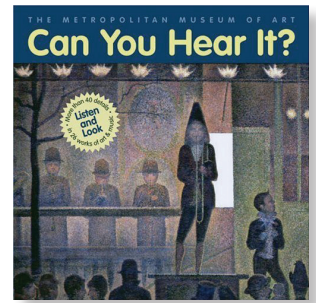


Can You Hear It?

By William Lach

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2006



“Classical music is filled with unforgettable images,” writes William Lach, a senior editor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and author of *Can You Hear It?* Connecting music with the visual arts is a way of integrating the two. According to Lach, the process of choosing appropriate art to exemplify the music varies. In this unique book, Lach encourages people to look closely at the artworks and listen intimately to music.

The book is beautifully illustrated with thirteen diverse works of art from numerous art periods. Examples of pictorial music are matched to masterpieces from The Metropolitan Museum of Art to provide an introduction to both music and art appreciation for young listeners. A CD with American and European orchestras playing thirteen short works (or excerpts) about two to three minutes in length is also included in this book.

Lach encourages teachers to play a game with each recording and artwork. He establishes three clues for each artwork with the paired listening selections. The game starts with a clue leading the student to focus on something in the artwork. Once the clue has been uncovered, the musical selection paired with the artwork is played. Listeners are invited to raise their hands when they hear the correct sound effect. The teacher is encouraged to lead the class in identifying the clues through guided discovery: “When the track is played, readers will look and listen as never before.” Lach suggests that teachers allow the students the opportunity for creative movement using the artwork as a foundation for ideas.

The first section of the book, “An Introduction to Musical Instruments,” includes pictures and information about the instruments. This section is beauti-

fully illustrated with historically significant examples from The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Department of Musical Instruments. The middle of the book is the heart of the art and the number one clue posed by the author relating to the specific artwork and music selection. A brief description of the music follows the first clue. Lach offers two follow-up clues that require more imagination. Each page includes a brief description of the artwork and the music selection. The book is printed with a full opening across the pages illustrating each artwork and spilling over the fold, except for Examples 6 and 7. The culmination of the book includes descriptions of each artwork and information about the composers.

The paintings in the book lead to movement exploration, form, and composition. In *Sound Composition Lesson: Chrysanthemums* by Utagwa Hiroshige, Hiroshige incorporates three colors: yellow, orange, and green. I invite the students to discover what is in the piece of art. Once the list is created, I invite the students to find sounds using nonpitched and pitched percussion to represent each of the items on the list. Each student is given or chooses one of the selected instruments placed in sections by color and object. I use a “magic” pointer to point to the items in the painting and say, “If I touch or wave over your object or color, you may play your instrument.” In various ways, I move across the painting or point at various objects. I invite other student conductors. When incorporating movement, I encourage the students to explore how the various objects come to life. I pair the sound with the movement, creating a live work of art!

My first-grade students discovered that the excerpt *An American in Paris* by George Gershwin fit perfectly with

the work of art *Avenue du Bois* by Kees van Dongen. The students listened to the music while looking at the painting. Through guided discovery, the students identified car horns, horses, and people crossing the street. In the second listening, the students drove imaginary cars and demonstrated the car horns through a beeping movement using French horns. In the third listening, the students walked when they heard the people, depicted by xylophones. In the fourth listening, they galloped like horses when they heard the temple block. Divided into three groups—people, cars, and horses—the students were invited to move when they heard the music that represented their group. The piece was repeated three more times to allow each student to experience the three sections. My students were bubbling with excitement, begging to do it again!

The National Standards in the Arts correlates with the book through two standards: Standard 7—listening to, analyzing, and describing music; and Standard 9—understanding relationships among music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts. They were learning to understand music in relation to history and culture. I recommend this book as a springboard to integrate art and music. It is a means for getting children excited about art and music history. The more children listen to music, the more they tend to like it. In the world of children, what is familiar is usually what they like best. ■

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