



Lesson Plans: Listen & Respond to *Letter from Sado*

INTRODUCTION

By addressing *Letter from Sado* as music for listening and responding, students gain important insights into recognizing and interpreting the structure of the piece as well as the Blackshaw's compositional techniques. Exploring these facets enhances our appreciation and understanding.

Below are two options for listening and responding to Jodie Blackshaw's music. Choosing one versus the other depends on when you want your students to listen to the recording of *Letter from Sado*.

- **Option #1** – **BEFORE** students ever hear the piece, they can be challenged to speculate about the music and make predictions based on the images and poetry that inspired the composer to create this music. They can reflect and discuss how they think the music will sound, make their predictions informed by their speculative discussions, and finally, listen and describe the music noting how it is similar and different from their predictions.
- **Option #2** – Use the recording and a “map” of the piece to **INTRODUCE THE MUSIC** to your students. Follow the “map” will help them understand the large structure and narrative elements in *Letter from Sado* before they begin working on the music.

Option #1: Making Predictions

OVERVIEW

Before hearing or playing any part of *Letter from Sado*, students will view the images and hear the haiku poem that the composer identified as inspiration for her piece. After individual reflection and a conversation with peers, students will make predictions about how they think the music will sound. While listening to the piece, they will identify where their predictions were similar and different from the actual music.

LEARNING GOAL

After reading and viewing the poetry and images which inspired the composer, students will integrate their thoughts to make predictions about what they will hear in Blackshaw's music.

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- [Recording of *Letter from Sado*](#) (click link to download or email BandQuest@composersforum.org for a free Catalog CD)
- Copies of the [Musical Inspirations](#) page for students
- Images of a “stormy sea.” Ask the visual art teacher in your school for art prints in his/her collection or invite them to work on this lesson with your students.
 - <http://fineartamerica.com/featured/rough-seas-joan-edge.html>
 - <http://www.spacetelescope.org/news/heic0602/>
 - <http://www.pinterest.com/asianart/making-waves/>
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPBaqh3dcVM>
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QH6OOfh7sFs>
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UG6FhK96dBg>
 - Several websites and blogs are listed at the end of Lesson Option #Two

PROCESS

1. Introduce the title of a new piece that students will soon learn, *Letter from Sado* by Australian composer, Jodie Blackshaw. Continue on with the idea that many musical compositions are inspired by ideas outside of music. Use the term **program music** if this is terminology you want students to know.
2. BEFORE they hear the piece, tell students that they will examine the things that inspired Jodie Blackshaw to write the music as she did. After looking closely at the poetry and images that fired her imagination, students will make predictions about what they think they will hear in the piece.
3. Distribute or display the “Musical Inspirations” page. Read the poem and ask students to identify what they noticed, ask questions it may have raised, and offer thoughts about how a composer might be turn it into musical sound.
 - Examine art images and photographs of the key words in the poetry: “stormy sea” and “heaven’s river” – the Milky Way, to expand their thoughts and interpretations/translations of the poem. Use additional images from other sources.
 - Jot down or ask students to write down some of the ideas talked about as they described the poetry and images.
4. In partners or small groups, ask student to imagine how music composed to capture these words and images might sound and to make predictions about that music. During discussion, one student should serve as the recorder to write down ideas.
5. Regroup and share predictions. Discuss similarities, differences, and interesting twists. Then listen to the music and compare predictions to reality. Congratulate them on their ability to think about sound and translate words and images into sound.

ASSESSMENT

Any musical terms and related vocabulary students use in their predictions provides an opportunity to informally assess knowledge, use, and understanding of terms and concepts. The comparison of predictions to the actual music also provides evidence of musical thinking.

EXTENSIONS

- Save the language used to make predictions and the ideas generated by the class as material to display when students write program notes for *Letter from Sado*.
- Make predictions about other new pieces for which you have materials related to the context, intentions, and inspirations of the composer.

More examples of stormy seas and the night-time sky & the Milky Way

Images for Stormy Sea and Starry Night

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IB5Us8yksXc> – sound and video- short

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P67jQC8BL7s> – one image and sounds of stormy sea.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXWKtAJzab8> – one image but more weather sounds. Also seagulls.

http://chandra.harvard.edu/learn_mw.html - a great “portal” site from the Chandra Observatory, starting with a short video summarizing the elements and significant aspects of the Milky Way. Many, many links, images, informational pdf poster type pages.

<http://dakotalapse.com/2011/06/plains-milky-way/> - A blog with time-lapse night photography from various places on the open plains of the USA.

<http://blog.planet5d.com/2014/01/huelux-a-breathtaking-milky-way-and-aurora-timelapse-shot-in-4k/> - Almost 5 minutes of time-lapse photographs of the night sky in South Dakota, Wyoming, and Utah. You may choose to turn down the sound track so as not to influence your students about how they might play the sounds of the Milky Way (or perhaps you would prefer they have this model.) Lots of irritating ads.

Option #2: Use a Map to Follow the Music

OVERVIEW

Students will listen and follow a “map” of the music to help them comprehend the structure and narrative elements of the music. Teachers can choose one of the two maps included in the curriculum for students to follow; a more detailed map for teachers or a student map with images and fewer details.

LEARNING GOAL

Students will notice and be able to identify key elements and characteristics of the music as they follow a visual “map” while listening to the recording.

MATERIALS

- Hard copies or projected image of the selected [Listening Map](#) (you may also choose to use the “teacher” version found in the Teacher’s Guide of this curriculum)
- [Recording of Letter from Sado](#) (click link to download or email BandQuest@composersforum.org for a free Catalog CD)

PROCESS

Maps help travelers know where they are and where they are going. A musical map does the same thing for listeners as they move through a piece of music.

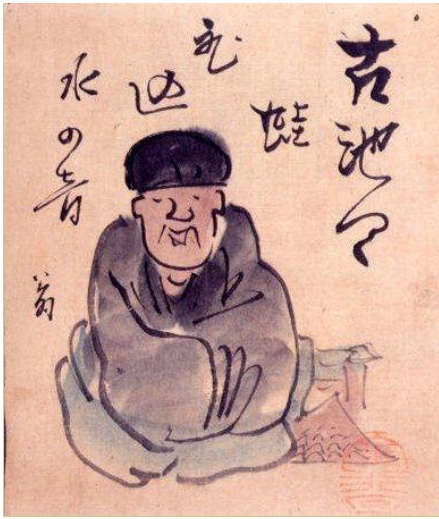
1. Display or distribute copies of either map (Student – below, or Teacher – in Teacher’s Guide). Before you listen, ask students to scan the page and describe some of the details they notice.
2. Read the descriptions of selected sections of the map.
3. Challenge students to stay on track as they follow the map, then play the recording.

EXTENSIONS

1. Provide drawing materials (paper, markers, colored pencils) for students to create their own impressionistic version of a map for *Letter from Sado* or another piece the band is rehearsing.
2. Both versions (educator map and student map) highlight the music vocabulary students will hear, learn, and use as they play *Letter from Sado*. Reinforce this learning by asking students to write definitions for the bolded/underlined terms as a homework assignment.

ASSESSMENT

Observe students as they follow print copies of the *Letter from Sado* map to informally assess student’s ability to connect the recorded music to the print analysis. Use any student created maps of the music as evidence of their ability to use terms and images to communicate musical understanding.



A portrait of the poet Bashō, with his most famous poem "An old pond - a frog jumps in -"

MUSICAL INSPIRATIONS

Here is the poem that inspired Jodie Blackshaw's piece for Middle School bands. The author was the Japanese poet, Matsuo Bashō. He was born in 1644, near the city of Kyoto, Japan. He traveled the islands of Japan and wrote this haiku about Sado Island.

Read the poem, look closely at the images, and **make predictions** about how you think the music will sound.

Stormy sea:

Stretching over Sado,

Heaven's River¹

Stormy seas have been interpreted by many artists. Here are images to help you imagine how a stormy sea might sound.



Stormy Sea with Shipwreck-Marcus Larson (1857)



The Great Wave off Kanagawa, a Ukiyo-e print by Hokusai

Heaven's River is one way the people of Japan talk about the Milky Way. Look at this recent Hubble image of the Milky Way and think about how music might sound like Heaven's River.



¹ Reprinted by permission from *Basho's Haiku: Selected Poems of Matsuo Basho* by Matsuo Basho, translated by David Landis Barnhill, the State University of New York Press ©2004, State University of New York. All rights reserved.



1-OPENING

"The Wild Sea"

Small groups of players interpret musical phrases to create the sound of "The Wild Sea." Each group determines their dynamics, tempo, articulation and when to enter and exit the section. Music sounds like the turbulent, bubbling sea that surrounds Sado Island. Near the end of the section, a decrescendo and lighter textures bring the turbulence to a close. All that is left is the sound of ocean drums.

LETTER FROM SADO LISTENING MAP

3-CLOSING

"Heaven's River"

A still starry night – the Milky Way

Musicians play the same phrases as in "The Wild Sea," but now they interpret the sound of a still starry night, looking up at the Milky Way, or Heaven's River as it is called in Japan. They again determine the entrances, dynamics, articulation, and tempo. Similar in length to the opening.

2-MIDDLE

A lone traveler looks out to the Isle of Sado

- Ocean drums whisper & pairs of flutes, clarinets, and oboes play a soft, legato wandering melody. The melancholy music echoes the quiet steps of the traveler.
- Other instruments play softly weaving threads of polyphonic melodies carrying the traveler forward.
- A ritardando and the shimmer of a suspended cymbal end the section.

With Increasing Intensity

- The mood changes as sustained chords anchor a strong, spoken chant: "*Stormy sea stretching over Sado.*"
- Intensity builds as the traveler steps onward boldly. More musicians play.
- A long arc of sound builds a crescendo with increasing strength and emotion. Drama ebbs and flows, but keeps expanding.
- Taiko drums enter - crescendo builds again. Chant ends but drums continue. All play this powerful song with a persistent syncopated melody. The determined traveler journeys on against the elements.
- Drums cease. The section ends on a long chord. It dies away over a resonating suspended cymbal & 3 glockenspiel tones.

Soundscape of the misty mountain peaks of Sado Island

- With the word "shimmer" & wispy soft melodies from the beginning of the section, musicians create a vocal soundscape.
- Ends with a chord that crescendos and merges into the closing section.