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music
director

The NSO Arts & Minds Wind Trio

Presents

Postcards from a Blue Planet

by

Kevin Lau

2019-2020 Study Guide

“As curators of music in the region, it is incumbent on us to ensure that this most universal of art forms thrills, enriches and thrives in Niagara.”

- Bradley Thachuk, Music Director, NSO

“The students at Harriet Tubman Public School were entirely focused on the trio’s performance of Post Cards from a Blue Planet. You could have heard a pin drop in the gymnasium. Not only was it an incredible learning experience for our students but it was also the cultural experience of a lifetime.”

- Tom Reynolds, Vice Principal Harriet Tubman PS



Doug Miller, Principal Flute



Zoltan Kalman, Principal Clarinet



Cathi MacDonnell, Bassoon

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The NSO Arts & Minds Wind Trio is a production of the Niagara Symphony Orchestra, conceived, developed, and performed on tour by musicians of the NSO: Doug Miller, Zoltan Kalman, and Cathi MacDonnell. The performance features *Postcards from a Blue Planet*, an original work by Composer Kevin Lau, commissioned by the NSO in 2018.

The Niagara Symphony Orchestra acknowledges with thanks the significant contribution to the NSO Arts & Minds Wind Trio project made by Rachael Haynes, B. Mus., OCT, who researched and developed this study guide.

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Introduction

The Niagara Symphony Orchestra is proud to partner with Niagara Investment in Culture and The Ontario Paper Thorold Foundation to deliver this tour of the NSO *Arts & Minds Wind Trio* to schools across the region. The *Arts & Minds Wind Trio* brings the art of imagery and music together, by encouraging students to become discriminating music listeners, and to connect to contemporary music through the live performance.

Each short section of *Postcards from a Blue Planet* represents a different biosphere on our diverse planet. The contemporary nature of the piece will surely be a new experience for young listeners. By listening to music that steers away from traditional forms and sounds, students will be exposed to music that “percolates” into an aural representation of each postcard. During the live performance, students will notice performance techniques, interact with the performers, and gain an appreciation for music as a form of communication.

Listening to selections of orchestral music before the performance is encouraged. Repetition of pieces will help students improve their ear for identifying instruments, patterns, and expression in music. When students are listening to music, there should be a clear focus. Listening **for** music, whether this is instruments, repetition, or themes requires students to document their observations. Listening **to** music suggests a reaction, such as a sketch, performance, or movement. In pre-concert listening and learning, students are encouraged to consider both the elements of music and auditory imagery.

By introducing students to orchestral music prior to performance, and by encouraging pre-concert creations and post-concert reflections, the *Arts & Minds Wind Trio* works with students and educators to build a lasting relationship with orchestral music.

Meet Our Musicians

DOUG MILLER, Principal Flute

Douglas Miller is a versatile soloist who performs regularly in symphony orchestras, chamber music series, mega-musicals, film and television recordings. Currently Principal Flute of the NSO, he has performed with the Toronto Symphony, Hamilton Philharmonic, and Kitchener Waterloo Orchestra and in pit bands for many productions, including *The Lion King*.

A founding member of The Gallery Players of Niagara, he has also produced three CDs with his trio *Glissandi*. Doug regularly performs his multimedia show, *Flutes en Route!*, a showcase of ethnic flutes from around the world.



ZOLTAN KALMAN, Principal Clarinet

Zoltan Kalman was born in Hungary, training in Clarinet Performance and Chamber Music at the prestigious Franz Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest. Since arriving in Canada in 1989, Zoltan has appeared as guest soloist with numerous orchestras and ensembles, including the Etobicoke Symphony, Boris Brott Music Festival Orchestra, and the Gallery Players.

October 2006 marked the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Uprising, a defining moment in Hungarian and Canadian history. Zoltan was selected by the National Arts Centre as one of the 50 Hungarian-Canadians who have made significant contribution to the cultural life in Canada; his portrait now hangs in the permanent collection at the Portrait Gallery of Canada.



CATHI MACDONNELL, Bassoon



Cathi MacDonnell earned a Bachelor of Music in Performance Degree from the University of Toronto. She has been a regular performer with the Niagara Symphony Orchestra since 1995 as well as freelancing with many orchestras throughout Ontario, including the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, and the Toronto Operetta Theatre.

In addition to her orchestral work, Cathi has performed with several chamber ensembles across the region, and served as a mentor with the National Academy Orchestra, Niagara Youth Orchestra, and Hamilton Philharmonic Youth Orchestra.

KEVIN LAU, COMPOSER



Kevin Lau has established himself as one of Canada's leading young composers. Awarded the 2017 Victor Martyn Lynn-Staunton Award by the Canada Council for Outstanding Achievement, Kevin's music has been commissioned and performed by ensembles across North America, including: the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra,, and the Niagara Symphony Orchestra, among many others.

In addition to composing concert music, Kevin is also active as a pianist and film composer. Born in Hong Kong, Kevin moved to Toronto at the age of 7, and received his doctorate in music composition from the University of Toronto, where he now lectures, and co-founded the Sneak Peek Orchestra.

Concert Etiquette

Ontario Curriculum Connections:



Reflecting, Responding, Analysing: 2.2, 2.3



Oral Language: 1.1, 1.2

Arts in Minds Wind Trio is a wonderful opportunity to listen and watch a live performance of music. This is also an opportunity to play an important role as an audience member. To help students understand their role on concert day, use this activity to outline acceptable behavior throughout the performance.

It is important to mention that the audience does not usually have a chance to speak to the performers during a concert. We want to encourage lively discussion, but at the appropriate times.

IN CLASS

1. As a class, discuss different venues where you have been a part of an audience (sports, dance, play, rock concert, etc.) Create a chart of 3 or 4 different venues.
2. On the chart, label the columns *Look*, *Feel*, *Hear*. Ask students to describe what is happening at each event. A typical example may look like this:

	Look	Feel	Hear
Hockey	-Lights/Screens -Huge Crowds -People moving around	-Fast-Paced -High Energy	-Cheering -Chants/Singing -Buzzing for Goals
Ballet	-Dark in Audience -Dancers on stage -People sitting	-Calm energy -Rested when you watch	-Music (Orchestra) -Some applause - Dancers do not speak

3. Using the chart, ask students why different behaviours are acceptable at different events. [*We cheer at hockey to encourage our team to win!; At the orchestra, we wait to applaud until the conductor drops their hands*]

4. Explain that *Arts and Minds Wind Trio* is a live performance. Referring to the chart again, what rules will stay the same? What rules will change?

Here is an example of revisions your class might create:

Orchestra	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Dark Audience-Players on stage-Audience Sitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Calm sitting-No moving around-React to music (crying, laughter)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Music-Some applause-Very little talking-Musicians do not talk; Conductor might
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In Gym
More pauses in concert
Talking with performers
No Conductor
We talk *when music stops*

Use the revisions to reinforce acceptable times for interactions (when performers stop playing **and** return to rest position).

5. Have students imagine they are in a movie theatre. With distractions such as cell phones, loud talking, and people standing up in front of you, can you **appreciate** and **enjoy** the movie? Are these behaviours **respectful** of others?

6. Remind students that during a performance, the audience is quietly listening. This demonstrates an **appreciation** for the musician's hard work, **respect** for fellow listeners, and gives everyone the moment to **enjoy** the many small details of the music. We want you, and those around you, to have a great experience during *Arts in Minds Wind Trio*.

Sound Board

Sound Board is a fun and engaging way for students to learn to identify different instruments of the Wind Trio. Since there are only 3 main instruments in the *Arts & Minds Wind Trio*, students will also learn to listen for different performance techniques, along with high vs. low pitches, various tempi, and a range of dynamics. The game allows students to practice their “listening for” skills, and learn to identify and describe technical features of the music.

A combination of musical excerpts and solo sound clips are encouraged. Britten’s *Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra* implements a single theme that is heard through variations in instrumentation, tempo, and texture. Descriptive solo sound clips are available for use at philharmonia.co.uk/explore/sound_samples. A simple drop-down menu allows you to choose instruments, tempo, and playing styles.

The following page is a suggested *Sound Board* card. The card may be laminated, and students can record their answers using a dry-erase marker. The game could also be adapted to a SmartBoard lesson, and become a whole-class interactive game.

Here is a quick summary of what students may listen for:

Instrumentation: Listen to the pitch and timbre of the instrument. A flute and oboe can play many of the same notes, but the bassoon has a deeper, more mellow sound.

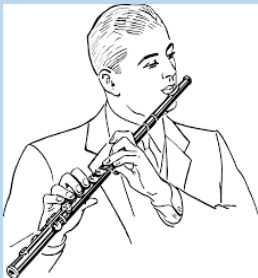


Pitch: Begin with the basics. Is it high or low? From there, dig deeper and describe overall movement of the melody or accompaniment. Did the melody climb to a high range? Do the low notes stay in one spot, repeating like a bass line?

Tempo: Finding the beat will help you estimate the tempo of the piece. Italian terminology can be paired with visual graphics to establish clear differences in speed.

Dynamics: Dynamics are simply different volume. Is it loud or soft? Are all sections doing the same thing, or is there contrast?

Articulation: Listen and imagine how the instrument is played. Staccato, legato, and a technique called flutter-tonguing each have a distinct sound.




Sound Board

Instrumentation	Flute	Clarinet	Bassoon
			

Tempo	<i>Largo</i> Slowly	<i>Adagio</i> Leisurely	<i>Andante</i> Walking	<i>Allegro</i> Fast	<i>Presto</i> Very Fast
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Dynamics	<i>pp</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>mp</i>	<i>mf</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>ff</i>
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Pitch	Very Low	Low	Middle	High	Very High
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Articulation	 Legato Smooth	 Trill Fluttering	 *Staccato Detached or poking
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First Impressions of Modern Classical Music

Lesson for Grades 4-5

Ontario Curriculum Connections:



Reflecting, Responding, Analysing: 3.1, 3.2



Media: 1.1, 1.5

In this lesson, students will listen to different variations and recordings of the same piece of music and compare CD cover art for the same piece of music. By studying the CD art and listening to excerpts from these recordings, students will decide the target audience.

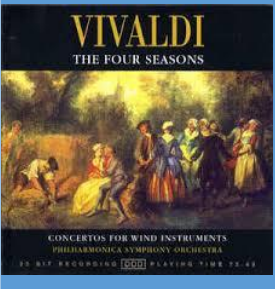


Students can access music-streaming sites such as [NAXOS Music Library](#), [Spotify](#), or other services available through your school or public library, to find popular classical recordings. Choosing a popular composer or composition will make their search easier than finding an unknown or new recording of music. Use the worksheet **First Impressions of Classical Music** (pg. 14-15) to complete this task.

Teacher Example: Vivaldi's "Four Seasons"

Using Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" as an example is an excellent choice; it is a composition that has been recorded many times. You will find images that appeal to children (the music is a great teaching piece), a young audience (the music has been reimagined in many ways, including a jazz-inspired album), and the traditional audience (cover art is often a Classical painting, or image of the composer).

Teacher Example: First Impressions of Classical Music

Vivaldi's "Four Seasons"

<p>Musical Work: Vivaldi "4 Seasons"</p> <p>Year: 1721</p> <p>Instrument: Strings</p>			
<p>The CD artwork makes me think...</p> <p>I notice the artwork has...</p>	<p>An old painting, and the people are wearing old clothing. This is probably going to be the original.</p>	<p>There are no photos or images. The title tells me saxophones are used. The cool colours make me think that this will sound like blues.</p>	<p>There is a photo of a mother and her baby. The CD is 'classical music', so there will be other composers on this CD</p>
<p>Sounds Like (instruments, mood, similarities and differences with original work)</p>	<p>This is an example of the original work. Strings are used.</p>	<p>Similar to original, but sounds like jazz. Saxophones are used instead of strings.</p>	<p>Sounds like the original work. The CD is a collection of different classical pieces, and this CD only has 'Winter' included.</p>
<p>First Impressions</p> <p>Who would buy this CD?</p> <p>How does the CD artwork compare to the music?</p>	<p>People who want to hear the original</p> <p>People who have never heard Classical Music before</p>	<p>People who know the original, and want to hear a new version</p> <p>People who like jazz</p>	<p>Families</p> <p>People who want a variety of classical music.</p>

PART 1: Search and Find Classical Music

Have students work in small groups. Each group will use the worksheet **First Impressions of Classical Music** (pg. 14-15) to search and find multiple recordings of the same classical piece of music.

Students are to choose 3 different CD's that include the same composition, or an **adaptation** of that work. The artwork should be vastly different from one example to the next.

In their search for music, student may find using the keywords 'adaptation', 'arrangement', 'derivative', 'recording', '**transcript**' and 'tribute'. Searching by instrument, 'for children', 'in movies', etc., will also help students find more variety in their CD art.

Suggested works (many recordings and variations):

Bach's "Toccata and Fugue in d minor"
Beethoven's "5th Symphony"
Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata"
Debussy's "Claire de Lune"
Pachelbel's "Canon in D"
Ravel's "Bolero"
Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee"
Strauss's "Also Sprach Zarathustra"
Tchaikovsky's "Theme from Swan Lake"
Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries"

PART 2: Exploring Classical Music

The handout **Listen To This!** (pg. 16) will allow students to compare ‘old’ and ‘new’ styles of music, and will give students an opportunity to compare traditional and “reimagined” recordings of timeless and popular compositions.

This worksheet can be used as a journal reflection, exit card, or sharing circle conversation.

Guiding Questions:

Are there instruments used that you did not expect to hear in an orchestra?

Is this piece of music a “re-imagined” Classic? Are there elements of old styles and forms?

Are there elements in this piece of music that are similar to your own choices in music?

Where might people have heard this music when it was first performed? Describe the audience, the era, and/or the possible venue(s) where music would be performed during this time period.

The orchestra has changed in size, new instruments have been introduced or improved, and we have many more options for viewing concerts (outdoor, stage, laser productions, etc.). Should timeless pieces of music be adapted to fit a new era, or should the music remain in its purest (and most authentic) form?

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF CLASSICAL MUSIC

In this WebQuest, you will be working in small groups to compare the CD artwork for a popular classical music piece. As a group, consider how the artwork influences the buyer to purchase the CD.

The CD's you will choose will all have the same version of the classical of your choice. "Adaptations" and "Arrangements" tend to use different instruments, but usually stick to the original form of music. Stick to music that stays close to the original version of your classical piece.

On the back of this sheet is a chart that you will complete with your group. Save the CD images to your personal drives, to be shared with the class later.

As you look for different CD's, think about:

- Who is the target audience that would buy this CD?
- What information can I learn from the cover design?
- What do I expect to hear when I listen to this CD?
- Judging from the artwork, what time period would this music belong to? What visual clues do you notice?
- If you were an experienced/professional musician, would you appreciate how classical music was represented in the CD design? Why or why not?

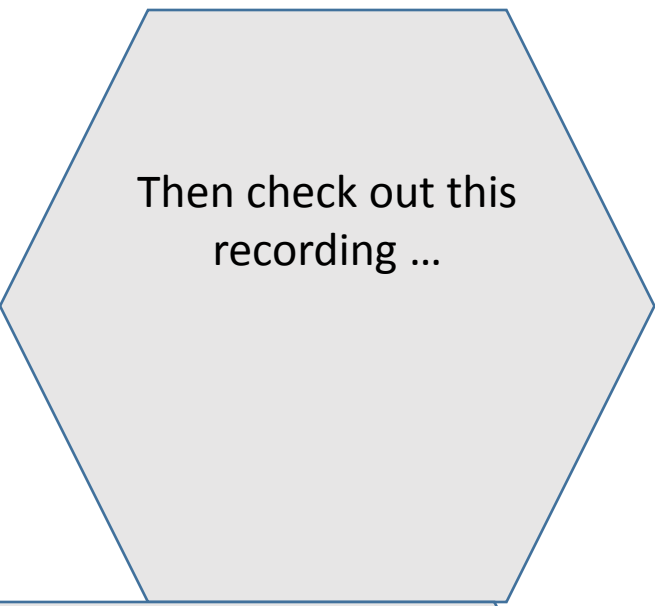
Musical Work: Year: Instrument:	Image of CD 1	Image of CD 2	Image of CD 3
The CD artwork makes me think... I notice the artwork has...			
Sounds Like (instruments, mood, similarities and differences with original work)			
First Impressions Who would buy this CD? How does the CD artwork compare to the music?			



Listen to This!



If you like ...



Then check out this
recording ...



I enjoyed this new version because ...

Listening to New Classical

Lesson for Grades 6-8

Ontario Curriculum Connections:



Reflecting, Responding, Analysing: 2.1, 3.1, 3.2

The world of New Classical music covers many different styles. Unlike previous eras of music, there is no true defining trend or feature in current classical music. This exploration will allow students to be exposed to different facets of contemporary classical music by first reviewing more familiar classical styles.

First, students will use 2 online databases to find a contemporary Canadian composer. Many of today's composers will have their own websites, which will provide biographical information, composition excerpts, video, awards, and more. Once a composer is chosen, students will choose a piece of music, and compare different genres of music.

Using the same composer, students will dissect a biography and create a **6 Degrees of Inspiration** (pg. 22-23) organizer, that summarizes their composer's influences and music style. Research may combine a collection of biographies, instruments, locations, and listening examples.

PART 1: Classroom Brainstorming

Begin the learning with brainstorming what classical music means to your students. They may choose composers, instruments, or opinions on familiar characteristics of classical music.

The chart below could be reproduced as a whole-class discussion. Have students discuss the genres of music they are interested in, and encourage them to find connections to contemporary music.

IF YOU LIKE ...	THEN TRY ...
Big orchestra sound	Soundtrack Compositions Search Serialism , or 12-tone music
Piano Music	Prepared Piano music
EDM	Electronic Classical, or devices such as the theremin , synthesizer , and tape loops
Music that tells a story	Rock Opera, Musicals, Protest Music, Symphonic Poems
World Music	Heritage or World Music, search World Music instruments
The traditional 'Classical' sound	"Neo"- Classical, Romantic Compositions with "Form" titles (Sonata, Concerto, etc.), not imagery-based titles

PART 2: Research a Contemporary Composer

Using the [Composer Diversity Database](#) and [The Living Composers Project](#) as a research tools, students can click on preferences related to gender, nationality, ensemble, and more.

As part of their research, they will research a Canadian contemporary composer, and record their findings on the worksheet **Listen To This!** (pg.16).

Once a composer has been chosen, students will find a musical example that they find interesting. The worksheet **Listen To This!** (pg. 16) will allow students compare ‘old’ and ‘new’ styles of music, and will give students an opportunity to compare contemporary classical music examples to their own musical interests.

Guiding Questions:

What instruments does this composer often use? Are there instruments used that you did not expect to hear in an orchestra?

What is the composer’s inspiration for writing this piece? Does knowing the composer’s vision for the piece help you appreciate the music?

Is this piece of music a “re-imagined” Classic? Are there elements of old styles and forms?

Are there elements in this piece of music that are similar to your own choices in music?

PART 3: Understanding Musical Influences

In this task, students will focus on the composer’s musical influences. From the previous research, student research will begin with the composer’s biography.

Biographies in general will summarize where a person was born, what they have studied in school, occupations, and major life events. Musician biographies will often outline details such as:

- Instruments they have learned
- Musicians/Instructors they have studied under
- Musicians they have worked as a collaboration
- Most successful compositions
- General style of composing, inspiration for writing music

Using the graphical organizer, **6 Degrees of Inspiration** (pg. 22-23), students will summarize details found in the composer's biography, and connect that information to other sources.

Research may lead to :

- videos of performances
- recordings of works
- articles (reviews, premiere promotions, touring schedule, etc.)
- interviews with music journalists, local newscasters, etc.
- collaborators, teachers, students connected to the composer
- program notes (the composer's own description of their piece)

Using Kevin Lau, composer of *Postcards from a Blue Planet*, as a model, teachers can highlight important details in the biography, and model how to find secondary sources of information.

A suggested list of secondary sources:

[The Canadian Music Centre](#)

[CBC Music – Classical](#)

[The JUNO Awards](#)

[Music at the NAC \(National Arts Centre\)](#)

Professional Orchestra Websites and other social media

Composer Websites and other social media

Performing Arts Centers (concert halls, stadiums, and other venues)

Magazines, Newspapers, Blogs, and other online sources of news and opinion

Teacher Example: 6 Degrees of Inspiration

Kevin Lau



Learned to
play piano

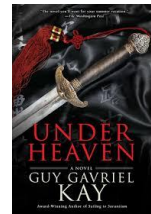


His teacher,
Christos Hastis

Wrote "Down the Rivers
of the Windfall Light"
from Dylan Thomas's
poem, *Fern Hill*



Collaborated with Victor
Cheng, and co-founded
Sneak Peek Orchestra



The title "Foothills
From Heaven" was
inspired by a
phrase found in
this book

"The Great North Overture was commissioned by Fran Harvey for the Metropolitan Silver Band's 75th Anniversary. I am honoured and delighted to be a part of the celebration for this amazing milestone, and especially to collaborate with my former high school teacher, who was a tremendous inspiration to me well before I had decided upon my path as a composer."

6 Degrees of Inspiration

In this WebQuest, you will research a Canadian modern classical composer, and discover his or her music influences. Heritage, places, teachers, world issues, and more might inspire your composer's style of music.

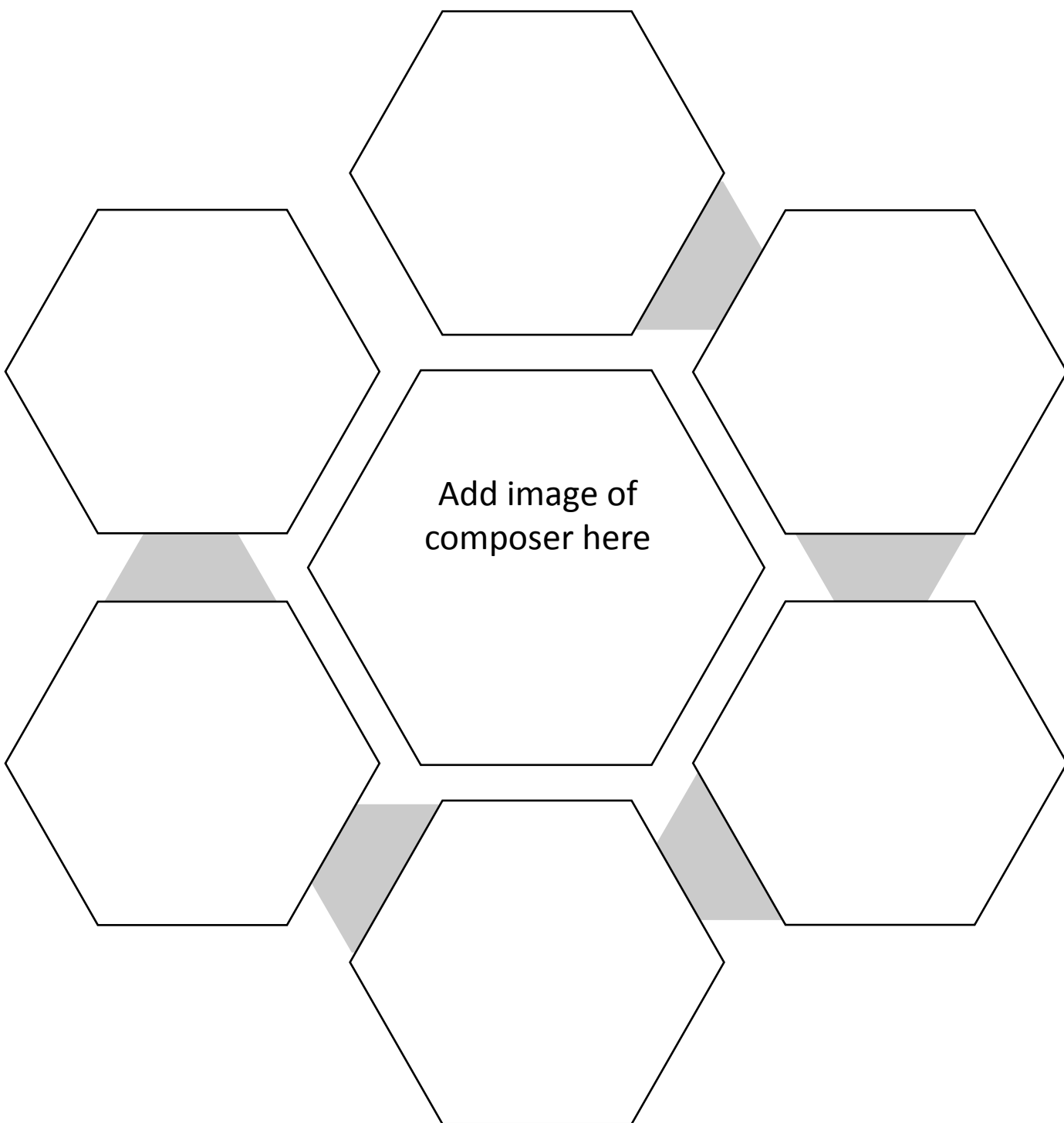
Begin by finding your composer's **biography**. Most modern composers will have their own websites, but you may also find information on the Canadian Music Centre website.

Biographies in general will summarize where a person was born, what they have studied in school, occupations, and major life events. Musician biographies will often outline details such as:

- Instruments they have learned
- Musicians/Instructors they have studied under
- Musicians they have worked as a collaboration
- Most successful compositions
- General style of composing, inspiration for writing music

Use the organizer to find out what – or who – inspires your composer to write music.

6 Degrees of Inspiration



Listening to *Postcards From A Blue Planet*

The composer of *Postcards from a Blue Planet*, Kevin Lau, included his own **program notes** to this multi-movement piece.

Program notes are written to accompany a piece of music. These notes are included in the score, for conductor and musicians to read and learn more about the music they will perform. Program notes are also included in concert programs, to give the audience some historical or background information, and to give the audience a sense of ‘what to expect’ while listening to the concert.

Lau had this to share about his composition:

Composed for the Arts and Minds Trio as part of the Niagara Symphony Orchestra’s educational outreach program, *Postcards from a Blue Planet* is a love letter to our home planet that takes the listener on a musical tour of Earth and its diverse biospheres.

The purpose of the work is threefold: to expose students to various musical techniques (including motivic threads and their transformations, structural and narrative considerations, unusual textures and sonic colours, and so on), to raise awareness of the beauty and fragility of the natural world, and to foster an appreciation for the relationship between music and visual imagination. Each of its seven movements is an aural ‘postcard’—that is, a brief, evocative snapshot of a particular environment, one that is musical rather than visual in nature. The composition as a whole includes a wide range of musical styles that serve as a metaphor for the staggering variation of life.

Ultimately, *Postcards* is an invitation to view our astonishing habitat as a precious gift, worth caring for and attending to—in the hopes that a new generation of young minds will renew humanity’s efforts toward sustainability in a rapidly-changing world

Consider this as you listen to *Postcards from a Blue Planet*:

EXPRESSIVE DEVICES

Think of punctuation in music. The exclamation mark is *forte*, a dramatic pause in our story is marked by a *fermata*, and a child’s laughter is mimicked in a high *staccato*. Volume and tempo are just a few ways we can add expression to a piece of music.

TIMBRE

In your listening, consider the instruments. An instrument’s **timbre** is a unique quality that defines its sound. Think of the ringing of a bell, or buzzing sound of an oboe.

VISUALIZATION THROUGH MUSIC

Listening to contemporary classical music is challenging to a new audience. By learning more about the composer, the style of music, and the message of this piece, we learn to listen for these influences in a performance.

Also, don’t go in with the expectation that you won’t understand modern music. Allow the music to ‘develop’ the image for each postcard,

Please schedule a performance with the Arts & Minds Wind Trio to view the full study guide.

E-mail brody.smith@niagarasympphony.org for more information.

