

TEACHER NOTES – The Colour of Music

AUTHOR: Lisa Tiffen

Lisa Tiffen is a children's picture book author, illustrator and composer. She has previously published a family of four quirky books; *Grumps*, *Lovies*, *Sorrows* and *Frights*. A piano teacher for many years, Lisa has recently commenced writing orchestral music to accompany her books. Being able to combine her love of music, art and writing makes her heart sing.

<https://lisatiffen.com/>

ILLUSTRATOR: Matt Ottley

Matt Ottley is an award-winning multi-modal artist, working equally across the fields of literature, visual arts and music. Matt has had 35 picture books published and his work also appears in more than thirty non-fiction books. His awards include the CBCA Picture Book of the Year and both the Queensland and NSW Premiers Awards for literature. His international awards include Ibbly Honour Book for Australia and a White Ravens listing, Bologna. He has recorded his music with Brno Philharmonic Orchestra and the Czech Philharmonic Choir.

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THE COLOUR OF MUSIC SYNOPSIS:

Molly lies with her eyes closed and her ears open.

Molly can see the music. Colours flash brilliantly as she listens. The music takes her on a journey into places filled with colour, revealing connections between music, emotions, and the world we live in. *The Colour of Music* mixes art, music and the written word in a truly synesthetic experience.

WHAT IS SYNAESTHESIA?

Everyone sees and experiences the world differently. Synaesthesia is a merging of the senses. People with synaesthesia may see colours when they hear, smell or taste something. Sometimes they even see letters, words and numbers as colours.

LISA:

I think of and feel colours when I listen to and play music. Sometimes when my mind is quiet, I visualise the music in colour. Occasionally when I smell things the smell makes me think of a colour, and every so often when I read, the words will create an image of a colour in my mind.

MATT:

I see colours and shapes when I hear pitched sounds, like music. Sometimes other kinds of sounds, like loud motorbikes will also make shapes and colours in my vision.

GLOSSARY:

Arpeggios – Arpeggios are the notes of a chord that are played in rapid succession – one after the other – and are either ascending or descending. That means to go up, or to go down!

Atmosphere – The atmosphere is a collection of gases that surrounds the earth, but in our case, atmosphere is the feel of a place or the vibe. If you go to a restaurant, the atmosphere could be crowded or loud. In a library it is likely that the atmosphere will be very cosy and quiet.

Bass – A bass is a low sound in music. It sounds like rumbling thunder, or the sound of a big truck. Many people sing in very low tones, which makes them a bass singer.

Chords – Chords are a set of notes that are played together. They are typically heard at the beginning of a song, which lets the audience know that the tune will be the foundation of the harmony.

Echo – Have you ever stood in a cave and called out “HELLO!” only to hear the sound of your own voice coming back to you? That’s an echo! It’s caused by the reflection of sound waves against a surface, that is then thrown back to the source of the sound.

Harmonies – A person singing is a harmony, and a guitar player strumming chords is a harmony. The combination of chords and musical notes that creates any sort of song is a harmony.

Hues – A hue is a shade of a colour, for example, bright cherry red is a different hue to a burgundy wine red.

Lilt – To lilt in music is for it to move up and down, but that happens when a person is talking too. When someone asks a question, their voice usually lalts up at the end of the sentence. Have you ever noticed?

Melodies – A melody is very similar to a harmony. It is a sequence of single notes all arranged to form a song.

Resounding – Resounding is a big word, but it’s also a way that you can describe a big sound. A stadium cheering is a resounding sound. A loud bang is a resounding sound. If an area becomes full with a loud noise, then it’s resounding.

Shrillness – Ever heard a sound that’s so loud and so high that you’ve flinched? Then chances are you’ve heard a shrill tone. High-pitched and harsh, a shrill sound can be both unsettling and awe-inspiring.

Tones – A tone is the sound of a musical note, or the sound of a person’s voice, or the way that someone writes a story. If you’re telling a joke, then your tone is quite light. If you want to sing a sad song in a bass, that’s a low and slow tone.

Triads – Triad is an unusual word, but it’s not completely unfamiliar when you think about it. It sounds like tricycle, or a trilogy – the common factor in all of them is that there are three! A triad is when three notes are on top of one another, and they are all played as one note at the same time.

Trudge – To trudge is to walk with slow and heavy steps. Dinosaurs used to trudge the earth, pirates trudge through the sand, and explorers trudge through mud and forests.

Vibrations – A vibration is a moving thing, that moves from side to side. If it hums, strums or drums, then there's a very good chance that you can feel the vibration.

LITERACY OPPORTUNITY

QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS BEFORE READING THE STORY:

- What kind of music do you like listening to? Why?
- Do you have a favourite song?
- Have you ever heard of synaesthesia before? If you haven't, what do you think it means?
- Does your favourite song have lyrics? If so, do you picture the words in your head when you listen to it or characters acting out a story? Or do you see something different?
- When you listen to music without lyrics, what do you picture? Do you see colours or shapes? Do you see different colours or shapes depending on the music?

QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS AFTER READING THE STORY:

- Think again about the music you like to listen to. If this music had a colour, what would it be?
- Think about your favourite song. What colour is it? Why?

BEGIN A DISCUSSION – Use the questions as prompts below:

In groups, discuss what your favourite page of the book is. Why is it your favourite page? What are the images illustrating? What music do you think Molly is listening to based on the picture you see?

Lisa Tiffen has used minimal text, but her words are accompanied by beautiful images. Why are her words by themselves so powerful? Why does the image add to the words on the page?

Matt Ottley has created wonderful images that show the reader what he sees when he hears specific types of music. Would you paint something different if you had to create illustrations to match Lisa's words?

ACTIVITY:

Privately, or in groups, write down or create a drawing of what you see when you hear the following music. Make sure you close your eyes when you are listening!

- *Dancing Queen* by ABBA
- *Für Elise* by Ludwig van Beethoven
- *Wake me Up Before you Go-Go* by Wham!

- *Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major* by Yo-Yo Ma
- *Head & Heart* by Joel Corry x MNEK

Share your visual discoveries with the class. If you're comfortable, explain to your peers why you saw something specific.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

SYNAESTHESIA

Synaesthesia can take many different forms. Some people experience multiple senses at the same time. Molly sees colour when she hears music. Lisa Tiffen can sometimes see smells as colours.

- Do some research on synaesthesia. What other forms can it take?
- What causes synaesthesia?
- What kinds of professions do people with synaesthesia often choose? Why do you think a lot of people with synaesthesia are in creative roles?
- What famous people can you find who have synaesthesia? Think about musicians, artists, etc.