

Little Stories of Great Composers

# THAT'S MY PIANO, SIR!

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Story Ana Gerhard Illustrations Marie Lafrance  
Musical Recordings I Musici de Montréal  
Narration Colm Feore



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## TEACHING GUIDE

Grades 1 & 2

**Themes:** Classical music, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, mouse, history, travel, port, Europe, piano, violin, power of music.



## PEDAGOGICAL INTERESTS

- *That's My Piano, Sir!* is part of the Little Stories of Great Composers series, a collection of musical books that allow students to discover the great names of classical music, including Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Vivaldi, Schubert, Paganini, and Hadyn.
- In *That's My Piano, Sir!* readers travel back in time and meet Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart as they follow a charming little mouse named Minim, who is fond of cheese and music.
- The story takes place in an Austrian port, at the time when Mozart was a young composer. Marie Lafrance's illustrations provide visual clues of time and place through clothing, scenery, objects, instruments, and means of transportation.
- The different topics covered in *That's My Piano, Sir!* are relevant for several school subjects, including English, music, social studies, drama, and history.
- The simple and accessible story is written by Ana Gerhard, a concert pianist. She received the prestigious Parents' Choice Gold Award in the United States for a collection of musical books that introduce children to classical music.
- Narrated by renowned actor Colm Feore, the audio version of the story adds an oral and theatrical element to the reading experience.
- Accompanying music performed by the I Musici de Montréal orchestra allows readers to discover a classical composition from the 18th-century.





## BEFORE READING

With your students, read the title and study the front-cover illustration. Then make predictions about the story.

**What is the book about?**

**Who are the main characters?**

**When does the story take place?**

Explain to students that they will be traveling back in time to meet Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, then give them the following reading intention:

**Read this story to learn more about this great composer.**

The book and companion album include:

- An illustrated story followed by explanatory notes on Mozart and his work
- The audio version of the tale narrated by Colm Feore and a recording of Mozart's composition A Little Night Music ("Eine Kleine Nachtmusik") by I Musici de Montréal

# DURING THE READING

Ask your students the following questions to support their understanding of the story.



<b>Pages 1-2</b>	<b>Who is telling the story?</b>  The story is told by a mouse named Minim.
<b>Pages 3-4</b>	<b>How do the port workers feel at the beginning of the story?</b> <b>Explain your answer.</b>  They are in a bad mood because of the cold weather and the fact that they will not be home in time for dinner due to the delay of the boat.
<b>Pages 5-6</b>	<b>Why do the visitors have to go through customs?</b>  They have to go through customs because they are entering a new country.  <b>What does this tell us about the passengers on the ship?</b>  We learn that they probably made a long journey to get to this destination.
<b>Pages 7-8</b>	<b>Can you describe one of Minim's character traits?</b> <b>Explain your answer.</b>  Open to the students. For example: "I think it may be a musical instrument, such as a piano, because the title of the story is <i>That's My Piano, Sir!</i> ".



<p><b>Pages 9-10</b></p>	<p><b>What do you think is inside the crate?</b></p> <p>Open to the students. For example: “I think it may be a musical instrument, such as a piano, because the title of the story is <i>That’s My Piano, Sir!</i>”.</p>
<p><b>Pages 11-12</b></p>	<p><b>What does the phrase “losses his footing” mean?</b></p> <p>To lose your balance and slip, trip, and /or fall from your feet.</p>
<p><b>Pages 13-14</b></p>	<p><b>Can you describe the boy who walks over to the crate?</b></p> <p>He is young. He looks like a character from a fairy tale because he wears a white wig and a red velvet suit.</p> <p><b>In your opinion, why are the boy’s clothes are different from those of the other passengers and port workers? Explain your answer.</b></p> <p>In my opinion, the boy has come to Vienna to perform concerts for important people. That’s why he is dressed so elegantly.</p> <p><b>What do you think is inside the intriguing little case he is holding?</b></p> <p>Open to the students. For example: “I think it’s a violin.”</p>
<p><b>Pages 15-16</b></p>	<p><b>What do you think the little boy seems to have heard?</b></p> <p>Open to the students. For example: “He heard the sound of his piano.”</p> <p><b>Would you have reacted the same way he did in this situation? Explain your answer.</b></p> <p>Open to the students. For example: “No, I probably would have been angry that the dockworker dropped my piano. The boy seems very calm. In fact, he politely asks the dockworker if he was injured.”</p>



<p><b>Pages 17-18</b></p>	<p><b>Who do you think are the man and young girl who follow the customs officer? Explain your answer.</b></p> <p>Open to the students. For example: “I think it’s the boy’s father and sister since they are both dressed as stylishly as him.”</p>
<p><b>Pages 19-20</b></p>	<p><b>In the end, what was the purpose of the crate?</b></p> <p>It was used to transport a piano.</p>
<p><b>Pages 21-22</b></p>	<p><b>Why is the boy traveling with a piano?</b></p> <p>He is traveling with it because he will perform several concerts in this city with his sister.</p> <p><b>What is inside the intriguing small case?</b></p> <p>A violin.</p>

**How do the dockworkers feel at the end of the story? Explain your answer.**

Their faces are beaming. The cold, their fatigue, and their bad moods have all disappeared as if by magic as they listen to the impromptu performance by the boy and his sister.

**Have you ever been in a similar situation? Explain your answer.**

Open to the students. For example: "Yes. When I feel sad, I listen to music that I like and it makes my troubles disappear."

**With more information, can you identify the man and the young girl who followed the customs officer?**

The young girl is his sister, Nannerl. Even though it's not written in the story, it's likely that the man is their father.



**Who is the little boy?**

He is one of the greatest composers of all time: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Now that the students have discovered the identity of the boy, as a group, discuss all the details that the story shared about him. Reread previous passages as necessary.

Responses may include:

- Mozart traveled with his sister and father to play music.
- He played the piano and the violin.
- He started his career when he was very young.
- He has an older sister, named Nannerl.
- He wears stylish clothing.
- He comes from a wealthy family.
- He is well-mannered.
- Etc.



Read “A Few Morsels of History” and continue to describe Mozart’s character.

Next, invite the students to share their thoughts on the story.

**Do you think the author did a good job of telling us about Mozart?**

Open to the students. For example:

“Yes, she did a great job. She chose a moment in his life that allowed us to learn a lot about him. For instance, we learned that he started his career as a child, traveled to different countries with his family to perform concerts, and that he played multiple instruments.”





## AFTER READING

Start a discussion with the students about the story.

**Would you have been friends with Mozart? Explain your response by describing yourself and referring to the story.**

Open to the students. For example: “Yes, I would have liked Mozart because I like music, too. It would have been nice to hear him play because he seemed very talented.”

Invite students to interpret the text.

**Why do you think the author gave the story the title *That’s My Piano, Sir!*? Explain your answer.**

Open to the students. For example: “In my opinion, she wanted to use a sentence in the story that presents a musical instrument, the piano. Also, this line tells the reader that one character in the story will present the piano to someone else.”

**Would this story have been the same if it took place now? Explain your answer.**

Open to the students. For example: “Yes and no. Even today, musicians travel around the world to perform concerts. However, their clothes and methods of transportation are different.”

Invite students to appreciate the story.

**This story is told by a mouse. What do you think of this choice? Explain your answer.**

Open to the students. For example: “I think it’s a good choice because a little mouse can observe things without being noticed. I also like that Minim doesn’t find out who the boy is until the very end. It piques our curiosity. Also, Minim’s search for cheese adds a touch of humor to the story.”



## THE NARRATED STORY

Listen to the audio version of the story, narrated by Colm Feore (Duration: 11 minutes). The audio version is available on the accompanying CD, or can be downloaded as an MP3 with the unique digital code. You can also play the animated video, which is available on [YouTube](#). Afterward, ask the students about the narration and musical score.

**What do you think about the actor's narration?**

**How did you distinguish the voices of the different characters?**

**What sounds did you hear in the audio version of the story? (e.g. boat horn, falling piano, violin being tuned.)**

**What effect did the sounds have on the story?**

In the audio story, the two children can be heard playing a sonata for piano and violin that Mozart composed as a child. The album also includes “A Little Night Music” (“Eine Kleine Nachtmusik”), which Mozart composed 25 years later. Play these pieces for the students as well and ask them to choose which one they prefer.

**What instruments do you hear? What families do they belong to? (e.g. wind, string, brass, percussion)**

**If you were a journalist writing an article about this music, how would you describe it?**

**When you listen to this composition, what emotions do you feel?**

**Using musical terms, can you describe some of the characteristics of this composition?**

**What composition do you like best? Justify your answer using elements you identified earlier.**



## SPOTLIGHT ON THE MUSIC

Explore musical terms with your students by asking the following questions:

**In the story, the little boy takes time to tune his violin. Why does he need to do this?**

The little boy tightens or loosens the tension in the strings of his violin to obtain the most accurate and beautiful musical notes when he strikes them with his bow.

**As the stylish young girl approaches the piano, she begins to play a duet with the young boy. What is the difference between a duet, trio, and quartet?**

Duet: Musical piece played by two musicians

Trio: Musical piece played by three musicians

Quartet: Musical piece played by four musicians

After that there are quintets (five), sextets (six), septets (seven), octets (eight), nonets (nine), and dectets (ten).

**Minim reveals that Mozart is one of the greatest composers of all time. What is a composer? What is the difference between a musician, a composer, and a conductor?**

- 1) A composer writes music by creating a succession of musical notes and chords (e.g. do, mi, sol played simultaneously).
- 2) A musician plays the music on an instrument.
- 3) A conductor leads several musicians in an orchestra.

**Mozart looks at the notes his sister is playing on the piano. Why does he do this?**

He wants to play in rhythm and harmony with his sister.



## THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Explore Marie Lafrance's illustrations with your students to identify the elements of time and place.

### The port

**On pages 5-6, you can see a three-masted galleon and a pirogue.  
Do these types of boats still exist?**

**Today, boats that carry passengers and goods are equipped with engines. Are they faster?**

**Why do we use sailing boats today?**

**In the story, goods are stored in wooden crates, barrels, and cloth bags. Is this still the case?  
If not, what do we use today?**

**In the story, goods are transported on the backs of animals and dockworkers.  
Is this still the case? If not, what do we use today?**

To help guide the discussion, you may wish to consult these online resources beforehand:

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/word-lists/boat-boats-and-ships>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirogue>





# THE MOZART FAMILY'S CLOTHING

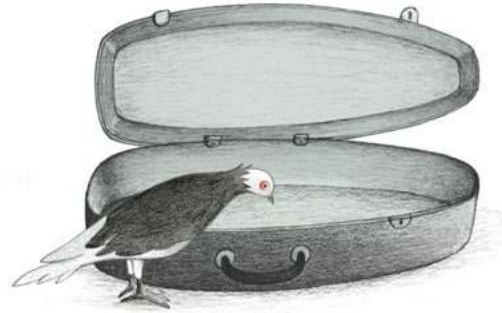
**How would you describe the clothing of Mozart and his family?**

**Have you ever seen clothing like this in a museum or elsewhere?**

**Would you want to wear something like this?**

**Do these clothes seem fashionable or outdated, comfortable or uncomfortable, easy to clean or high maintenance?**

Ask your students to draw a character wearing 18th-century clothing like that of Mozart and his sister. Draw their attention to different elements in the illustration such as embroidery, lace, wigs, shoe tops, buckles, velvet, etc.



## MOZART'S TRAVELS

Mozart traveled extensively across Europe to perform in castles and palaces and concerts for the courts of kings and queens, including their entourage of family, friends, and servants. At the age of six, the young Austria prodigy visited Vienna to play for Maria Theresa, the archduchess of Austria. The story takes place in the Port of Vienna, located on the Danube River.

**Ask the students to colour in Austria on the map of Europe, and locate its capital, Vienna. Next, ask them to colour and fill in the names of the other countries (and their capitals) Mozart performed in throughout his career: France, Italy, and Germany. This exercise can be done in small groups.**

While not included in the story, Archduchess Maria Theresa lived in Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna. Have the students research this castle, where Mozart gave his concert. Ask them to look at pictures of the exterior and interior of the building (architecture, gardens, rooms, decor) and to select five characteristics of the castle.

For example: Spacious, elegant, many windows, a fountain, sculptures, paintings on the ceiling, several lights in the corridors, flowers in the courtyard.

Depending on the technology resources available, this exercise can be done in small groups in class or individually after class, at home, or in the library.

Start a discussion on the topic of child prodigies. You can watch videos on Youtube where children play the violin or piano. Ask your students if they would like to practice a musical instrument for several hours a week.



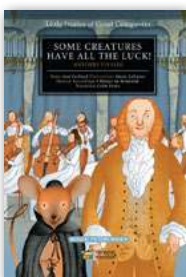
# MORE LITTLE STORIES OF GREAT COMPOSERS



## A Delicious Taste of Mozzarella!

Meet Russian composer Pyotr Illych Tchaikovsky as Minim goes on a vacation adventure with his niece and nephew Sasha and Bobik in the Italian countryside.

<https://www.thesecretmountain.com/portfolio/a-delicious-taste-of-mozzarella-april-2021pyotr-ilyich-tchaikovsky/>



## Some Creatures Have All the Luck!

Meet Italian composer Antonio Vivaldi as Minim braves a cold Venetian winter night to visit an orphanage where he encounters a musical rehearsal.

<https://www.thesecretmountain.com/portfolio/some-creatures-have-all-the-luck-may-2021antonio-vivaldi/>



## Curiosity Killed the Cat!

Meet Austrian composer Franz Schubert at an open-air café on a beautiful spring day where he saves Minim from a Gruyere-topped mouse trap.

<https://www.thesecretmountain.com/portfolio/curiosity-killed-the-cat-september-2021franz-schubert/>



## A Brilliant Plan!

Meet Austrian composer Joseph Haydn in Eisenstadt at the summer residence of Prince Nikolaus, where members of the orchestra begin to feel homesick.

<https://www.thesecretmountain.com/portfolio/a-brilliant-plan-october-2021franz-joseph-haydn/>



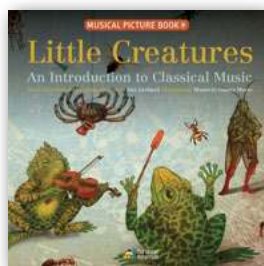
## We Are All Ears!

Meet Italian composer Niccolò Paganini at a luthier's workshop just as his most cherished instrument, the violin, is miraculously saved from destruction.

<https://www.thesecretmountain.com/portfolio/we-are-all-ears-november-2021niccolo-paganini/>



# INTRODUCTIONS TO CLASSICAL MUSIC



## Little Creatures

Works by Beethoven, Bartók, Ravel and other composers introduce children to classical music through this animal-inspired repertoire.

<https://www.thesecretmountain.com/portfolio/little-creatures-an-introduction-to-classical-music/>



## Amazing Water

In this compilation, Beethoven, Bach, Schubert, and others bring classical music to young ears with works that evoke the fluidity, dynamism, and rhythmic diversity of water.

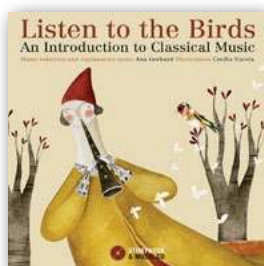
<https://www.thesecretmountain.com/portfolio/amazing-water/>



## Simply Fantastic

In this collection, discover works by Tchaikovsky, Verdi, and others inspired by ancient legends and fantastical creatures (gnomes, fairies, witches).

<https://www.thesecretmountain.com/portfolio/simply-fantastic/>



## Listen to the Birds

Birds have always stimulated the imagination of composers. In this compilation, little ears will discover the melodic similarities between the sounds produced by instruments and the song of swans, nightingales, and larks.

<https://www.thesecretmountain.com/portfolio/listen-to-the-birds/>

**For more musical picture books and teachings guides, visit [www.thesecretmountain.com](http://www.thesecretmountain.com)**

