

Little Stories of Great Composers

SOME CREATURES HAVE ALL THE LUCK!

ANTONIO VIVALDI

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, Antonio Vivaldi, Venice, mouse, tooth fairy, orphanage, cat, winter, music school



PEDAGOGICAL INTERESTS

- *Some Creatures Have All the Luck* 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 *Some Creatures Have All the Luck*, readers travel back in time and meet Antonio Vivaldi as they follow a charming little mouse named Minim, who is fond of cheese and music.
- Marie Lafrance’s illustrations provide visual clues of time and place through clothing, scenery, objects, and instruments.
- The different topics covered in *Some Creatures Have All the Luck* 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 Antonio Vivaldi, 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 Vivaldi's composition Concerto for Winter from *The Four Seasons*, performed by I Musici de Montréal

DURING THE READING

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



Pages 1-2	Who is telling the story? The story is told by a mouse named Minim.
Pages 3-4	Why does Minim say that mice are appreciated because of their nocturnal visits? In some places, such as Italy and France, the tooth fairy is assisted by a little mouse who leaves coins under pillows in exchange for baby teeth at night.
Pages 5-6	What does the phrase “half-frozen to death” mean? What does it suggest about the weather and season? It means very, very cold. The weather is probably very chilly since Minim already told us it is winter. Why does Minim think he has the wrong address? Explain your answer. He doubts that a family would live in this old, uninviting building.
Pages 7-8	What makes this house a bit strange? It’s like a labyrinth, with lots of corridors and stairs. Minim thinks that this must be the home of a very large family.



<p>Pages 9-10</p>	<p>In your opinion, is it a family home or a music school? Explain your answer.</p> <p>Open to the students. For example: “I think it’s a music school because the building is big and you can hear different musical instruments such as the violin, cello, and harpsichord. However, this school is not like others, because people live there, like little Ambrosina.”</p>
<p>Pages 11-12</p>	<p>After reading these pages, do you think this is a family home or a music school? Explain your answer</p> <p>Open to the students. For example: “I think it’s a music school because there are a lot of girls in the same room. It could be a large family, but it would be unlikely that all the children would sleep in the same room.”</p>
<p>Pages 13-14</p>	<p>Minim says that he’s “the sentimental type.” What does that mean?</p> <p>It means that he’s prone to feelings of tenderness, attachment, and other emotions.</p>
<p>Pages 15-16</p>	<p>How does Minim escape from the house cat?</p> <p>He slips under a large dresser where the cat cannot reach him.</p>
<p>Pages 17-18</p>	<p>How does the author show that Minim is scared?</p> <p>She writes that he holds his breath and waits for his racing pulse to calm down.</p>



Pages 19-20	In your opinion, why does the cat stroll away from Minim after a few minutes? Open to the students. For example: “I think it was lured away by the melody that can be heard from the first floor.”
Pages 21-22	How do the author and illustrator show that Minim appreciates the music he hears? The author writes that Minim forgets his fear as he listens to the music and that he closes his eyes to savour the moment. He thinks he is listening to the music of angels. The illustrator shows his appreciation by making the tip of his tail form a treble clef.
Pages 23-24	Why did the cat stroll away from Minim after all? Explain your answer. It’s clear now that the cat was lured away by the music. The author says he is stretched out on a couch beside the fireplace, relaxing to the soothing music.



**Pages
25-26**

Who is the conductor? Who are the young musicians?

The conductor is Antonio Vivaldi. The young musicians are orphans.

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

Responses may include:

- Vivaldi has red hair.
- He is a conductor.
- He works in a music school for orphan girls.
- Etc.

**Pages
27-28**

Read “A Morsel of History” and continue to describe Vivaldi’s character. Confirm or refute previous student answers, if necessary.

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

Did the author manage to capture your attention?

Open to the students. For example: “Yes. I kept wondering what the place was throughout the story. I was surprised to find out it was an orphanage and school where Vivaldi taught music.”



AFTER READING

Start a discussion with the students about the story.

Would you like to have attended the school in the story? Explain your answer by describing yourself and referring to the story.

Open to the students. For example: “No, because it is a school for orphans. Even though the students seem to be happy to learn music, I prefer to live with my parents.”

Invite students to interpret the text.

Why do you think the author gave the story the title *Some Creatures Have All the Luck*? Explain your answer.

Open to the students. For example: “I think she chose this title because luck is a key theme in the story. For instance, through the orphanage, she shows that some people are less fortunate than others. But, also, Minim is lucky that the cat is distracted by the beautiful music.”

Would this story have been the same if it had taken place in our time? Explain your answer.

Open to the students. For example: “Yes and no. Foster care is much more common than orphanages now. But there are still boarding schools and camps where young children go to learn music.”

Invitez vos élèves à apprécier le texte lu.

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. We follow the adventures of Minim in his role as a tooth fairy, and at the same time, we discover Vivaldi teaching at the music school.”



THE NARRATED STORY

Listen to the audio version of the story, narrated by Colm Feore. The audio version is available on the accompanying CD, or can be downloaded as an MP3 with the unique digital code. Afterward, ask the students about the narration and musical score.

What do you think about the actor's narration?

What sounds did you hear in the audio version of the story?

What effect did the sounds have on the story?

The album also includes the recordings *Concerto for violin and orchestra Op. 8 n°4, Winter, 1st Movement* and *Concert for violin and orchestra Op. 8 n°4, Winter, 2nd Movement*. 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:

Vivaldi is an Italian composer and violinist. He also held the positions of choir director and concertmaster. What is the difference between these positions?

Violinist: Plays music on a violin.

Composer: Writes music by creating a succession of musical notes and chords (e.g. do, mi, sol played simultaneously).

Choir director and concertmaster: Directs a choir. Leads musicians.

Vivaldi is regarded as a violin virtuoso. What does “virtuoso” mean?

The term “virtuoso” describes someone who is extremely skilled in an artistic discipline, such as music.

Vivaldi is one of the most important composers of the Baroque period. What characterizes Baroque music?

Baroque music is characterized by the presence of several melodic lines in the same piece of music, a technique known as “counterpoint.”

Vivaldi composed more than 400 concertos in his lifetime. What is a concerto?

A concerto is a musical work composed of three movements for a soloist in dialogue with an orchestra.



THE ILLUSTRATIONS

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

On pages 3 and 4, how does the illustrator show that the story takes place in Venice?

What does the exterior architecture of the city's buildings look like?

What does the interior architecture of the Pio Ospedale della Pietà look like?

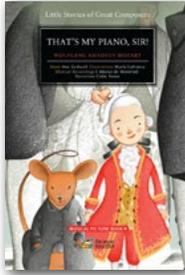
How are the characters dressed?



THE PIO OSPEDALE DELLA PIETÀ

This story takes place at the Pio Ospedale della Pietà in Venice. Ask the students to colour in Italy and locate the city of Venice on the map of Europe.

MORE LITTLE STORIES OF GREAT COMPOSERS



That's My Piano, Sir!

Meet Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in 18th-century Vienna as he arrives by boat to play a concert in the city, and bumps into Minim along the way.

<https://www.thesecondmountain.com/portfolio/thats-my-piano-sir-march-2021wolfgang-amadeus-mozart/>



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.thesecondmountain.com/portfolio/a-delicious-taste-of-mozzarella-april-2021pyotr-illich-tchaikovsky/>



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.

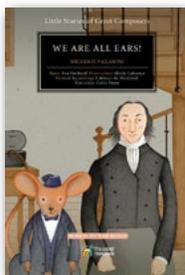
<https://www.thesecondmountain.com/portfolio/curiosity-killed-the-cat-september-2021franz-schubert/>



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.thesecondmountain.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.thesecondmountain.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.

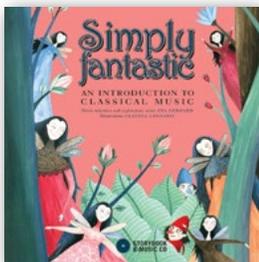
<https://www.thesectionmountain.com/portfolio/little-creatures-an-introduction-to-classical-music/>



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.

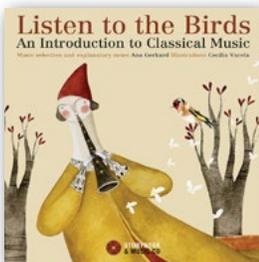
<https://www.thesectionmountain.com/portfolio/amazing-water/>



Simply Fantastic

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

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

For more musical picture books and teachings guides, visit www.thesectionmountain.com

