Meet the Strings Family
Teacher’s Guide
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Information
The Violin Family

The violin family is part of the larger string family, also known as the chordophones so called because they produce sound with vibrating strings. The instruments in the violin family are the violin, the viola, the cello, and the double bass. These instruments became popular in Italy during the 1600s. Some well-known string instrument makers during this period were the Guarneri, Stradivari, and Amati families in Italy. A person that makes or repairs string instruments is called a luthier (LOO-thee-ur). Luthier is a French word that means lute-maker. A lute is an early guitar played by strumming the strings with the fingers. The violin, viola, cello, and bass all have four strings and make sound by causing those strings to vibrate over the hollow belly of the instrument. They can cause these vibrations in many ways. The most common way is by drawing a bow across the strings.

The Bow

The word arco tells a player when he or she should use the bow to play a string instrument. The bow is made of wood from Brazil [show where Brazil is located on the map] strung with horsehair. When it is drawn across the strings, the horsehair catches the strings causing them to vibrate. To help the horsehair grab the strings, players rub their bows with rosin, which is made from a sticky substance from trees called resin, on the horsehair. [Explain what tree resin is and how it can crystallize and preserve things kind of like a fossil.] A person who makes bows for string instruments is called an archetier (ar-CHE-teer). Archetier is another French word; it means bow-maker. An archetier can use up to 200 horsehairs when making one bow. There are many different ways to play a string instrument using the bow. Words like sul tasto (sul tas-to), sul ponticello (pon-ti-CHEL-oh), and col legno (kawl le-nyaw) are written in music to tell string players how to play. Sul tasto and sul ponticello let a musician know where to place their bow on an instrument. Col legno tells a player to play using the bow in a completely different way.

Players can change notes by drawing the bow across different strings or by pressing down the string with a finger on the left hand, which holds the neck of the instrument while the right hand holds the bow. When a player holds down a string to make a different note, it is called a stop. If a player holds down two different strings and plays them at the same time, it is called a double stop.

A string player can also play without using the bow by plucking the strings. This way of playing is called pizzicato. Players play in this style to make shorter notes that have more of a bouncy feel. An effect performed by the left hand when playing with the bow is vibrato, which causes a note to wobble, or vibrate. A player makes this sound by moving the finger of the left hand that is holding down the string being played.

The Lute from Disney’s Sleeping Beauty

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Project #1

For a science or arts and crafts project, have the class make mini-string instruments out of empty tissue boxes and strings of different length. Make sure all of the strings are strung tightly so each can be heard and is a different pitch when plucked. (To secure the strings, you can just tie glue them directly to the box.) Explain to the class how the vibrating strings work to produce sound.
Instruments of the String Quartet

There are four instruments in any quartet. Only three of the instruments in the violin family are in the string quartet. They are: two violins, one viola, and one cello.

The violin is the smallest of the string instruments in the string quartet and the violin family. It is played by resting the belly of the instrument on your left shoulder, placing your chin on the chinrest, and holding the neck, or the skinnier part, of the violin in your left hand. [Have the class pretend they are holding violins]. People who play the violin are known as violinists. The violin is also sometimes called the fiddle. Violins play the highest notes and always read music in the treble clef which looks like this:

\[ \text{\textbf{G}} \]

The viola is the medium-sized instrument in the string quartet and plays lower notes than the violin because of its larger size. It looks exactly like a violin and is held the same way. People that play the viola are called violists. Violas play music written in the treble clef for high notes, but they also read music written in alto clef which looks like this:

\[ \text{\textbf{C}} \]

The cello is the largest instrument in the string quartet and plays the lowest notes. These notes are called the bass (bās) line. Cellos have a pin at the bottom so they may be played by standing them up on their ends without damaging them. This pin is called an endpin. A player holds a cello by placing it between his or her legs while holding the neck in the left hand. [Have class pretend to be playing a cello]. Since the cello stands on its end, there is no chinrest like the viola and violin. People that play the cello are called cellists. Music for the cello is written in the bass clef for lower notes, which looks like this:

\[ \text{\textbf{F}} \]

The Double Bass

Another bowed string instrument in the string family that is not part of the string quartet is the double bass. This instrument is also called an upright bass or contrabass. Because of its large size, the double bass is played by either sitting on a stool or standing next to the instrument, holding the neck in the left hand and standing it on its end. Like the cello, the double bass has an endpin to help support it and reads music written in the bass clef.

Project #2

For this science or math project, find three containers of different sizes and use them as drums to demonstrate how larger instruments produce a lower sound. You can have the class measure the containers to find the area and perimeter of the base or the volume of the whole container. Then, explain why it is that the larger instruments make deeper sounds.
Composers

Joseph Haydn was an Austrian composer born in 1732 in Rohrau, Austria. He was the second of twelve children. In 1761, Haydn began working for the Esterházy family in Vienna, Austria, and stayed there for thirty years. After leaving the Esterházy family, Haydn made two trips to London in 1791 and 1794. While in London, Haydn wrote many of his best-known symphonies. Haydn is sometimes called the “father” of the string quartet and the symphony because he wrote 67 pieces for the string quartet and over 100 symphonies. He died on May 31, 1809 in Vienna, Austria.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in 1756 in Salzburg, Austria. Like Haydn, Mozart spent most of his life in Austria. Music was a large part of Mozart’s life. His father, Leopold, was a composer and violinist. Wolfgang began composing before he was even five years old. Leopold took Wolfgang and his sister, Nannerl, on many trips around Europe to show off their musical skills. Mozart grew up to become one of the greatest musicians ever, but when he was alive he was not appreciated because he was not afraid to upset people by breaking convention. His music was also thought to be too active. During his life, Mozart wrote 27 pieces for string quartet. On December 4, 1791, Mozart died at the age of thirty-five in Vienna, Austria.

Sergei Prokofiev was born in 1891 in what is now Ukraine but was part of Russia during his life. Prokofiev was a composer, pianist, and conductor. His mother was the most significant person in his musical training. Before he was five years old, she had begun to teach him to play piano. Like Mozart, Prokofiev began composing music at a young age, writing his first piece before he was five. At thirteen, Prokofiev was accepted into the St. Petersburg Conservatory as the youngest student to ever be allowed in. A conservatory is a school that focuses on musical or artistic education. In 1920, Prokofiev moved to Paris and traveled around Europe. Throughout his life, Prokofiev only wrote two works for string quartet. He moved to Moscow, Russia in 1936 and stayed there until he died in 1953.

Bedřich Smetana was a Bohemian composer who was born in 1824. Bohemia is a region of what was known as Czechoslovakia. Now, it is located in the Czech Republic. Smetana was a nationalist, which means he was extremely loyal to his country. Like Mozart and Prokofiev, Smetana began his musical training early in his childhood and had his first performance on piano at the age of six. In 1848, he opened a piano school in Prague in the present-day Czech Republic. Smetana, like Prokofiev, only wrote two string quartets during his life. He died in Prague, Czech Republic on May 12, 1884.
Project #3a
For a geography project, have each of the students locate the birthplaces of each of the composers. Have them note surrounding countries and capitals. If you want to do a more in-depth social studies or English project, have each student choose one of the countries or one of the neighboring countries to read a small book about and do a book report.

Project #3b
For a history/social studies project, have each student pick one of the composers so they can research what was happening during that composer’s life in the world.

Project #3c
Combine #3a and #3b so some students read about the countries and cultures and others read about the events. You could also put people in groups to make the project a bit easier for students. Instead of a book report, you could also have each student/group do a report to the class about what they have learned about their subjects.
String Diagram

- Pegbox
- Neck
- Fingerboard
- Bridge
- F-Holes
- Fine Tuners
- Tailpiece
- Chinrest
**The Parts of the String Instrument**

The instruments in the violin family have two sections: the belly (the larger part of the instrument) and the neck (the skinnier part).

The neck of the string instrument is made up of the scroll, the pegbox, and the fingerboard. The scroll is used to make the instrument prettier. The pegbox has four pegs, which are each attached to one of the four strings. This part of the instrument is used to make sure the notes are in tune. The fingerboard is the place where a player places his or her left hand. You can change the note played by a string by pressing the string against the fingerboard when playing.

The belly of string instruments is the place where the bridge, tailpiece, f-holes, and chinrest or endpin can be found.

**[Ask: Which instruments have a chinrest? Which use an endpin?]**

The f-holes help the string instruments to make a louder sound. The bridge holds the strings up so they can vibrate and produce sound. The tailpiece is where the strings attach. On the tailpiece, there are fine tuners that help to make the notes sound in tune.

**Articulations**

Earlier we saw the terms, *sul tasto, sul ponticello, and col legno*. These three phrases are Italian and are used to describe to a musician how he or she should make a note. The way a note is played is called the articulation.

There are many different ways to play a string instrument. You can play it with the bow in different places or you can even pluck the strings like a guitar. On string instruments, different articulations are written in the music by the composer. *Sul tasto* means the player should play with the bow over the end of the fingerboard. *Sul ponticello* means to play with the bow close to the bridge. There are also other ways to play using the bow. The word *col legno* tells the player to strike the strings with the wooden side of the bow.

Two other articulation styles are *legato* and *staccato*. These two are opposites. *Legato* means “connected” in Italian. It tells a musician to play the music without much space between the notes. *Staccato* in Italian means “separated.” This tells a musician to play the notes with more space between them.

**Project #4**

Here is another project in sound. This time, give each student a piece of string. Have them tape one end to the desk and hold the other in his or her hand. From there, have the students pluck the strings in three different places: the middle, the end closest to the desk, and closer to the end in their hand. Note the different sounds produced each time. Explain to the students about how the sound resonates from the string through the vibrations and how it depends on where the sound starts from as to how it sounds.
The Violin Family

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![Holding the Violin](image)

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![The Viola](image)

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For higher notes, cello music is sometimes written in the tenor clef, which looks a lot like the alto clef except it has been moved up a line on the music staff:

![The Double Bass](image)

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Meet the Strings Quiz

Instructions: Choose the best answer for each question.

1. Which of these instruments is NOT part of the violin family?
   a. Violin
   b. Double Bass
   c. Trumpet
   d. Viola
   e. Cello

2. How many instruments are in a quartet?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. 5

3. Which answer shows the number and types of instruments in the string quartet?
   a. 1 violin, 1 viola, 1 cello, and 1 bass
   b. 4 cellos
   c. 2 violas and 2 basses
   d. 2 violins, 1 viola, and 1 cello
   e. 1 violin, 2 violas, 1 cello, and 1 bass

4. How many strings are on the bowed string instruments used in the orchestra?
   a. 1
   b. 3
   c. 2
   d. 7
   e. 4

5. What is the bow made of?
   a. Wood and Horsehair
   b. Metal and String
   c. Only Plastic
   d. Only Wood
   e. Only Horsehair
6. Where and when was the violin family made?
   a. In the 1900s in the U. S. A.
   b. In seventeenth-century Italy
   c. England in 2000
   d. In eighteenth-century Egypt
   e. In 1850 in Germany

7. What makes a cello different from a violin or viola?
   a. It is larger.
   b. It plays lower notes.
   c. It has an endpin for support.
   d. It is played by setting it upright on its end.
   e. All of the above.

8. Who is called the father of the string quartet?
   a. Beethoven
   b. Mozart
   c. Haydn
   d. Brahms
   e. None of the above

9. Which instrument is the largest member of the violin family?
   a. Violin
   b. Viola
   c. Cello
   d. Bass
   e. Harp

10. Which instrument is the largest member of the string quartet?
    a. Violin
    b. Viola
    c. Cello
    d. Piano
    e. Trombone

11. Which is the smallest instrument in the violin family and string quartet?
    a. Violin
    b. Viola
    c. Cello
    d. Bass
    e. Clarinet
12. Which instrument is the middle voice of the string quartet?
   a. Violin
   b. Viola
   c. Cello
   d. Bass
   e. Flute

13. Which is NOT one of the families of 16th-century Italian string instrument makers?
   a. Guarneri
   b. Violini
   c. Stradivari
   d. Amati

**BONUS:**

**Instructions:** List the string instruments of the orchestra in order from the one that plays the highest notes to the one that plays the lowest notes:
Viola, Cello, Violin, Bass

1. _________________ (Highest)
2. _________________
3. _________________
4. _________________ (Lowest)
Important String Quartet Composers

Instructions: For each clue, write an M for Mozart or H for Haydn in the blank.

___ 1. Called the “father” of the string quartet and the “father” of the symphony.
___ 2. Born in Rohrau, Vienna.
___ 4. Taken on tours by his father around Europe as a child to show off his musical skills.
___ 5. Wrote 67 works for string quartet.
___ 6. Wrote 27 works for string quartet.
___ 7. Worked for the Esterházy family for most of his life.
___ 8. Made two trips to London during his lifetime.
___ 9. His music was thought to be too active.
___ 10. Was the second of twelve children.

Instructions: For each fact, place a P for Prokofiev, an S for Smetana, or a B for both in the blank.

___ 1. Born in Russia.
___ 2. Born in Bohemia.
___ 3. Youngest person to go to St. Petersburg Conservatory.
___ 4. Learned piano from his mother.
___ 5. Had his first piano performance when he was six.
___ 6. Composed his first piece before he was five.
___ 7. Opened a piano school.
___ 8. Was extremely loyal to his country.
___ 9. Was a composer, pianist, and conductor.
___ 10. Wrote two string quartets during his life.
## Vocabulary

### Instructions:
Match the words to their definitions.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>___ 1. sul ponticello</td>
<td>a. Plucking the strings rather than bowing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ 2. sul tasto</td>
<td>b. Violin maker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ 3. col legno</td>
<td>c. Making the sound shake by moving the fingertips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ 4. pizzicato</td>
<td>d. Playing by drawing the bow across the strings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ 5. arco</td>
<td>e. Part of a string instrument that holds the strings up so they can vibrate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ 6. vibrato</td>
<td>f. Play close to the bridge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ 7. bridge</td>
<td>g. Play by striking the strings with the wood part of the bow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ 8. luthier</td>
<td>h. Play with the bow over the end of the fingerboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Label the String Diagram

Instructions: Label the parts of the string instrument.

List of Parts:
- Bridge
- Fingerboard
- Neck
- Pegbox
- F-holes
- Fine tuners
- Belly
- Tailpiece
- Chinrest
**Crossing Strings: Matching**

**Instructions:** Match each person or object on the left with the object on the right that it produces or plays. Answers may be used more than once.

___ 1. Violinist  
___ 2. Luthier  
___ 3. Cellist  
___ 4. Resin  
___ 5. Bassist  
___ 6. Archetier  
___ 7. Violist  

a. Cello  
b. Viola  
c. Violin  
d. Bass  
e. Bow  
f. Rosin
Instructions: Use the map above to help answer the following questions.

1. What continent is this?

2. Locate Austria. Color it blue.

3. What two composers are from Austria?

4. Locate the present-day Czech Republic. Color it green.

5. What larger country was the Czech Republic a part of before it split?

6. What composer is from the present-day Czech Republic?

7. Locate Ukraine. Color it red.

8. What larger country was Ukraine part of before it gained independence?

9. What composer is from present-day Ukraine?
**Synonyms and Translations: Matching**

**Instructions:** Match the word on the left to the word to its synonym or translation on the right.

___ 1. Violin  a. Archetier
___ 2. String instrument maker  b. Pizzicato
___ 3. Bow-maker  c. Col Legno
___ 4. Plucked  d. Contrabass
___ 5. Bow  e. Luthier
___ 6. Separated  f. Legato
___ 7. Connected  g. Violoncello
___ 8. Double Bass  h. Fiddle
___ 9. Cello  i. Arco
___ 10. With the wood  j. Staccato
Activity Pages
**Musical Mystery: Graph**

**Instructions:** Fill in the chart as the key says. Then answer questions about the musical symbol that appears.

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**Key:**
- F7, G15, H5, H11, I4, I12
- G1, H2, H10, I3, I8
- E8-E11, F9, F10, F12, G2-G14, H8, H12, I9-I11
- E12, F11, F15, H3
- E7, F6, F8, H4

**Questions:**

1. What is this symbol?
2. Which instrument(s) in the string quartet play music using this symbol?
Strings Crossword

Instructions: Use the clues at the bottom to find the words to fill in the squares.

Across
1) The clef violins play in.
3) Used to help bow hairs grip the strings
5) Second largest string instrument
7) The clef the viola plays in.
8) Second smallest string instrument
9) Object used to vibrate the strings.
10) Style of playing the strings by plucking with the fingers.
11) Part that makes sound by vibrating

Down
1) The clef cellos play in when playing higher notes.
2) Treble ______.
4) Smallest of the string instruments
6) Larger group, in which the string family can be found
9) The clef basses play in.
12) Playing more than one string
**Twisted Strings: Word Scramble**

**Instructions:** Unscramble each of the words. Put the letters with numbers beneath them in order to answer the bonus.

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**Bonus:** A person that makes bows for string instruments is called a(n)
Meet the Strings Word Search

**Instructions:** Find and circle the words at the bottom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alto</th>
<th>Pizzicato</th>
<th>Vibrations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arco</td>
<td>Resin</td>
<td>Viola</td>
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<td>Bass</td>
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<td>Cello</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
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<td>Clef</td>
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</table>
String Me Up: Connect-the-Dots

Instructions: Connect the dots in order from 1 to 50.
Maze 1

Instructions: Help the violin find its bow.
Maze 2

Instructions: Help the cellist find her instrument
Maze 3

Instructions:  Help Haydn get back to Austria.
Coloring and Handwriting Pages
V v

Violin

V v
B b

Bass Clef

b b
Name:
Date:

T t

Treble Clef

t t
Music

M m m

m m
Answer Key
Meet the Strings Quiz

Bonus: Violin, Viola, Cello, Bass

Important String Quartet Composers

Haydn and Mozart
Prokofiev and Smetana

Vocabulary


Label the String Diagram


Crossing Strings


Origins


Synonyms and Translations:

Matching

Musical Mystery

Strings Crossword

Twisted Strings

Meet the Strings Word Search

String Me Up

Mazes

Maze 1

Maze 2

Maze 3
Bibliography

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Britannica.com for information on Smetana.
Classical.net for information on Haydn.
Disney, Sleeping Beauty. For the picture of the lute.
Forney, Kristine and Joseph Machlis, The Enjoyment of Music, W. W. Norton Company & Inc. For information on composers and the string quartet.
Prokofiev.org
Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, for information about each of the composers, instruments, and the string quartet.

Cover Art: The Strings by Joshua M. Tims