

Freedom HOMESCHOOLER



COMPOSER *Unit Study*

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WELCOME TO YOUR COMPOSER STUDY!

Music is one of the great storytelling languages of humanity. Long before recordings or movies existed, composers used sound to paint pictures, express emotions, celebrate cultures, and share the stories of their time. In this family-style unit study, we will travel across countries, centuries, and artistic movements as we meet composers whose music still shapes the world today.

Each lesson invites your family to step into a different place and time — from the churches of Germany with **Johann Sebastian Bach**, to the elegant concert halls of Austria with **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**, the powerful emotional world of **Ludwig van Beethoven**, the storytelling ballets of **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**, the dreamlike soundscapes of **Claude Debussy**, and the wide-open American landscapes captured by **Aaron Copland**.

This study is designed for **learning together as a family**, allowing children of different ages to experience the same music while engaging at their own developmental level. Through listening, geography, living books, art, and hands-on activities, students will discover that music connects history, culture, creativity, and emotion.

Rather than memorizing facts alone, your family will:

- Listen deeply to beautiful music
- Explore the countries where composers lived
- Create art inspired by sound
- Move, play, and experiment with music together
- Build meaningful connections across subjects

Music becomes richer when it is experienced — not just studied. Allow curiosity to guide conversations, encourage questions, and revisit favorite pieces often. Over time, these composers will begin to feel like familiar friends whose music tells stories without words.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

(BAROQUE ERA)

Bach was a German composer known for intricate musical patterns and deeply structured compositions. Much of his music was written for church services.

Geography Study

Locate on a map **Germany** (home country), **Eisenach** (birthplace, childhood home), and **Leipzig** (where he worked, taught, and composed many major works).

Food from the area: pretzels, rye bread, sausages, apple cake, hot cocoa.

Bach traveled between German towns for church & music positions. Trace routes from Eisenach to Leipzig.

Hands-On - Create a Germany salt dough map, print a blank map of Germany, label cities, color neighboring countries.

Biography <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Johann-Sebastian-Bach/352813>

Listening

- Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLj_gMBqHX8
- Toccata and Fugue in D Minor <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nnuq9PXbywA>

Living Book Suggestions

- Bach and the Pipe Organ — Paul Galdone
- Getting to Know the World's Greatest Composers: Bach — Mike Venezia
- The Story of the Orchestra — Robert Levine

Art Lesson — Baroque Symmetry Art

Bach lived during the **Baroque period**, when both music and art were detailed, ornate, structured & full of patterns. Baroque art often included swirls, gold decoration, symmetry & dramatic design. Reference artist Johann Michael Rottmayr to see symmetry, layering & intricate design.

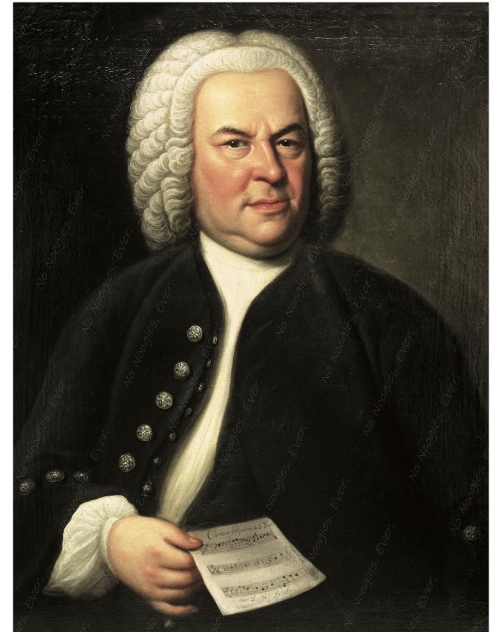
Project: Fold paper in half. Paint one side. Press and open to reveal symmetry. Older learners: design ornate Baroque patterns using gold accents. Complete the project as is, or do a second layer of paint in another color once dry to connect to the layers in Bach's music.

Interactive Activity - Build a Human Canon (Round Song Game)

Bach loved musical structure, layering, and patterns. This activity helps children feel how parts of music can overlap beautifully.

How to Do It: Choose a simple song everyone knows (even nursery rhymes). Divide family members into 2–3 groups. Group 1 starts singing. After one line, Group 2 begins at the start. If enough people, Group 3 joins later. Listen to how the melodies layer together. Younger children can repeat motions: clap, stomp, snap, pat knees, etc. Start one group, then layer the next group. Afterward discuss: Could you still hear your own part?, Why was timing important?, How is this like teamwork? Why might Bach enjoy music like this?

“Bach built music like an architect builds a cathedral — one beautiful layer at a time.”



Biography



Listen to Brandenburg Concerto No. 3



Listen to Toccata and Fugue in D Minor



WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(CLASSICAL ERA)

Mozart was a musical prodigy who composed hundreds of works before age 35.

Geography Study

Locate on a map **Austria** (home country & birthplace nation), **Salzburg** (birthplace, childhood home) & **Vienna** (where he worked & composed major works)

Compare the Alps Mountains to U.S. mountain ranges.
Food from the area: schnitzel, pretzels, apple strudel & hot chocolate

Hands on - Create Salt Dough Alps, Print out a blank map of Austria and label & color Austria & neighboring countries

Biography <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyB4-6g-Vbg>

Listening

- Eine kleine Nachtmusik https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1FSN8_pp_o

Living Book Suggestions

- Mozart — Demi
- The Magic Flute (children's retelling)
- Getting to Know Mozart — Mike Venezia

Art Lesson - Mozart-Era Portrait Art

Connection: Mozart lived in a time of elegance and beauty. Rococo art was light & graceful, pastel-colored, decorative & fancy. His music sounds are balanced, playful & refined.

Project:

Start by looking at Mozart Portraits. Notice hairstyle, clothing, colors, expression & background. Create Portrait - Paint Mozart, yourself or a family member in Mozart's time. Add optional decorative details such as lace collars, gold borders, drawn curtains, music notes, etc. Then frame it! Reference artist Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun to see her elegant portraits of nobility & children.

Interactive Activity:

Create a family orchestra using household objects and compose a short piece.

"Mozart's music dances like sunlight through palace windows — bright, graceful, and full of joy."



Biography



Listen to Eine kleine Nachtmusik



Listen to Symphony No. 9



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(CLASSICAL, ROMANTIC)

Ludwig van Beethoven expanded music's emotional power and continued composing after losing his hearing.

Geography Study

Locate on a map **Germany** (birth nation), **Bonn** (birthplace), **Austria**, and **Vienna** (where he became famous and composed many major works).

Compare the Danube River to major U.S. rivers like the Mississippi.

Food from the area: breads, sausages, potato dishes, pastries. Beethoven moved from Bonn to Vienna. Trace his travel route across Europe.

Hands-On: Create a travel line map from Bonn to Vienna, print blank maps of Germany and Austria, label both cities.

Biography <https://www.ducksters.com/biography/beethoven.php>

Listening

- Symphony No. 5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOk8Tm815IE>
- Moonlight Sonata <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TrootuiQuU>

Living Book Suggestions

- Beethoven Lives Upstairs — Barbara Nichol
- The Heroic Symphony — Anna Harwell Celenza
- Getting to Know Beethoven — Mike Venezia

Art Lesson — Emotion Through Color

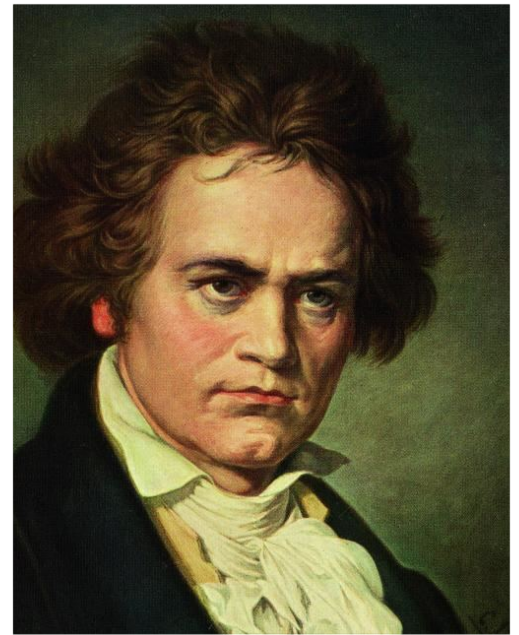
Beethoven helped move music into the **Romantic era**, where art focused on: strong emotions, drama, nature & individuality. Paintings from this time often show storms, powerful landscapes & intense feeling. His music expresses, struggle, triumph & deep emotion.

Project: Paint emotions while listening to music. No drawing objects. Only colors and movement to feel the emotion. Reference artist Caspar David Friedrich whose art focused on movement & nature.

Interactive Activity

Compose music while wearing ear protection to experience Beethoven's **hearing loss challenge**. Use earmuffs, earplugs, hands over ears, etc) then try to create rhythm or melody. Next, **feel the vibration** by playing music with strong bass on a table. Ask children to place hands on the piano, speaker, table, drum, floor, etc. Beethoven used vibration and physical sensation to help experience sound.

“Beethoven turned struggle into thunder and hope into song.”



Biography



Listen to
Symphony No. 5



Listen to
Moonlight Sonata



PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

(ROMANTIC ERA)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky composed famous ballet music full of storytelling and drama.

Geography Study

Locate on a map **Russia** (home country), **Votkinsk** (birthplace), **Moscow**, and **Saint Petersburg** (major music centers).

Compare the size of Russia to the United States.

Food from the area: tea, black bread, dumplings, soup, pastries.

Trace routes between Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and discuss long-distance travel in Russia.

Hands-On: Create a climate map of Russia, print a blank Russia map and label cities, color Europe/Asia sections.

Biography <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pyotr-Ilyich-Tchaikovsky>

Listening

Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdduPpnqre4>

Nutcracker Suite: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8J8urC_8Jw

Living Book Suggestions

- *The Nutcracker* (illustrated editions)
- Tchaikovsky Discovers America — Anna Harwell Celenza
- Getting to Know Tchaikovsky — Mike Venezia

Art Lesson - Ballet Movement Drawing

Tchaikovsky wrote music for **ballets**, which combine: music, dance, storytelling & visual art.

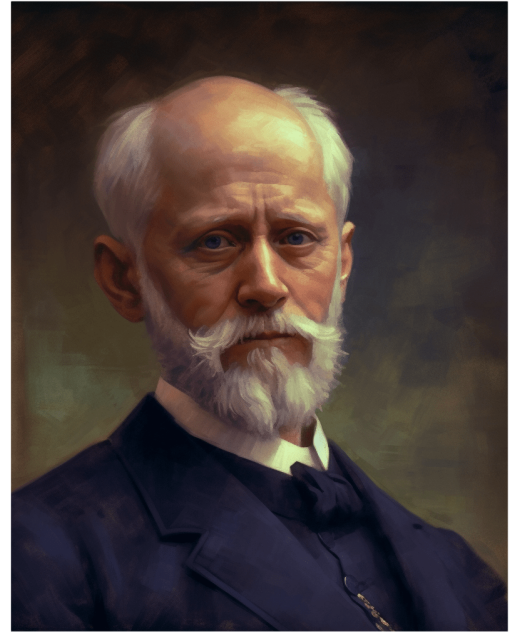
Reference artist Edgar Degas who painted dancers in motion. Tchaikovsky's music tells stories, creates movement & feels graceful & dramatic. See samples of Degas' work here: <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/edgar-degas-beautiful-ballerinas/>.

Project: Watch ballet clips or put on the Nutcracker / Swan Lake for inspiration & sketch dancers using quick lines. Focus on motion in your art instead of detail. Younger learners can draw stick figures dancing, add flowing dresses, ribbons, etc. Older learners draw simple dancer forms (oval head, lines for limbs) - try making bent arms or jumping posts. Once sketch is complete, use watercolor paint to bring it to life.

Interactive Activity

Create a short ballet performance together using scarves or ribbons to Tchaikovsky's music.

"Tchaikovsky wove stories into music, where every note could leap, twirl, and dream."



Biography



Listen to the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy



Listen to the Nutcracker Suite



Artist Edgar Degas Dancers in Motion



CLAUDE DEBUSSY

(IMPRESSIONISM)

Claude Debussy created music inspired by light, water, & atmosphere.

Geography Study

Locate on a map **France** (home country), **Paris** (where he studied and worked), and the Seine River.

Food from the area: baguette, cheese, pastries, hot chocolate.

Hands-On: Recreate the Seine River flowing through Paris using art materials. Draw or print a simple map of France. Use blue watercolor, yarn, or ribbon to create the river. Mark Paris along the river.

Biography <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Claude-Debussy>

Listening

Clair de Lune: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvFH_6DNRCY

La Mer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOCucJw7iT8>

Living Book Suggestions

- Getting to Know Debussy — Mike Venezia
- Clair de Lune illustrated editions
- Impressionist art picture books

Art Lesson - Impressionist Watercolor

Debussy's music matches Impressionist art. Impressionist artists painted light, water, atmosphere & quick moments. Debussy's music feels dreamy, suggests images & doesn't follow strict structure.

Project: Paint the Ocean inspired by Debussy's piece *La Mer*. Create an abstract ocean painting. Techniques: layer blues and greens, use horizontal brush strokes, add white for waves & tilt paper to let paint flow. Add: Salt for texture = wave foam effect. Reference artist **Claude Monet** for reference on painting light, water & atmosphere.

Interactive Activity

"Debussy didn't tell stories with music, he created feelings & pictures in your mind. Listen & imagine." Dim the lights slightly. Sit or lie comfortably & close your eyes. Play: *Clair de Lune* (calm, dreamy) or *La Mer* (flowing, ocean-like). Ask children to listen & imagine pictures in their mind. After the music ends, ask: "What did you picture?", "Did you see water, sky, light, or something else?", "What colors did it feel like?" Now try it with movement. Play the music again. This time, move slowly, use scarves or ribbons if available, sway, or glide. Talk about how it made you feel.

"Debussy painted with sound, using moonlight, water, and wind instead of brushes."



Biography



Listen to Clare de Lune



Listen to La Mer



AARON COPLAND

(AMERICAN COMPOSER)

Aaron Copland developed a musical sound that captured the feeling of American landscapes.

Geography Study

Locate on a map **United States**, **New York City** (birthplace), and the **Appalachian Mountains** (inspiration for Appalachian Spring).

Food from the area: cornbread, apples, stew, biscuits.

Hands-On: Create a 3D map of U.S. regions that inspired Copland's music. His music often reflects wide open spaces & natural landforms. Include: Appalachian Mountains, plains (Midwest), deserts (Southwest) & some major rivers. Materials: clay / salt dough, cardboard base & paint.

Biography <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aaron-Copland>

Listening

Appalachian Spring: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8e3rVcSy3lQ>

Rodeo - Hoe-Down: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsReWx9XdNs>

Living Book Suggestions

- Aaron Copland biographies for young readers
- American folk music books
- Picture books about pioneer life

Art Lesson - American Landscape Painting

Copland's music reflects **American life and land**. Art of his time often showed farms, open land, small towns & wide skies. His music sounds open, spacious, simple and strong.

Project: Paint wide landscapes while listening to Copland's music. Think big skies, rolling hills & farms. Reference artist **Grant Wood** to see his paintings of rural American life.

Interactive Activity

Learn a simple square dance or folk dance. You can use YouTube to search for one or start with a simple 'Circle Dance'. Play Copland while doing this. Start by standing in a circle. Step side to side slowly. Clap on rhythm & turn in a circle together. Older learners can add patterns (step, step, clap & change directions). Another idea is to create your own folk dance by matching movements to musical changes.

"Though they lived in different times and lands, each composer teaches us that beauty can be heard as well as seen."



Biography



Listen to
Appalachian Spring



Listen to
Rodeo - Hoe Down



THE MUSIC CONTINUES

As your family finishes this composer study, you have traveled through hundreds of years of history and across continents without ever leaving home. You have listened to music written for kings and churches, ballets and celebrations, quiet reflections and wide-open landscapes. Along the way, you discovered that composers were not distant historical figures, but real people who felt joy, struggle, wonder, and hope, just as we do today.

Music study is not meant to end with the final lesson. The goal is to cultivate **lifelong listeners**, people who recognize music as a source of beauty, creativity, and connection. Perhaps your family now notices instruments more easily, hears emotion within melodies, or feels inspired to create music and art of your own.

Consider revisiting favorite composers throughout the year, playing their music during meals, art time, or quiet afternoons. Attend a local concert if possible, explore new composers, or allow children to follow the musical styles they loved most.

The greatest gift of studying composers together is not simply knowledge gained, but shared experiences, moments of listening, creating, laughing, and discovering as a family.

MUSIC HAS A REMARKABLE WAY OF STAYING WITH US.
LONG AFTER LESSONS END, MELODIES LINGER, MEMORIES
REMAIN, & CURIOSITY CONTINUES TO GROW. IN THAT WAY,
THE MUSIC NEVER TRULY STOPS.



COMPOSER STUDY REFLECTION

LISTENING

- Which composer's music did you enjoy the most? Why?
- Was there a piece of music that made you feel strong emotions? What did you feel?
- Which music helped you imagine pictures or stories in your mind?

Younger learners can draw a picture of how your favorite music sounded or felt.

GEOGRAPHY

- Which country or place was most interesting to learn about?
- How did geography seem to influence the music?
- What places would you like to visit someday because of this study?

CREATIVITY

- Which art project did you enjoy most?
- How did music change the way you created art?
- Did listening to music make creating easier or different?

Display favorite artwork from the study and talk about it as a family gallery.

COMPOSER CONNECTIONS

Think about the composers we met:

- Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Claude Debussy & Aaron Copland

Questions to discuss:

- Which composer's life story inspired you most?
- Which composer overcame challenges?
- Which composer's music sounded most different from the others?

DISCUSSION

- What did we learn about music that we didn't know before?
- How is music connected to history, art, and geography?
- When did we enjoy learning together the most?

MUSIC LEARNING DOES NOT END HERE

- What instruments would you like to learn about or try?
- What kind of music do you want to explore next?
- How can we keep music part of our daily life?

Ideas:

- Play classical music during meals or art time.
- Attend a live concert or community performance.
- Continue a monthly composer study.

FINAL THOUGHT

Music is a language shared across time and cultures. Every composer we studied added their voice to a larger story — and now, through listening and creating together, we have become part of that story too.