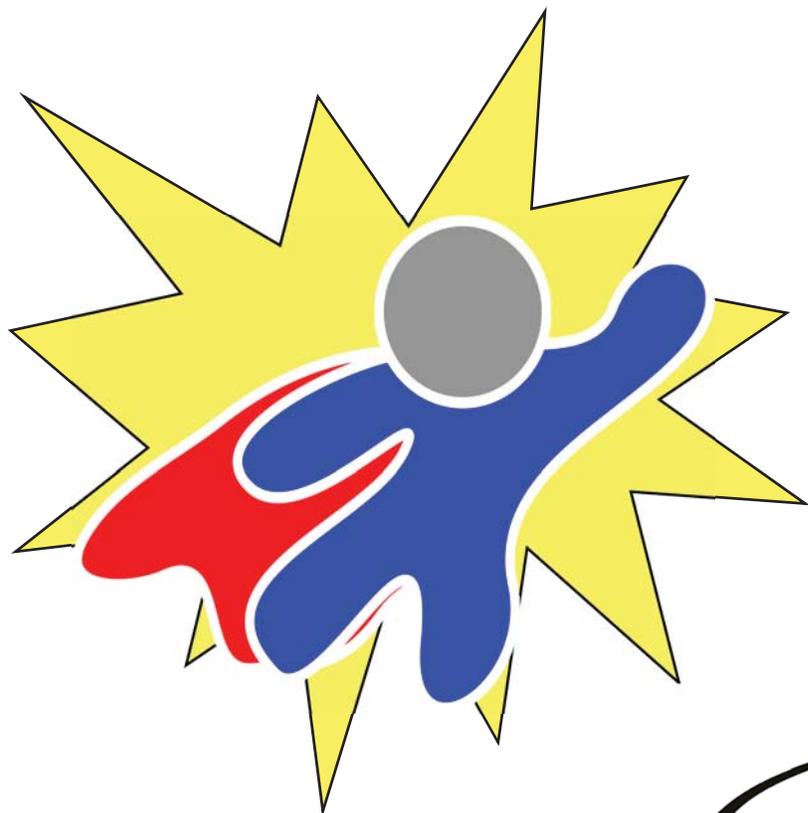


SUPERMAN THEME

Composed by John Williams (b. 1932)



The *Superman Theme* was originally composed for the opening and closing credits of the first *Superman* film released in 1978. He composed this music as his fame grew due to the recent releases of *Jaws* and *Star Wars*. The way he uses a leitmotif perfectly represents the characters. The lesson plan below explores how this music establishes a character, specifically that of a hero, and the mood of the film.



John Williams was born in Flushing, New York in 1932. He has received 50 nominations for Academy Awards and 67 nominations for Grammy Awards. Williams began writing for film and television early in his career, after studying at the Juilliard School for piano performance. In addition to composing the score for the *Superman* films, Williams also composed for the first three *Harry Potter* films, the first two *Jurassic Park* films, *Jaws*, and *Star Wars*, among many others.



Mood, Motifs, and More!

Superman Theme Lesson Plan

Materials Needed:

- White Board
- Dry Erase Markers
- Recording of “Superman Theme” by John Williams - [Click here to listen to the Superman Theme on YouTube](#)
- Printouts of listening activity
- Pencils
- Crayons (if using the listening glyph)

Main Objectives – Students will be able to:

- Identify John Williams as the composer of *Superman Theme* and some of his other works.
- Identify the musical elements within *Superman Theme* and how they impact the mood of the piece.

Music State Standard Benchmarks addressed:

- MU.4.C.1.2 Describe, using correct music vocabulary, what is heard in a specific musical work.
- MU.4.C.1.4 Classify orchestral and ban instruments as strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion, or keyboard.
- MU.4.O.3.1 Identify how expressive elements and lyrics affect the mood or emotion of a song.
- MU.5.C.1.2 Hypothesize and discuss, using correct music vocabulary, the composer’s intent for a specific musical work.
- MU.5.C.1.3 Identify, aurally, selected instruments of the band and orchestra.
- MU.5.O.3.1 Examine and explain how expressive elements, when used in a selected musical work, affect personal response

Essential Questions:

- What makes someone a superhero?
- How does a composer use music to represent a character?
- What is a motif?
- What do you envision when you listen to this piece?

Factual Knowledge – Students will be familiar with John Williams and some of his famous works.

Procedural Knowledge – Students will be able to identify, using correct musical vocabulary, different musical elements and instrumentation within a piece of music.

Conceptual Knowledge – Students will understand that the elements within a piece of music affect the mood and can be used to represent characters.



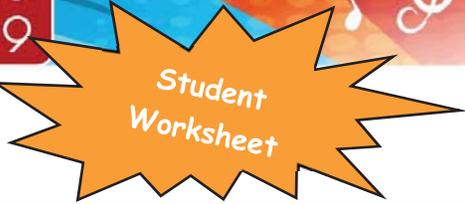
<p>Introduction</p>	<p>Attention Getter: Ask students to sing the themes from some of John Williams’ most popular works, i.e. Star Wars, Harry Potter, Jaws, etc. Use their knowledge of these film scores to introduce John Williams. Some suggested pieces of information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Born in New York • Attended Julliard • Worked as a jazz pianist before getting into TV and film composing • Has written the music for over 100 films <p>For older students, you can use this conversation to introduce the concept of “motif.” John Williams’ music is iconic because of his ability to embody the spirit of a film within a simple motif. Teacher should utilize any of their normal teaching practices throughout each segment of this lesson.</p>
<p>Instruction (“I do” – teacher models)</p>	<p>Facilitate a “word splash” activity with your students. Using a white board, ask students what characteristics a superhero might have, writing the words randomly on the board. Some words they may come up with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bold • Brave • Courageous • Daring • Fearless • Strong • Trustworthy • Reliable <p>Next, choose one word from the list to demonstrate the next portion of the activity. For example, I choose the word “daring.” Ask students to think about how a composer can make his music sound daring. Prompt them using musical vocabulary such as dynamics, tempo, instrumentation, etc. In order to make his music sound daring, John Williams might use a louder dynamic such as forte or fortissimo.</p>



<p>Guided Practice ("We do" – shared practice teacher and students)</p>	<p>Break students into smaller groups of 2-3. Give each group a word from the word splash. Give them a few minutes to discuss in their group what a composer might need to do in order to embody that characteristic in his music. Some examples of things your students might say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The composer might use brass instruments to represent a strong character. • The composer can increase the tempo to create excitement. • The composer can write a smooth, flowing melody to make the music calm. <p>Monitor discussions, listen for students to use specific musical vocabulary to describe their ideas. Allow groups to share out their ideas and give feedback on others ideas.</p>
<p>Independent Practice ("You do")</p>	<p>For this portion of the activity, you can explain that you will be listening to one of John Williams' compositions, the <i>Superman Theme</i>. Start by handing out your choice of listening activity, either the SQUILT or the listening glyph. If using the SQUILT, depending on your students' knowledge of musical elements, you may want to use the activity with question prompts to guide your students.</p> <p>Listen through <i>Superman Theme</i> one time, having students just listen. Have them listen for any repeated theme that they hear (the motif). On their second listen through, have students complete the listening activity of your choice. Both activities require students to actively listen for specific musical elements. You may need to give students some time after listening to complete their activities. Once they are finished, have them compare their responses with a shoulder partner.</p> <p>Go over the listening activity as a group. Allow students to share out their answers. When talking about the mood, prompt students to talk about which specific elements affected the mood. For example, if they think the music was joyful, they may say that it was due to a quick tempo. It is essential that students understand that composers are very intentional with their choices.</p>

Extension:

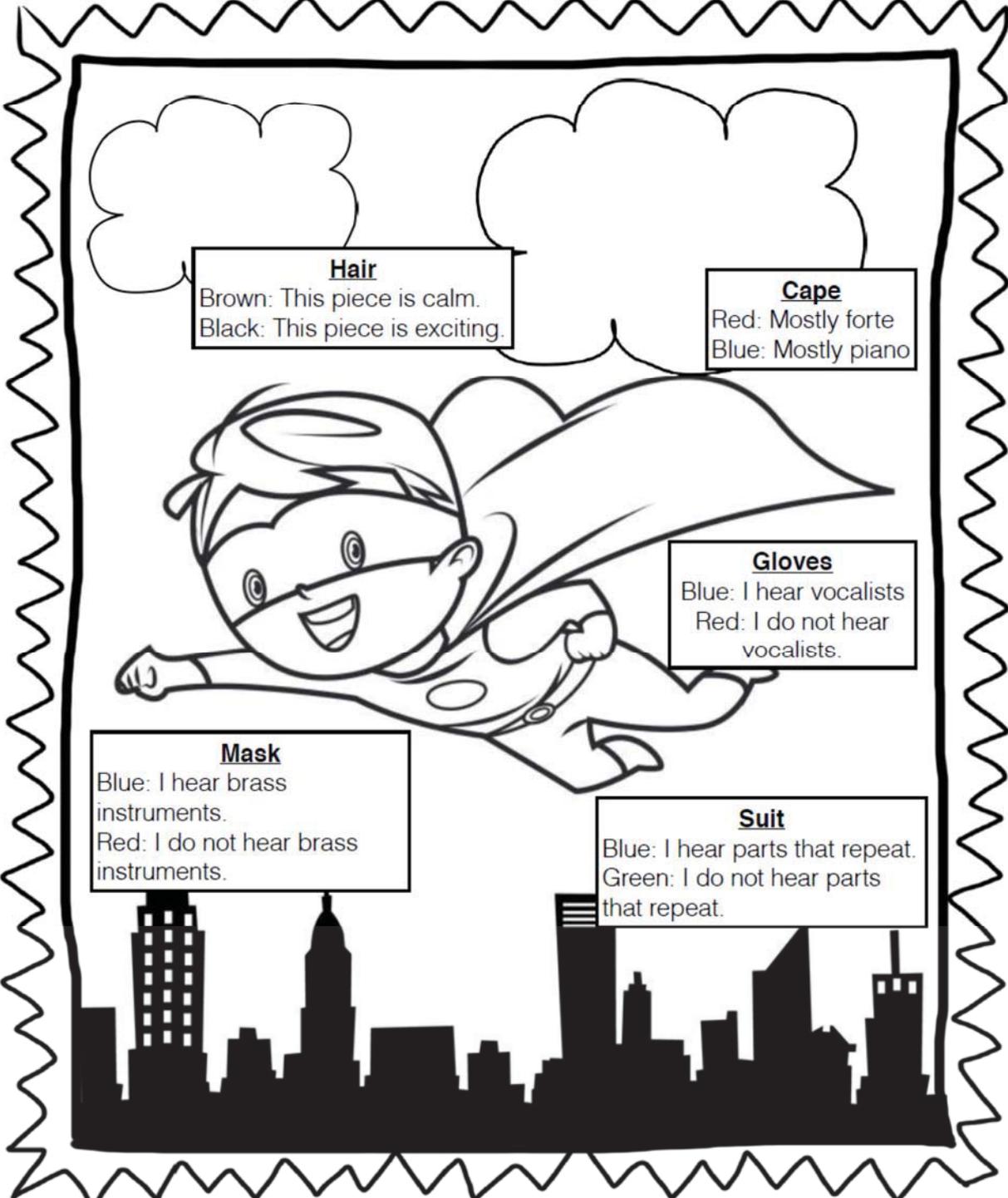
- You can use the SQUILT activity, found on page 5 and 6, for some of John Williams' other works. Choose another film score, have students complete the SQUILT. Then, have students create a venn diagram comparing the music of *Superman Theme* to whichever composition you chose. When discussing the differences between them, ask students why they think those particular elements are different. Was he representing a certain character? Was he trying to evoke a different mood or feeling?



Name _____

John Williams' "Superman Theme"

Directions: Listen to the piece of music. Color your picture using the keys. Anything left over can be colored any color.



Hair
Brown: This piece is calm.
Black: This piece is exciting.

Cape
Red: Mostly forte
Blue: Mostly piano

Gloves
Blue: I hear vocalists
Red: I do not hear vocalists.

Mask
Blue: I hear brass instruments.
Red: I do not hear brass instruments.

Suit
Blue: I hear parts that repeat.
Green: I do not hear parts that repeat.