

What's a theme?

ALCOS

K.15; 1.16; 2.16, 2.17; 3.17; 4.17; 5.17; 6.15; 6.16; 6.18

Analyze

Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret

Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators'/performers' expressive intent.

Connect

Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

I can:

- Identify the main theme in two different pieces of classical music.
- Compare and contrast two different themes.

Introduction

- Ask the students to name their favorite cartoon character.
- After discussion, have the students make a list of cartoon characters. Ask the students to think of characteristics that each cartoon character exhibits. After discussing the cartoon character's characteristics, ask the students if the show the characters are from have a theme song.
- Read "What's a theme?" (R-3). Discuss with the students the cartoons characters from before and the theme songs. Ask the students if they think the theme songs fit the cartoon characters.
- Listen to each of the main themes from *The Blue Danube* and *Tritsch Tratsch Polka*.
- Ask the students to broadly compare and contrast the two themes. Which one is fast? Which theme is slow?
- Tell the students that the themes for each of these pieces were written to accompany a dance. Where do they think the dance would have taken place? What type of dance would the dancers perform? Examples - (1) Viennese Waltz (2) Viennese Polka.
- Explain to the students that they have only heard the main theme for each piece. *The Blue Danube* has one main theme and five secondary themes. *Tritsch Tratsch Polka* has one main theme and two secondary themes. Explain to the class that this is like how cartoons have a main character and other supporting characters. The main theme represents the main character. The secondary themes represent the other characters.
- Listen to the two themes again. Explain to the students that over the next few lessons they will be learning more about *Blue Danube Waltz* and *Tritsch Tratsch Polka*.

K-3 Activity

Listen to the two themes (main theme, B4 theme) from *The Blue Danube*. Have the students create a movement for each theme. As they listen to the full recording of *The Blue Danube*, have the students perform their movements.

K-3 Activity

Listen to two themes from *Blue Danube Waltz*. As a class, compare and contrast the two themes generally and using music vocabulary. Have the students create a drawing for each theme. Make sure the students know that they should be able to explain how their drawings represent each theme. As a class, discuss the drawing and see if there are any similarities.

All Grades

Listen to the full performance of *The Blue Danube* and *Tritsch Tratsch Polka*. Have the students explore other recordings of waltzes and polkas. How are the themes similar and how are they different?

4-6 Activity

The main theme from the *Blue Danube* has been used in movies, commercials, and cartoons. Listen to the Mills Brothers version of the *Blue Danube* called How Blue. After listening to the Mills Brothers' version listen again to the *The Blue Danube* main theme. Compare and contrast the two themes.

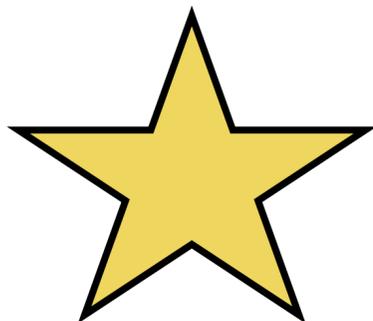
4-6 Activity

The original version of *Tritsch Tratsch Polka* was written for orchestra. The sound of instruments performing a theme can make a difference in how we interpret the theme. Use this midi file to download the main theme of *Tritsch Tratsch Polka*. Use GarageBand or another program to create a new arrangement of the main theme of *Tritsch Tratsch Polka*.

Extensions

- Explore how main ideas in literature are similar to main themes in music.
- Compare and contrast several TV show theme songs using a streaming music service or YouTube?
- Speak to someone that is a poet, dancer, actor, or artist. Explain to them what you learned about musical themes. Ask if they have something similar in their art form.

What's a theme?



Did you know?

The main theme of *Blue Danube Waltz* has been used in commercials, movies, and even a piece of music by the Mills Bros.

Listen to the Mills Brothers' *How Blue*.

How did they change the theme of *Blue Danube*?

Have you noticed that most TV shows have **theme music**? Some of the music is just instruments and some of the music has words. Funny shows have happy sounding theme music. Scary shows have scary sounding theme music. Theme music at the beginning of a show helps set the mood for the show.

Classical music also uses **themes**. A TV show usually only has one theme, however, a musical composition can have several themes! Each section of a classical music piece usually has its own theme. Just like a TV theme, the individual themes in a classical piece has its own characteristics. However, the first theme you hear in a piece of classical music is usually the **main theme**.

Listen to the main themes in the *The Blue Danube* and *Tritsch Tratsch Polka*. What if these pieces were TV themes? Ask these questions about each theme:

- (1) What type of TV show would you be watching?
- (2) What would the main characters be like?
- (3) Where would the show take place?

Did you know?

Tritsch Tratsch means “chit-chat” and was written to capture the sound people chatting. Meredith Wilson wrote a song in his musical “The Music Man” called *Pick-a-little, Talk-a-little* to sound like gossiping. Listen to a version of Wilson’s *Pick-little, Talk-a-little* and compare to *Tritsch Tratsch Polka*.

