

Tritsch Tratsch Polka

(The Very Mean Ringmaster and the Tightrope Walker)

Music: Johann Strauss

Story/Lesson: Deborah Ziolkoski

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Lesson One

Objectives To familiarize students with “Tritsch Tratsch Polka” by Johann Strauss. Students will be able to sing, dance and play through the music and conduct through the music map successfully.

Related Concepts

A B A (ternary) form, improvisation, terms ascending and descending, accents, coda.

Recommended Grade

Preschool – grade 6 (adapt instrumental accompaniment accordingly).

Suggested Themes

Circus

Formation

Students are in a scattered formation for the duration of the story. When putting Section A together, strings may be taped to the floor acting as tightropes. Ringmasters are at one end of the rope and the tightrope walkers around the middle. Section B will have students moving freely about the room.

Materials required String/yarn taped on floor for tightropes. (Ten to twelve ropes or lines of masking tape will do) cd, class-sized music map, picture books.

Suggested Teaching Process -Read story (lesson strategies for Section A incorporated within). Teach Section A (as per story). **A great way to introduce the concept of a circus is to begin a discussion with the aid of a few picture books. There are many to choose from! Olivia Saves the Circus, Mirette on the High Wire and more! See the Zoom Workshop for more ideas!*

The Very Mean Ringmaster and the Tightrope Walker

Section A

Many years ago, there was a mean, selfish ringmaster. He always wanted to be the main attraction at every circus. He made certain that other circus performers had very little time in the spotlight, for he wanted all the attention! He believed that it was his show, and that he should be the star!

During every circus act, the ringmaster would crack his whip to show everyone that he was the most powerful and the best. One day the circus needed to hire a new tightrope walker for their show. They hired a talented young boy who seemed to be very good at his act. In fact, the ringmaster thought he was a little too good!

So he decided to try and scare the tightrope walker off his rope. He had a scowl on his face, and with a sharp snap of his wrist his whip cracked loudly through the air—not once, but twice.

*(Refer to the music for the rhythmic notation of the lyrics) *Teacher asks students to demonstrate while saying, “Snap, snap.”*

Well, with two loud cracks like that, the tightrope walker became very nervous and cried out, “Ah, ah, ah, ah!” as he stumbled around on his rope!

**Ask students to demonstrate what a scared tightrope walker crying out, “Ah, ah, ah, ah!” might look like.*

Realizing that this was a very talented tightrope walker, the ringmaster continued to crack his whip until he realized his plan was not working!

(Repeat snapping whip and "Ah, ah, ah, ah" part four times.)

To make things worse, the tightrope walker looked at him with a big smile on his face and in a teasing manner sang, "Can't catch me Mis-ter Ring- mas-ter, leg up high, leg up high; can't catch me Mis- ter Ring-mas-ter, leap, leap, cha, cha, cha."

**Teacher demonstrates how the ringmaster was getting teased while singing the section above. Ask all students to try.*

This made the ringmaster so furious, that he bent down and began wiggling the rope trying to get him off.

Teacher demonstrates saying: "Wig-gle, wig-gle, wig-gle, wig-gle, wig-gle, wig-gle, wig-gle, wig-gle."

This trick almost worked, for the tightrope walker shouted out, "Fal-ling, fal-ling, fal-ling, fal-ling, I am fal-ling down!"
(Teacher's voice falls from high to low.)

Just as the ringmaster thought he had won, the tightrope walker caught his balance at the bottom of the rope.

Teacher asks students how they might fall down if the ringmaster were wiggling the rope. (Ask students what clues from your voice were heard – high to low.) Rehearse from the beginning point of wiggling the rope.

The tightrope walker refused to let the ringmaster get the best of him and began saying, "I can do it, I can do it, I can do it, I can do it, do it, do it, do it, do it..."

**Have students act this out along with the teacher, as the teacher repeats words, "I can do it..." (rising from a low balancing position to a high one).*

So, with the ringmaster cracking his whip, the tightrope walker began gaining back his balance. The battle began once again with "snap, snap..."

Teacher points to herself/himself and says "snap, snap," then points to students. They should say, "Ah, ah, ah, ah!" (Repeat this four times alternating "ahs" as in the music.)

- Ask students if they would like to become ringmasters and tightrope walkers?
- Divide students into two groups: ringmasters and tightrope walkers. Ask the ringmasters to find their places at the ends of the ropes (one ringmaster per rope, two if necessary). Tightrope walkers are to find a spot in the middle of the ropes. Ideally, there should be one student per rope, but there can be two, if necessary.
- You may also have a section of students who are on the sidelines watching and singing. Switch turns allowing these students to participate after reviewing through it once.
- After the students have all had a chance to sing, dance, and act out both the ringmaster and the tightrope walker parts for Section A, ask them to take a seat on the floor in front of you.

- Tell the students you were at the circus that had this mean ringmaster, and you managed to get a copy of the music that he had there. Explain to the students that the ringmaster's favourite music was by composer Johann Strauss. Do they remember anything special about Mr. Strauss? (Discuss a few highlights.)
- Explain to the students that this special piece is called "Tritsch Tratsch Polka." Can they say such a funny name? It really means "Chit Chat Polka."
- Ask students to listen carefully, to see if they can hear the ringmaster and tightrope walker's magic words. Play Section A, quietly whispering or singing along. (This often leads into doing the actions on the spot as well.)
- Would they like to try to be the ringmasters and tightrope walkers to the real music? Ask students to find a spot on the ropes, and sing, dance, and act through with the cd.

**I find it works best if you ask students to pick their own parts. Place all the ringmasters at the ends of the ropes (remind children that these ringmasters have no idea how to tightrope walk) and place tightrope walkers in the middles of the ropes. Remind tightrope walkers to place their arms out to keep their balance.*

If time permits, you may like to introduce the music map at the end of this lesson. If not, take fifteen minutes another time and work through the music map then. Proceed as follows:

Introduce Section A of the music map

- Ask students to take a seat on the floor in front of the music map.
- Have students take out their conducting fingers, and ask them to conduct in the air as you conduct through Section A of the map.
- Students can sing along with you as together you conduct through the map. Demonstrate how the map works the first time just by singing. The second time, sing it through with the cd.
- When students are really secure with how the map works, ask volunteers to come up and conduct for the class.

**Don't forget a special conducting hat and wand for fun!*

Lesson Two

Section B (Refer to the music for the rhythmic notation of the lyrics)

Suggested Teaching Process - Review through Section A, and when students are secure continue on with Section B.

- Ask students what other people they might see at the circus besides the performers. (People who sell peanuts and popcorn {vendors}.)
- Explain how, very often in circuses, there is an intermission or a short break between acts. During this break, vendors try to sell their treats. The vendors in this circus, however, each want to sell more treats than the others. They all walk around as though they have the best treats in the land.
- Ask students what types of treats there might be, drawing out answers like, peanuts, popcorn, and cola from students. Ask students to demonstrate how these vendors walk around calling out, "Peanuts, popcorn, cola!" Join the students, demonstrating Section B.
- Sing and act through Section B together.
"Doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, peanuts! Doo, doo, popcorn! Etc." Shout out the treat words in a way that a vendor might.

Tell children the vendors "show off" at the end of the phrase by singing: "La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, La, La, La" in a teasing way.

- Explain to students that the vendors all thought that everything was going really well, until a thief grabbed a treat from their treat box. Then the chase began!

Teacher demonstrates the chase taking swift, giant steps on the word chase, (strongly emphasize that there are only four chase steps). Students freeze in a searching pose on the words "look, look, look."

"Chase, chase, chase, chase, look, look, look. Chase, chase, chase, chase, look, look, look. Chase, chase, chase, chase, look, look, look.

It's you, it's you, I got you too! (*Pretends to find thief and points at them.*)

Ask students to try this with you. Practice from the start of Section B.

After the vendor caught the thief, he didn't want anyone to think anything was wrong, so he continued on just like he did before. (Sing and move to the last line of Section B).

Ask students if they can stand up and act like one of the vendors at the circus. Sing, dance, and act this part through together.

Introduce Section B of the music map:

Ask students to take a seat on the floor by the large class music map. Have students conduct through Section B in the air, as you conduct on the class- sized map. Have a few volunteers come and guest conduct, with you remaining close by to help guide.

If time permits, practice through the entire song with the recording, having designated ringmasters and tightrope walkers for Section A (on designated ropes).

Tell students that after Section A, everyone magically transformed into vendors for Section B (scattered formation). Students then return to their original positions when the music returns to Section A.

Introduce Section B, singing and dancing through the entire section. Review the entire piece in its full form (A B A). Introduce Section B of the music map, and have students conduct through both sections.

Suggested Teaching Process

Review through Section A, and when students are secure continue on with Section B.

For Lesson Three instrumentation, all the reproducible activity pages, audio, video files and much more refer to the ***Fun with Composers Teacher Guides***. These are available in digital and hard copy format! For more video lesson ideas view the Fun with Composer YouTube Channel.

All FWC Resources now available through Music is Elementary!