

Classical Composers

Teaching with Johannes Brahms

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Introduction

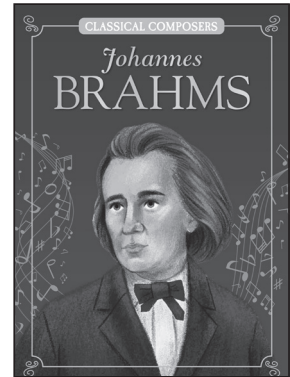
He was born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany, in this busy little neighborhood near the harbor. Not exactly the rich side of town, but it didn't matter; the place was alive with sound.

His dad was working musician, the kind who could pick up just about anything with strings or brass and make it sing. Most days, though, you'd catch the low, steady hum of his double bass in the corner, or maybe that bright, almost brash voice of the French horn cutting through the room. Johannes' brothers had violins (two of them) so yeah, imagine that: tunes everywhere, sometimes blending, sometimes a total mess. One afternoon, right in the middle of all that racket, his father just looks over and goes, "So, what's it gonna be, violin or cello?". Johannes smiled and said no... his heart was set on the piano.

He began lessons when he was just seven. His first teacher, Wilhelm Cossel, quickly noticed that Johannes was picking things up faster than most kids. Before long, he sent him to a more advanced teacher, Eduard Marxsen. Johannes loved practicing so much that sometimes he'd stay up late at night, quietly playing just one more song before bed.

Money was always tight, so as a teenager, Johannes played piano anywhere he could: bars, inns and even noisy dance halls. Some of these places weren't the best for someone his age, but he didn't care. If there was a piano, he was happy to sit down and play.

Many years after, that kid from the harbor streets ended up as one of the big names of his time. His music was being played in grand Concert halls and critics were putting him in the same breath as Beethoven and Schumann.



Lexile: 680L Words: 1,011

Vocabulary Review to supplement the Glossary

1. COMPOSER

Definition: Someone who writes music.

Example: Brahms composed symphonies, songs, and piano music.

2. LULLABY

Definition: A soft, gentle song to help someone (often a baby) fall asleep.

Example: Brahms' "Lullaby" is one of the most famous in the world.

3. PHILHARMONIC

Definition: A group of musicians devoted to orchestra music.

Example: Brahms' father played with the Hamburg Philharmonic Society.

4. REQUIEM

Definition: A special piece of music written for someone who has died.

Example: Brahms wrote “A German Requiem” for his mother.

5. MELODY

Definition: A tune made up of a series of notes.

Example: Brahms’ music is known for its beautiful melodies.

6. SYMPHONY

Definition: A long piece of music for an orchestra, usually with several sections.

Example: Brahms wrote only four symphonies.

7. TOUR

Definition: Traveling to different places to perform.

Example: Brahms toured Germany with violinist Eduard Reményi.

8. CONDUCTOR

Definition: The person who leads an orchestra or choir.

Example: Brahms conducted concerts across Europe.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Where was Johannes Brahms born, and what was his family like?

He was born in Hamburg, Germany, on May 7, 1833. His family didn’t have much money, but they loved music. His dad played the double bass and French horn, and his siblings played string instruments.

2. Why did Brahms choose to play the piano instead of violin or cello?

Even though his father offered to teach him violin or cello, Johannes wanted the piano because he loved its sound and possibilities.

3. What kinds of places did Brahms play in as a teenager?

He played in bars, inns, and dance halls around Hamburg to earn money for his family.

4. Who were Robert and Clara Schumann, and why were they important to Brahms?

They were famous composers who became close friends and supported his career. Robert even wrote an article praising Brahms’ talent.

5. Why is Brahms’ Symphony No. 1 special?

It took him 21 years to finish because he wanted it to be as good as Beethoven’s works.

6. What is Brahms’ “Lullaby,” and why is it famous?

It’s a gentle song written in 1868 that is still sung to babies all over the world.

Writing Activity “At the Concert with Brahms”

- **Imagine** you are sitting in a beautiful concert hall in Vienna, waiting for Johannes Brahms to walk onto the stage.
- **Describe** what the hall looks like, the people around you, and how you feel when the music begins.
- **Include** at least three vocabulary words (like composer, melody, or symphony).

DISCOVER Johannes Brahms music here online to play for students.

<https://www.classicfm.com/composers/brahms>



Music & Art Activities

1. Lullaby Chairs

- **Listen:** Play *Brahms' Lullaby* while the children walk around a circle of chairs.
- **Activity:** When the music stops, they must quickly find a seat. Remove one chair each round until only one person is left.
 - o To make it less competitive, children without a chair can join in by playing a triangle, tambourine, or clapping along to the music.
- **Goal:** To listen for changes in music and respond quickly while enjoying *Brahms' Lullaby*.

2. Rhythm Echo

- **Listen:** The teacher claps, taps, or plays a short rhythm on a drum (can match the beat of a Brahms piece).
- **Activity:** Students repeat the rhythm like an echo. Start simple, then try faster or longer rhythms for fun challenges.
- **Goal:** To develop listening skills and rhythm memory while connecting to Brahms' music.

Evaluation Questions and Answers

Comprehension

1. What challenges did Brahms face growing up?

Money was tight at home, so young Johannes had to help out. He earned extra coins by playing piano in bars and dance halls — not exactly places you'd expect to see a teenager, but it helped his family.

2. How did traveling help Brahms' music?

On his travels, he picked up all sorts of tunes from different towns and villages. Many of those folk songs found their way into the music he later wrote.

3. Why is Brahms remembered today?

Because his music could do it all — it was full of heart and beauty, but also powerful and exciting. He blended the calm of classical music with the drama of the romantic style, and people still love it.

Vocabulary

1. What is a requiem?

A piece of music for someone who has died.

2. What is a lullaby?

A soft song meant to help someone sleep.

3. What is a symphony?

A long musical piece for orchestra, usually in several sections.