

Williams – Main Title/ Rebel Blockade Runner from Star Wars

Listening

Listen to the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by the composer, play this music on the link here:

[Listen here ►](#)

Context

About the composer: John Williams (born 1932)

John Williams is one of the world's most famous film composers. He has written music for many blockbuster films including Star Wars, Harry Potter, Jurassic Park, E.T., Jaws and Indiana Jones. His music is known for its memorable melodies, powerful orchestral sound and ability to tell a story without words. This is similar to programme music where music is used to tell a story or picture a scene or emotion.

About the piece: Main Title/Rebel Blockade Runner from Star Wars (1977)

This piece opens the original Star Wars film (1977). The music immediately creates a sense of excitement, adventure, and heroism. Williams was inspired by the large-scale orchestral music of composers such as Gustav Holst and Richard Strauss – both of whom also feature in our concert.

Listening Guide

Timings	Musical features to listen out for
0:00-0:09	Opening fanfare played fortissimo (very loud)
0:10-0:28	Main theme – heroic leitmotif (main theme representing a character) played by high trumpets with syncopated (off beat) chords in lower instruments and snare drum
0:29-0:51	Contrasting section – strings with glockenspiel
0:52-1:43	Repeat of the Main theme – few new features like the harp glissando creating a sense of excitement, moving towards a more mysterious section that is played piano (quietly) with a solo piccolo, suggesting the stars in the sky
1:44-2:15	The music builds rapidly with upward figures in the strings. Use of gong and ominous rhythm with dissonant harmonies, rallentando (slowing down) and a pause
2:16-2:36	Battle section with a fast tempo and an ostinato rhythm in the bass (on the note C) with dissonance brass over the top

Key musical features

- **Instrumentation:** Full symphony orchestra
- **Tempo:** Fast and energetic
- **Dynamics:** Strong contrasts between loud (forte/fortissimo) and soft (piano/pianissimo)
- **Texture:** Mostly thick, with many instruments playing together
- **Rhythm:** Bold, driving rhythms, syncopation to give energy
- **Melody:** Memorable brass fanfare
- **Mood:** Heroic, adventurous, exciting, dramatic

Short 5-minute task: Space Explorer Challenge

This challenge looks to help pupils understand more about how to create music that describes a particular story, scene or emotion.

To set the scene, encourage your pupils to think about going to space on an epic adventure as if they were starring in a film. Think about the scene – the words to describe it, what they would need to bring, what they would see and hear, what happens in the adventure. Note all their ideas on the board, creating a class word bank. As you go through, think about what music might help to accompany their epic adventure.

Some possible describing words – heroic, exciting, powerful, dramatic, adventurous, triumphant...

Some possible music words – fanfare, loud, fast, brass, contrast...

Play an extract from the piece – for example the opening 30 seconds – to see if pupils think that music would help to accompany their scene.

Stretch and Challenge

- Consider how orchestral instruments could help to tell the story
- Compare the music to music from another film they might have recently seen
- Identify changes in the musical elements and how these can be used to tell the story

Support and Scaffold

- Provide a list of describing words to choose from
- Use sentence starters 'The scene has...,' 'The music sounds...'

Medium 20-minute task: Galactic Rhythm Orchestra

This challenge is all about taking rhythms used in the piece to create a class performance, developing ensemble confidence and getting to know the piece of music. The rhythms used here are from 2:15 in the recording.

Try performing the rhythm which can be heard in this section. You might want to do this using the lyrics or using body percussion/unpitched percussion if this is available to you.



Things to notice about this rhythm:

- 3/4 time – 3 crotchet beats in each bar
- 2 crotchets on 'Star Wars' - strong, march-like feel
- Use of a triplet for 'Adventure' - 3 notes crushed into 1 beat
- This is repeated to form a 1 bar ostinato

Then try adding the brass line over the top, splitting the group in 2:

STAR WARS Ad-ven-ture STAR WARS Ad-ven-ture STAR WARS Ad-ven-ture

Having practised this, consider asking pupils to create their own rhythms over the top of this ostinato figure to help set the scene. Using mnemonics can be helpful here, for example rhythms on the following phrases:

- Luke Skywalker
- Princess Leia
- Rebel Alliance
- Death Star
- Obi-Wan Kenobi

Stretch and Challenge

- Create longer mnemonics to extend the ostinato – for example to 2 bars
- Try layering different ostinato rhythms together
- Try notating their ideas using graphic score or staff notation

Support and Scaffold

- Keep a steady pulse over the original rhythm
- Copy teacher-led rhythms
- Consider pairing with a more confident musician to gain peer support

Longer 45-minute task: Create your own Space Adventure Soundtrack

This task looks to explore more of Williams' music to encourage pupils to create their own space adventure soundtrack. You might want to ask your pupils to do this using their voices or body percussion, or by using classroom instruments or computer-based instrumentation if this is available in your setting.

Part 1: Listening and Discussion (10 minutes)

Play a selection of different excerpts from the piece, using the listening guide to help you find contrasting sections. For example:

- Extract 1: Opening Section (0:00-0:09)
- Extract 2: Mysterious Section (1:33-1:43)
- Extract 3: March Section (2:15-2:26)

As you listen to each, ask pupils to consider:

- What story is the music telling?
- What picture does the music create?
- What instruments can you hear?
- What words would you use to describe the music?

Part 2: Story Creation (15 minutes)

In groups, ask pupils to create a short space adventure story with a clear beginning, middle and end. This can be based on a story of their choice, but some ideas are below to help support if needed:

- Landing on a new planet
- Escaping an asteroid field
- Meeting an alien civilisation
- Defending a space station

Pupils may want to plan their ideas in the Pupil Resource.

Part 3: Compose a soundtrack to the story (15 mins)

Having created the story narrative, pupils should now try to plan and explore their musical ideas to accompany their story. You could give more able pupils freedom to explore this independently, but the structure below might be useful to get all learners going with the task!

Beginning	Middle	End
• Quiet dynamics • Drone • Slow tempo	• Use of ostinato • Louder dynamics with crescendo	• Celebration fanfare • Very loud dynamics • Triplet rhythms

Part 4: Performance and Evaluation (10 mins)

Ask each group to perform their piece to the rest of the class. As the class listen, ask them to be active in their listening by asking them to consider specific questions, for example:

- What story was happening?
- How did the music represent the story?
- How did the music create different moods?

Stretch and Challenge

- Ensure contrast between sections
- Record ideas using graphic score or staff notation
- Create contrast by changing the way the elements of music are used
- Develop a reoccurring 'hero theme' as a leitmotif

Support and Scaffold

- Use storyboard and planning ideas above to give a structure to work from
- Use three different sounds to make the task accessible
- Use teacher-led modelling

Links to other subjects

This piece can link well to these other areas of the school curriculum:

Subject	Links
English	Use of descriptive vocabulary to explain mood and character, developing creative writing skills and developing speaking and listening skills through class discussion
Art and Design	Create storyboards to outline action – this could be extended to creating a film poster for their story, linking music, English and Art together
Drama	Consider acting out the scenes inspired by the music
Science	Links to space, Earth and the possibility to discuss real-life space missions
Maths	Counting beats and rhythmic patterns, recognising repetition and sequences
Computing	Chance to compose using computing equipment – for example by recording composition ideas

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Fanfare	A celebratory piece of music, often played by brass instruments, to get people's attention
Fortissimo	A dynamic instruction meaning very loud
Leitmotif	A melody to represent a character or emotion
Syncopation/ Syncopated	A rhythmic device meaning 'off-beat'
Glissando	A slide
Piano	A dynamic instruction meaning quiet
Dissonant	Harmonies that clash together
Rallentando	A tempo instruction to get slower
Ostinato	A repeated rhythm, melody or pattern
Programme Music	Music that represents a story, a scene or an emotion. Very popular during the Romantic Period of Western Classical Music
Triplet	Fitting three notes into 1 beat

Sensory activities for all Williams – Star Wars

Short task: Hero Poses

Sensory focus: Body awareness and confidence

Resources

- None

Activity: When the main theme reaches its biggest moments, encourage pupils to create their own “hero pose” by stretching tall, standing proudly or raising their arms. Hold the pose until the music changes.

Musical link: Reflects the bold, triumphant brass melody.

Medium task: Planet Texture Trail

Sensory focus: Tactile exploration

Resources:

Create sensory stations representing different planets (this activity works just as well using sensory trays):

- Sand
- Pebbles
- Metallic fabric
- Bubble wrap
- Soft fleece
- Crinkly foil

Activity: Travel between each “planet” as the music plays, exploring different textures (and smells where appropriate) and discussing which part of the music matches each environment.

Musical link: Responding to changes in musical mood.

Medium task: Star Map Adventure

Sensory focus: Communication and sequencing

Resources:

Picture cards showing:

- Planet
- Moon
- Star
- Rocket
- Home

Activity: Arrange the picture cards into a journey inspired by the music. Pupils can describe, point to or use AAC to explain where their spaceship travels next.

Musical link: Interpreting the structure and narrative of the music.

Longer task: Galaxy Orchestra

Sensory focus: Listening and musical response

Resources:

- Bells
- Shakers
- Tambourines
- Chime bars

Activity: Assign an instrument to different sections of the music. For example, pupils might play bells when they hear the soaring melody or shake instruments during the powerful rhythmic sections, encouraging active listening.

Musical link: Recognising different parts of the music e.g. melody, repeated rhythms, specific instrumentation or timbres.