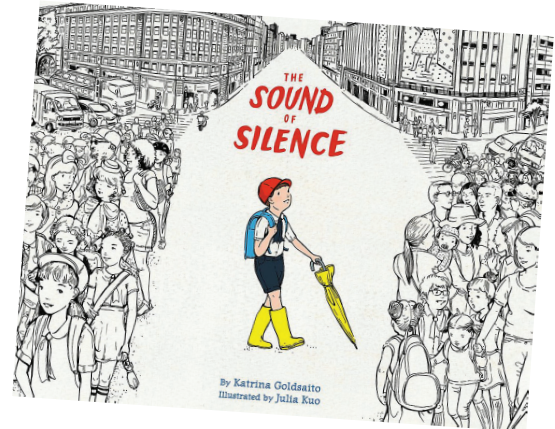


Reviewed by **Miranda Johnson**

The Sound of Silence

Written by Katrina Goldsaito/Illustrated by Julia Kuo
Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2016



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The laughter of your favorite person; the chorus of your favorite song; the first notes your students sing and play during music class—any one of these could be your favorite sound. But what about the sound of silence?

In the book *The Sound of Silence*, written by Katrina Goldsaito and illustrated by Julia Kuo, we follow little Yoshio through the busy, noisy city of Tokyo, Japan. From the moment Yoshio steps out his door, he engages with sounds, from the squish-squash of his rainboots to the raindrops pattering on his umbrella.

In music class, young students will love coming up with their own sound words for the world around them and moving with the descriptive language of this text.

With Yoshio, we meet a *koto* player tuning her instrument in the street. Yoshio asks the *koto* player what her favorite sound is, and she responds by saying her favorite sound—the most beautiful sound—“is the sound of *ma*, of silence.” This leaves Yoshio confused. “Where can I find silence?” We go on the journey to discover silence with Yoshio only to discover it in, perhaps, an unexpected place.

The Sound of Silence contains an afterword describing the concept of *ma*, the silence

between sounds, which is at the heart of many traditional Japanese art forms. The afterward includes mention of composer Toru Takemitsu, who loves *ma*. This book, including its engaging illustrations (drawn in pen, scanned, and colored digitally in Photoshop), provides a natural opening for learning about Japanese culture and listening to traditional and contemporary Japanese music. Children can learn, for example, that their counterparts throughout Japan remove their street shoes, just as Yoshio does when he enters his school and puts on his “inside shoes” that shuffle on the shiny floor. Kuo’s illustrations reflect the effort to make the images identifiable to people familiar with Tokyo, including Japanese instruments, a traditional home, and references to Japanese companies, artists, and authors.

In music class, young students will love coming up with their own sound words for the world around them and moving with the descriptive language of this text. Older students will enjoy making a soundscape to go with this book using classroom instruments, “found sounds,” and maybe even “junk percussion” (like bucket drums and handmade shakers). The book’s afterward shares some sounds (and onomatopoeias) that Yoshio “collects”—and challenges readers to search for them, too. Try challenging your students to a sound scavenger hunt in which they create names for sounds they hear in their everyday lives.

The Sound of Silence may not demonstrably lead to a typical music lesson with instrument

playing, singing, and chanting. Consider exploring the space between sounds together with your students. Those of all ages will enthusiastically tell you about their favorite sounds!

Goldsaito and Kuo's lovely book also lends itself nicely to teaching students about mindfulness through observing the sounds around us in the present moment. This book could be used with other child-centered mindfulness activities, such as those in the *Mindful Kids* cards by Whitney Stewart and Mina Braun or those available online. Engaging our students in mindfulness builds social emotional learning. Cultivating listening skills benefits musicianship.

The Sound of Silence encourages readers to listen and pay attention to sounds and to the spaces in between. The story can serve as a springboard for many different activities and lessons with your students. Goldsaito dedicates this book to inquisitive little Yoshios journeying to find the sound of silence everywhere. Enjoy the journey for *ma* with your classroom of courageous Yoshios. ■

MIRANDA JOHNSON'S favorite sounds are the laughter of her best friends and the first sounds her students make on their instruments. Miranda teaches middle school band, choir, and general music in Eastern Kentucky and uses the Orff Schulwerk approach to teach her young musicians. Miranda has completed two levels of Orff Schulwerk Teacher Education.

American Roots

The history of the Schulwerk goes back to Germany, then to Austria, finally making its way to the United States by way of Canada. What then can we say are the “American Roots” of the Schulwerk? Look forward to the Summer 2022 issue, “American Roots,” to consider what is American about our approach to Orff Schulwerk—through collecting songs in a respectful manner, considering regional American music, and acknowledging the role racial inequality has played in what genres of music have typically been considered as those worth teaching, and more.

