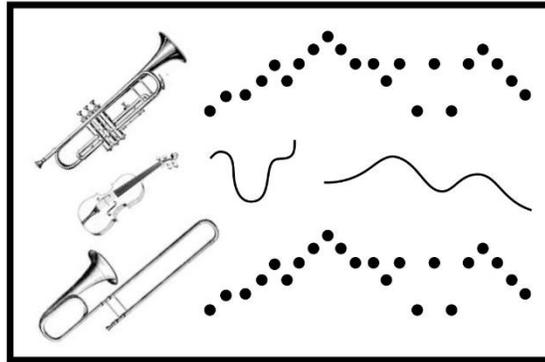
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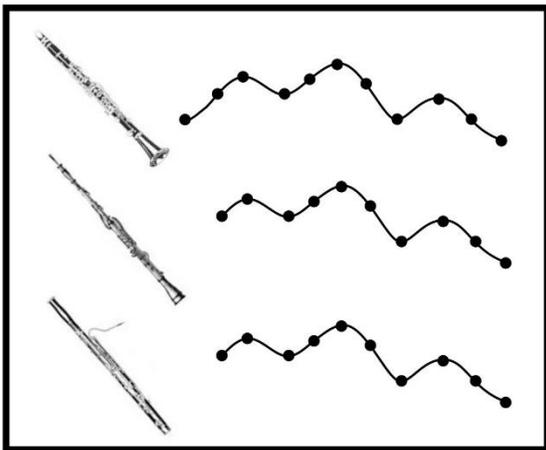
3.



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6.

