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## I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray

### African-American Song



## Activities

1. Play "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray" without giving background information on the music. After doing this, ask the students to offer their general impressions about what they heard. (Possible responses: male and female singers, unaccompanied, religious music, part singing, descant, soloist, and African-American singing style.)
2. Provide students with background information on the music. You might ask them if they have heard music like this before. If so, where did they hear it — church, school concert, radio, etc.?
3. Find copies of a simple song with a descant. (They can be found in most basal music textbook series.) Teach the students to sing the melody and then the descant. Then ask them how their singing of the song differed from "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray." (Possible answers: the textbook song had a composed descant, while the African-American song's descant was improvised; a group sang the descant to the composed song; the style of singing of the composed song and "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray" are different.)
4. Ask the students to look at No. 1 in the Student Activity Book. They should notice that each measure of the notated melody is numbered. Ask them to identify a measure by its number where emphasis occurs off the beat (syncopation).
5. Play "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray" again. As the students listen, they should complete Nos. 2 through 4 in the Student Activity Book. Play the recording more than once if necessary. When the students have answered each item, let them give their answers and explain why they answered as they did. There are no wrong answers when thoughtful reasons are provided. The answers may generally be as follows:

No. 2 — football game, Halloween, pep rally

No. 3 — music for singing, choral music, religious music

No. 4 — no instruments, descant, solo, improvised part, part singing



## Extending Learning

Ask the students to name a simple song that they all know and can sing. Rehearse them in singing it without accompaniment. Next, ask for volunteers to take turns improvising a descant above the melody as the others sing the song. They could improvise a melody and text related to the text of the song. Record on tape some of their descants, and then play them back to the class. Involve the students in a discussion comparing the effect of the descants they improvised with the style of the descant in "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray."



## Curriculum Connections

### Language Arts

Discuss with the students how the origins of folk songs and folk tales or stories are alike. For example, both have no known author or composer and both appear in several versions. Ask the students to name and list other folk songs (i.e., "Skip to My Lou," "Old MacDonald," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," etc.) or stories (i.e., *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Paul Bunyan*, etc.) they already know. Ask them if they know more than one version of the story. If two students suggest the same story, ask them to decide whether they are alike or different. Share with the class how they

**Russian Dance**  
from *Gayane Suite No. 2*  
Aram Khachaturian



## Extending Learning

Play the recording of *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* by Benjamin Britten to provide an opportunity for them to expand their recognition of families of instruments of the orchestra. Also play Variations on "Pop! Goes the Weasel" by Cailliet to expand their understanding of theme and variations.



## Curriculum Connections

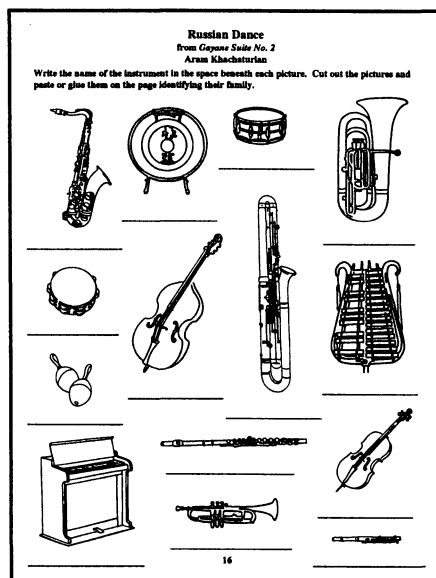
### Science

Discuss with the students how the size of the instruments of the orchestra and the materials they are made of affect the kind of sound they make. Guide them to discover that larger, thicker, and longer instruments will make lower sounds. Ask which instruments have higher sounds and which are lower. Using a guitar, violin, or any other stringed instrument, demonstrate how by pressing the string the sound may become higher or lower. They can also explore this principle with percussion instruments such as drums and triangles, as well as with wind instruments.

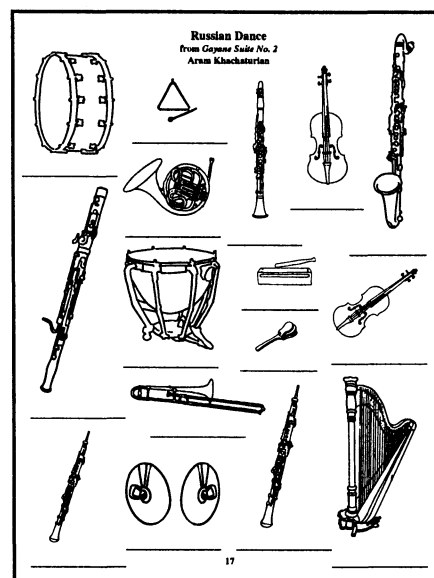
Have the students create their own string, percussion, or wind instrument using ordinary materials they may have at home. The only criterion the instrument must meet is that it can be played in such a way that the pitch or tone quality can be altered. The students must explain to the class how to play their instrument and what is involved in changing the tone quality or pitch.



## Student Activity Book



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