

Google Arts & Culture

Learn Together: Fryderyk Chopin

["Portrait of the Composer – an expression of the act of listening." The Royal Łazienki Museum in Warsaw](#)



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Using the lesson plan and Google Arts & Culture resources

This lesson plan is designed to support you as you explore Google Arts & Culture stories and exhibits related to the lesson topic. The images you will see here are just a sample of the media—texts, images, audio, and video—available to you on the Google Arts & Culture website and app. As the lesson uses only resources found on GA&C, it cannot present every aspect of a given topic. A parent or teacher might be guiding you through the lesson, or you might choose to complete it on your own.

All you need to access the lesson is an internet connection and a web browser or the Google Arts & Culture app. You may want to take notes, whether you do that digitally or with paper and pen.

The lesson plan has an **introduction**, which will describe the topic and provide some background information that will help you understand what you are seeing, hearing, and reading. Then the lesson will take you on a journey from one **Story** to another, fill in some details along the way, and pose **questions** that will help you focus on important ideas. A **quiz** and a link for **exploring the topic further** are followed by **ideas for projects** related to the lesson topic that you can do at home or in the classroom.

As noted, the lesson plan includes **questions** about the main stories, and there is also a **quiz**. You will want to write answers to the questions in a notebook or on a piece of paper. Then you can check all your answers when you've finished the lesson.

Resources on the Google Arts & Culture website include Themes, Stories, Museum Views, items, and images.

- ❖ **Themes** bring together stories, exhibits, collections, images, audio, and video files that relate to a topic.
- ❖ In a **Story**, scroll through by clicking the arrows or using the scroll function on your tablet, trackpad, or mouse. Audio and videos on slides will play automatically. Clicking on an image title will take you to a page with more information about it.
- ❖ In **Museum Views**, you move through a 3D space. Click to move forward. Click, hold, and move the cursor left or right to turn.
- ❖ An **item** will take you to an individual **image**, where you can zoom in and sometimes read more about the artefact.



In this lesson, you will learn about:

- ❖ The dramatic life of composer and pianist Fryderyk Chopin.
- ❖ What led Chopin to be hailed as a musical genius from the age of seven.
- ❖ The romantic beauty of some of Chopin's most recognizable music.
- ❖ The influence of Chopin on music and musicians today.

You will:

- ❖ Explore some stories and exhibits about Fryderyk Chopin's life and music.
- ❖ Answer some questions about what you have seen and read.

This lesson will take **30–45 minutes** to complete.

Learn Together: Fryderyk Chopin



Fryderyk Chopin was born in 1810 in Poland, to a family that was well-connected but not wealthy. Even as a child, Chopin was a master pianist and composer, and quickly gained the attention of the Polish elite. As a young man, he set out for what was then the music capital of the world: Vienna, Austria. Just after he left, his beloved homeland was shaken by an independence movement that was defeated by Russian rule. Due to ill health, Chopin never saw his home again.

While in exile in Europe, Chopin continued his rise to musical fame. His beautiful compositions, often inspired by Polish dances and music, entranced concert-goers in Vienna, Paris, and Britain. His short but intense life made him a hero of the Romantic era.

Today, Chopin's music is some of the most ambitious and beloved for pianists around the world. It continues to draw in young musicians, who revisit and reinterpret his music in modern ways. He remains most beloved in Poland, home of the [Fryderyk Chopin Institute](#), an organization dedicated to promoting Chopin's life and work.

As you view the exhibits and stories in this lesson, think about these questions:

- ❖ How did music shape the events of Chopin's life?
- ❖ Where did Chopin draw inspiration for his music?
- ❖ What makes Chopin's music so beloved by audiences from his lifetime and ours?



The Life of Fryderyk Chopin

Chopin's entire life was shaped by music. Even as a child, he outpaced his local music teachers and was hailed as a prodigy, or young genius. He debuted his first composition at the age of seven, and was a Polish celebrity while still a teenager.

Chopin's life changed dramatically during a musical tour to Vienna, Austria. His homeland of Poland rose up against the Russian Empire, but the rebellion failed, dashing hopes for Polish independence.

Settling in Paris, Chopin continued his rise as a celebrity musician, giving concerts, publishing compositions, befriending other famous musicians, and carrying on love affairs. But his health was frail, and at the young age of 39, he passed away, leaving behind a legacy of beautiful music.

Click [here](#) to learn about Chopin's family and [here](#) to learn about his education.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What was Chopin's family like?
2. What did Chopin's music teachers say about his talent?
3. How did Chopin feel being a Polish person in Paris?

To learn about Chopin's first printed composition at the age of seven, click [here](#).

["Photograph of Chopin's piano used for the filming of a movie," Museum Celda de Frédéric Chopin y George Sand](#)

Chopin in Europe

Chopin wrote his most important works while living in Paris and traveling around Europe. In Paris, he frequently gave large public concerts and small performances in *salons*, or parties hosted to hear music, see art, or discuss ideas.

Chopin's charming, funny personality won him important friends among the famous musicians, composers, and authors of Paris, and he traveled throughout Europe to perform. Underneath this social exterior, Chopin sometimes expressed frustration with his busy schedule, loneliness at being in an unfamiliar country, and longing for his beloved Poland and his family.

These contradictions seemed to find their way into his music, which expressed moods from lighthearted dancing to the deepest sadness.

Click [here](#) to learn about one of Chopin's earliest and most important concerts in Paris.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. Who hosted and promoted Chopin's first concert?
2. What pieces did Chopin play during the concert?
3. What was the audience and press reaction to Chopin's concert, and how did that change his life in Paris?

To learn about Chopin's first concert in Vienna at the age of seventeen, click [here](#).

["Grand Piano Pleyel," c. 1854. The Fryderyk Chopin Institute](#)

PLEYEL
Depuis 1807 à Paris





Chopin's Music

How did Chopin become so famous so quickly? There are two main answers. The first was his brilliant piano playing. Though he had taken lessons from an early age, Chopin developed his own ways of playing the instrument. As an adult, he was inspired by opera singers, and longed to make the instrument “sing” with the same control and expression as a human voice.

The second reason is Chopin's beautiful compositions, mostly for solo piano. Chopin drew inspiration from the music of his time, including [Polish dances](#) and works by other classical composers. He was brilliant at expressing emotions and moods through music. He wrote many *nocturnes*, or works inspired by nighttime, and was a master at capturing the quiet melancholy of the night hours.

Click [here](#) to learn about Chopin's compositions by studying one of his manuscripts.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What type of song is *Berceuse in D flat major, Op. 57*?
2. Why are so many of the notes for the left hand missing in the manuscript?
3. In your opinion, what is the effect of playing variations on a single melody?

To learn about Chopin's favorite pianos and how a craftsman recreated one, click [here](#).

Chopin Today

Chopin's music has remained popular since his untimely death. He is especially celebrated in his homeland of Poland, home of the Fryderyk Chopin Institute.

Though classical music is less popular today than in the past, young piano players continue to discover and fall in love with Chopin's music. Chopin allows musicians to express a wide range of feelings, and his compositions range from simple melodies that students can play to challenging pieces that demand years of training. The universal appeal of Chopin's music has spread beyond Europe and around the world.

Click [here](#) to learn about the famous International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competitions, which spotlight young pianists.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. Why was the competition founded?
2. Who was the youngest winner of the competition, and how old were they?
3. In some years, the competition does not award a first prize, saying that no musicians were worthy. Do you agree with this decision? Why or why not?

Hear interviews with young pianists [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), read essays about what Chopin means to them [1](#), [2](#), and hear performances of Chopin pieces, [1](#), [2](#), [3](#).



["Yulianna Avdeeva," The Fryderyk Chopin Institute](#)

Quiz

Read the questions and write your answers in your notebook or on a piece of paper.

1. What was the November Uprising, and how did it change Chopin's life?
2. How did Chopin earn a living while in Paris?
3. What was the most important piece that Chopin played at his first concert in Paris?
4. How did Chopin change his *Grand Variations* from when he first wrote it to when he performed it in Paris?
5. How did Chopin make changes in his musical manuscripts, and why?
6. What emotions and moods does Chopin create in his nocturnes? You can listen to one [here](#).
7. Who is allowed to compete in the International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition?
8. What decisions have led to controversies at the Chopin Piano Competitions?

Explore Further

You have learned a bit about Chopin's life and music. To learn more, click [here](#).

It's Your Turn!

In this lesson, you learned about the life and work of Fryderyk Chopin. Here are some ideas for projects that you can do at home or in the classroom.

- ❖ Reread the [analysis of Chopin's *Berceuse in D flat major*](#). The text describes the melodies as resembling a falling feather, raindrops, and light on water. Listen to each melody and describe the images that come to your own mind.
- ❖ Read [this story](#) about how artists have been inspired by Chopin. Listen to a Chopin piece and create art that expresses how the music makes you feel.
- ❖ Choose one of Chopin's [pieces](#) based on [dances](#). Work with others to come up with a dance for the piece.
- ❖ Choose a musician who you believe could be the basis of an international competition. Think about how you would judge the "best" performance for that musician. Make an advertising poster to invite musicians to participate.



Answers

The Life of Fryderyk Chopin

1. Chopin's family worked in the home of a Polish noble. They gave Fryderyk a full musical education. According to Chopin's letters, he and his family were very close and loving. Unfortunately they lost a daughter at an early age.
2. Chopin's music teachers said he was a genius, and his first teacher said he had nothing left to show Fryderyk.
3. Chopin seemed to both enjoy the social and musical life of Paris and miss his homeland. He often socialized with other Polish refugees in Paris.

Chopin in Europe

1. The piano maker Pleyel hosted the concert.
2. Chopin played his Piano Concerto in E minor and his Grand Variations on a theme from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.
3. The audience and press agreed that Chopin was a musical genius, and it led to more concerts, lessons, and friendships with other Paris musicians.

Chopin's Music

1. The song is a lullaby.
2. The manuscript is missing many notes of the left hand because the left hand plays the same notes over and over. Chopin only noted where the pattern would change.
3. Answers will vary. Students may note how the variations add different moods to the same melody.

Chopin Today

1. The competition was founded to promote Chopin's music and ensure that it remained popular.
2. The youngest first-prize winner was Krystian Zimerman of Poland, who was 18 when he won.
3. Answers will vary.

Quiz

1. The November Uprising was a failed rebellion against the Russian Empire by a Polish independence movement. After the rebellion, Russia ruled Poland much more strictly.
2. Chopin earned a living by giving concerts, teaching lessons, and publishing musical compositions.
3. Chopin's most important piece at the Paris concert was Grand Variations on a theme from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.
4. Chopin removed the orchestra part of the piece and played it for solo piano.
5. Chopin crossed out any changes over and over so no one could see what he had originally written.
6. Answers will vary. Most nocturnes create a quiet mood; some are peaceful and some are sad.
7. The piano competition is limited to young pianists, with age limits around 30.
8. Answers will vary. The juries have chosen to share prizes or to not award some prizes, which many people believe is unfair.