

# What's an ensemble?

## ALCOS

K.7, K.14; 1.7, 1.15; 2.7, 2.15; 3.7, 3.16; 4.7, 4.16; 5.7, 5.16; 6.7, 6.15; Connecting Standards 1 & 2

### Perform - Select

Select varied musical works to present based on interest, knowledge, technical skill, and context.

### Respond - Select

Choose music appropriate for a specific purpose or context.

## I can:

- Learn about brass ensembles.
- Learn about string ensembles.
- Discuss and describe the use of different ensembles in music.

## Introduction

- Ask the students to think of different types of teams. List the types of teams the students mentioned. You may want to help guide the students' thinking towards teams outside of sports.
- Ask the students to think of why we may need to form teams. What are characteristics of good teams?
- Tell the students that musicians form teams called ensembles to play various pieces of music. Read "What is an Ensemble" (R-4). Discuss with the student the different categories of instruments. Also, have the students compare the pictures and graphics of different ensembles.
- Tell the students that *The Blue Danube* and *Tritsch Tratsch Polka* are performed by different ensembles. Watch each of the main themes of the pieces. Have the students discuss the differences in the ensembles. Use the following questions to guide your discussion: (1) How were the ensembles similar? (2) How were the ensembles different? (3) Compare the performance venues. (4) Why do you think the string ensemble had a conductor, but the brass quintet didn't have a conductor?
- Watch a Woodwind Quintet version of the main theme from *The Blue Danube* (stop at 1:55). Ask the student to compare this version to the string ensemble they heard earlier. Ask the students how the change in instruments and venue impact the performance?
- Explain to the students that the type of ensemble performing music is dependent on many factors including size of venue, type of music being performed, type of occasion, the composer's choice, etc. Also explain to the students that the symphony can split into four unique sections (brass, percussion, strings, and woodwinds) to perform music. Explore with the students on YouTube or Vimeo other performances of *Blue Danube* and *Tritsch Tratsch Polka*. Have the students discuss each performance and compare to the Alabama Symphony musician's performances.

### K-3 Activity

Explore brass and string ensembles with the students. Have the students create a playlist of music performed by brass ensembles and a playlist of music performed by strings ensemble. Share the playlist with families and other people in the school community.

### K-3 Activity

Research with the students the basic categories of instruments of the orchestra: percussion, strings, and winds. Have the students write a letter to a musician asking them questions about their instrument. You could even contact the Symphony Education Department to schedule a virtual musician visit!

### All Grades

Explore with the students on YouTube or Vimeo other performances of *Blue Danube* and *Tritsch Tratsch Polka*. Have the students discuss each performance and compare to the Alabama Symphony musician's performances.

### 4-6 Activity

Discuss with the students how some musicians have formed ensembles within their own family. Watch this video of the [Kanneh-Mason](#) family; they held virtual concerts in their home during the pandemic. Discuss how performing at home is different than the concert hall. Brainstorm what types of ensembles the students could form with their family or friends.

### 4-6 Activity

*Tratsch Tratsch Polka* was originally written for orchestra. Often when a brass ensemble wants to perform a piece written for orchestra it has to be arranged for brass. Download the main theme to *Tratsch Tratsch Polka* into GarageBand or another program. Change the instrument sounds to create a new arrangement for different instruments.

### Extensions

- Research different performance venues in Alabama. Ask the students to brainstorm the types of ensembles that could perform in the venues.
- Using the [Encyclopedia of Alabama](#) research famous musical groups from Alabama.
- Check out this [Alabama Symphony Young Person's Guide](#) for a lesson on Instruments of the Orchestra.

# What's an ensemble?

Instruments can be placed into three different groups - **percussion, strings, and winds**. We group instruments by the way they create sound. Sound is created by **vibration**. **Percussion instruments** create vibration by hitting two things together. **String instruments** create vibration by plucking or rubbing a string. **Wind instruments** create vibration by causing air to vibrate. The way an instrument sounds depends on how the vibration is created and by what materials the instrument is made.

An **ensemble** is a group of instruments that perform music together. There are many different types of ensembles. Some ensembles are large and some ensembles are small. A symphony orchestra is a large ensemble. A brass quintet is a small ensemble. There are ensembles made up of the same type of instruments and ensembles of different types instruments. Some ensembles have a **conductor** to lead the music and some ensembles don't need a conductor. The type of ensemble needed for a performance is determined by how the music is written, the performance space, and the occasion.

The Alabama Symphony Orchestra

Did you know?

Solo



Duet



Trio



Quartet



Quintet

