

---

---

# BERLIOZ THE BEAR

Author: Jan Brett

Publisher: Putnam

## THEME:

The rhythm and energy of music draws people.

## PROGRAM SUMMARY:

Berlioz the bear and his fellow musicians are due to play for the town ball when their bandwagon becomes stuck in a hole in the road. The surprise that saves the day is the strange buzzing in Berlioz's instrument.

LeVar goes on a musicians who call the streets their stage. Viewers go behind the scenes at The Boys Choir of Harlem and visit with the boys and their director. Viewers learn that the rhythm and energy of music draws people together.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Invite students to share experiences in which they have had to perform, e.g., a music or dance recital, a play, an athletic event, etc. Discuss feelings they had both before and after the performance.

Ask the students, "Where do people sing?" Have them think about where they enjoy singing as well as different places that family members and friends sing. Discuss why people like to sing.

*Berlioz the Bear* is a good example of a problem-solution story. Revisit the story with a copy of the book and have students identify the problem. Discuss the solutions tried by the different animals and why they didn't work. Why was the final solution successful?

## CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Obtain some rhythm instruments and have students experiment with the sounds they make. Use the instruments to accompany the oral reading of poetry or stories or the singing of familiar songs.

Provide a variety of materials that students may use to make musical instruments. Possible materials include boxes of different shapes and sizes, rubber bands, paper cups, tin cans, string, aluminum foil, small blocks of wood, combs, etc. When the instruments are finished, allow opportunities for students to demonstrate how they are played.

Brainstorm a list of animals that make "music" with their sounds. If students need help getting started, suggest crickets, grasshoppers, birds, or coyotes. Listen to a tape of animal sounds and discuss how they are "musical."

Invite older brothers and sisters or other family members of students who play musical instruments into the classroom to demonstrate how to play. Ask the visitors why they chose their particular instruments and what was required in order to play proficiently.

Before viewing the program, make a list of sounds students expect to hear in the city. After watching, add other sounds to the list. Contrast these sounds with those the students might expect to hear in a rural area. Discuss how the sounds are made, i.e., by people (including mechanical means) or in nature.

Obtain some recordings of music by the French composer Hector Berlioz to play for the students. (Jan Brett says that her favorite piece by Berlioz is "The Hungarian March.") Another classical selection to enjoy with students as an accompaniment to this story is the music Berlioz the bear played at the end of the book, "The Flight of the Bumblebee" by Rimski-Korsakov.

Explore other books written and/or illustrated by Jan Brett with the class. Jan uses borders around her illustrations to enhance the stories. Quite often these borders contain a related or parallel story. Discuss with students the story that is taking place in the borders of *Berlioz the Bear*. Books by Jan Brett that contain borders include: *The Mitten*, *The Trouble with Trolls*, *The Owl and the Pussycat*, *Armadillo Rodeo*, *Annie and the Wild Animals*, *Town Mouse*, *Country Mouse*, and others.

Invite students to set up a display of stuffed bears in the classrooms. Have each student make a name tag for her/his bear, that includes the following information: My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I belong to \_\_\_\_\_. Allow students to introduce their bears to the class and tell interesting details, such as how long they have had the bear, who gave it to them, etc.

Have students research different types of bears. Provide paper cut in the shape of bear's head for them to record information they learn. Bind the pages into a "Bear Facts" book for the classroom library.

Jan Brett has drawn bears in other books she has illustrated, e.g., *The Valentine Bears* by Eve Bunting, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, *The Mitten*. Obtain copies of those books and have students compare the depiction of those bears to Berlioz. What similarities and differences do they notice between Jan's other bears and the bear modeled after her husband Joe.

Share the following information from Jan Brett about the creation of *Berlioz the Bear* with the students. The character of Berlioz is based on Jan's husband Joe, a double bass player with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. While she was watching an outdoor concert, she wondered what kind of animal might fit in the bass. After the concert when all the musicians were talking about their instruments, she asked Joe if his bass was ever affected by the weather. He told her that sometimes the wood dried out and made a buzzing

---

sound. From that moment, Jan knew what creature would live in the bass in her story. To make Joe into Berlioz, she drew his face, lengthened his nose and added a bear nose tip. Then she moved his ears up and made them round. Last of all, she covered him with thick fur. To make the rest of Berlioz's band, she used five other members of the Boston Symphony as models. Jan and Joe traveled to Bavaria so she could research the setting, Berlioz's band-wagon, and the costumes for the story.

**RELATED THEMES:**

music appreciation  
teddy bears

**RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:**

Program #15 — Ty's One-Man Band  
Program #127 — Hip Cat  
Program #30 — Mama Don't Allow  
Program #125 — Zin! Zin! Zin! A Violin

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Jan Brett is an enormously popular author and illustrator whose highly detailed illustrations have garnered many awards. She has stated that a children's book illustrator is all that she ever wanted to be. In addition to *Berlioz the Bear*, she also wrote and illustrated *The First Dog*, a **Reading Rainbow** review book. She and her husband Joe live in Massachusetts.

**BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:**

GEORGIA MUSIC  
by Helen V. Griffith, illus. by James Stevenson (William Morrow)

THE SCIENCE BOOK OF SOUND  
by Neil Ardley (Harcourt Brace)

INTRODUCTION TO MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS SERIES: BRASS/PERCUSSION/STRINGS/WOODWINDS  
by Dee Lillegard (Children's Press)

**SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:**

MUSIC CRAFTS FOR KIDS: THE HOW-TO BOOK OF MUSIC DISCOVERY  
by Noel and Phyllis Fiarotta (Sterling)

WHAT INSTRUMENT IS THIS?  
by Rosmarie Hausherr (Scholastic)

THE CAT'S MIDSUMMER JAMBOREE  
by David Kherdian and Nonny Hogrogian (Philomel)

A VERY YOUNG MUSICIAN  
by Jill Krementz (Simon & Schuster)

THE PHILHARMONIC GETS DRESSED  
by Karla Kuskin, illus. by Marc Simont (HarperCollins)

NICHOLAS CRICKET  
by Joyce Maxner, illus. by William Joyce (HarperCollins)

MAKING INSTRUMENTS: 6 INSTRUMENTS YOU CAN CREATE  
by Eddie H. Oates, illus. by Michael Koelsch (HarperCollins)

MAX FOUND TWO STICKS  
by Brian Pinkney (Simon & Schuster)

MUSIC, MUSIC FOR EVERYONE  
by Vera B. Williams (Greenwillow)

