

Classical Composers

Teaching with Joseph Bologne

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Introduction

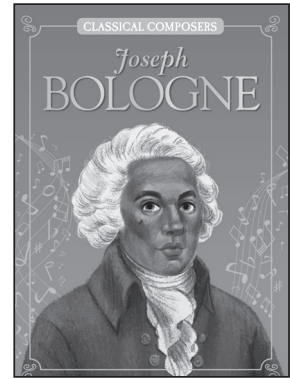
Joseph Bologne, who most people back then knew as the Chevalier de Saint-Georges, was born on December 25 in 1745, on the island of Guadeloupe in the Caribbean. Life didn't exactly give him a gentle start. He was of mixed race and in that time and place, a lot of people judged others by the color of their skin (often harshly).

Still, that wasn't going to keep Joseph down. He threw himself into everything he loved. The violin? He could make it sing in a way that stopped people in their tracks. Music? He wrote pieces that had audiences buzzing. And it wasn't just music. He fenced like a champion (real swords, not just for show) and even ended up leading soldiers during the French Revolution.

Some nicknamed him "The Black Mozart," not just because of his talent, but because his music had the same kind of brilliance people admired in Mozart's work. His life is a reminder that determination and maybe a bit of stubborn grit, can take you a long way, even when the odds are stacked against you.

DISCOVER *Bologne's music here online to play for students:*

<https://www.violinist.com/blog/RachelBartonPine/20235/29619/>



Lexile: 640L Words: 1,012

Vocabulary Review to supplement the Glossary



1.COMPOSER: A person who writes music.

Example: Joseph created all kinds: from grand symphonies to lively violin concertos and operas.

2.FENCING: A sport where two people duel with slim, light swords.

Example: Joseph didn't just fence, he won big competitions.

3.CONCERTOS: Music where one instrument gets the spotlight while the orchestra plays along.

Example: Joseph's violin concertos were full of flair and skill.

4.ARISTOCRATIC: Belonging to the upper class, the rich and powerful, like kings, queens, or noble families.

Example: Joseph, despite his background, became part of these social circles and even befriended Queen Marie Antoinette.

5. SYMPHONIES: Long, detailed pieces of music for an orchestra, often split into sections called movements.

Example: Joseph's symphonies helped shape what we think

6.MONARCHY: A way of ruling where a king or queen is in charge.

Example: Joseph lived at a time when the French people wanted to replace the monarchy with a republic form of government.

7.STRING QUARTET: Music for four string instruments (2 violins, 1 viola, and 1 cello).

Example: Joseph's quartets were known for their harmony and creativity.

8.COLONIALISM: When one country controls another.

Example: Joseph was born in Guadeloupe, a French colony, and his biracial heritage made his path to success more difficult.

9. PATRON: Someone who supports an artist, often with money or opportunities.

Example: Queen Marie Antoinette was one of Joseph's patrons, helping him grow as a musician.

10. LÉGIION SAINT-GEORGES: A special unit in the French Revolutionary army made up mostly of Black and mixed- race soldiers.

Example: Joseph fought with courage as their leader.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Where was Joseph Bologna born and what made his background unique?

Joseph was born on December 25 in 1745, on the island of Guadeloupe in the Caribbean. His father was a rich Frenchman and his mother was a young woman who had been enslaved. Back then, having parents from such different worlds and being of mixed race, made life a lot more difficult. People didn't always treat you fairly.

2. What was Joseph's first passion and how did it influence his life?

As a boy, Joseph fell in love with fencing. That's the sport where you duel with slim swords. He threw himself into it, trained for hours and soon started winning matches. Those victories didn't just bring medals; they got him noticed by wealthy, influential people and gave him the confidence to chase bigger dreams, like becoming known for his music.

3. Why did Joseph face challenges in the world of French opera?

Joseph had the skill for the job, no question. But when he was being considered to run the Paris Opera, some singers didn't want a mixed-race man in charge. That prejudice cost him the position.

4. Why did some people call him "The Black Mozart"?

His music was full of energy and brilliance, and it reminded people of Mozart's style. For a while, Mozart and Bologna even lived in the same building, so chances are they heard each other's work and may have been influenced by each other.

5. What part did Joseph play in the French Revolution and how did he fight against slavery?

Once the Revolution started, Joseph joined the cause to get rid of the monarchy. He formed a unit called the Légion Saint-Georges, made up mostly of Black and mixed- race soldiers. Later, he went to Haiti to lead 15,000 men in the fight to end slavery there and they won.

6. What happened to Joseph in 1779 and why might someone have wanted to harm him?

One evening in 1779, Joseph and a friend were suddenly attacked by six men. They fought back until guards arrived to break it up. Nobody knows for sure why. Maybe it was over a woman Joseph cared about, or maybe his friend was the real target. No one really knows.

Writing Activity

Activity: “Joseph Bologne’s Journey”

Goal: Write a diary entry as if you were Joseph Bologne himself.

Instructions:

- Pretend you’re Joseph. Pick a big moment in his life (writing a new piece of music, experiencing unfair treatment, or leading the Légion Saint-Georges).
- Use at least three of the vocabulary words (like “concertos,” “patron,” or “fencing”).
- Share how you felt and what you were hoping for at the time

Music & Art Activities

1. Listening to Classical Music

Goal: Understand how Joseph’s style was different from earlier Baroque music.

Listen: Play one of his violin concertos or symphonies.

Discuss: How is it different from older Baroque pieces? What makes it sound “Classical”? How did Joseph’s style help shape the music we know today?

2. Drawing a “Musical Portrait”

Goal: Show Joseph’s life through art while listening to his music.

- **Listen:** Play *Symphony in G Major* or another famous piece by Joseph.
- **Draw:** Make a portrait of him, adding details from his life (maybe his violin, a fencing sword, or a Revolutionary flag).
- **Share:** Show your drawing and explain what each part means.

Evaluation Questions

1. What challenges did Joseph face because of his heritage?

Joseph’s father was white and wealthy, his mother had been enslaved and that mix made life tricky in his time. People often judged him on sight before hearing him play a note or seeing what he could do. It didn’t matter how good he was, some doors were just shut to him because of who his parents were.

2. How was his music different from the popular music of his time?

Most folks back then loved Baroque music, the really fancy kind with lots of little twists and flourishes. Joseph’s pieces felt different: lighter, smoother, and more straightforward. It wasn’t what people were used to and that fresh style helped push music toward what we now call the Classical period.

3. What did he do during the French Revolution to fight against slavery?

He didn’t just sit in a concert hall during the Revolution. Joseph put on a uniform, formed the Légion Saint-Georges made up mostly of Black and mixed-race soldiers and led them. Later, in Haiti, he commanded 15,000 men in a fight to free enslaved people... and they actually won.

Further Questions

1. What does “patron” mean and why was it important for Joseph?

A patron is basically someone who has your back as an artist, sometimes giving you money, sometimes giving you chances you wouldn't get otherwise. For Joseph, one of the biggest was Queen Marie Antoinette, who opened doors to audiences and circles that would've been hard for him to reach alone.

2. How did fencing shape his life and reputation?

Joseph could fence like few others. Winning match after match didn't just make him a sports star; it got him noticed by powerful people. Those same connections later helped him in his music career.

3. How did the Revolution affect how people remember him?

If it hadn't been for the Revolution, maybe we'd only think of Joseph as a composer. But because he fought for freedom and equality, people remember him as both: a brilliant musician and a soldier who stood for what was right.

Extension Ideas

1. Compare and Contrast: Look at Joseph alongside Mozart or Beethoven. How was his background different? What made his music stand out?

2. Role-Playing: Imagine Joseph meeting Mozart in Paris. What would they talk about? How might their shared love of music connect them?