



## Overview

“Starting with Strings” is about Sistema Aotearoa, a children’s orchestra based in Otara. The article explains how children join the orchestra, what’s involved in learning to play an instrument, and what it means to be part of the orchestra.

This article:

- uses a report structure, with some format variations
- includes technical information about the various instruments and sections that make up an orchestra

- uses direct quotes from students and parents about what it means to them to learn and share their music with the community and describes some of the life skills the students are gaining in the process
- provides a link to Music – Sound Arts in The Arts curriculum.

Texts related by theme “Never Give Up!” SJ L2 Aug 2012 | “Taonga Puoro” SJ 2.2.09 | “Conductor” (poem) SJ 2.2.09 | “Shine” SJSL 2004

## Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

### Tutti Means Together

When you are part of an orchestra, you can’t just play music whenever you want to. You have to watch the conductor.

The conductor tells the orchestra who will play, when they will play, and how they will play. The conductor of the Sistema Orchestra often uses body language to show the students what she wants them to do.



some abstract ideas that are clearly supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students’ prior knowledge

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some places where information and ideas are implicit and where students need to make inferences based on information that is easy to find because it is nearby in the text and there is little or no competing information

“When the conductor looks around at all the sections of the orchestra and spreads her arms wide, it means ‘tutti’, so everyone has to play. When we do, the sound is really exciting. It feels amazing to be part of it.”



some words and phrases that are ambiguous or unfamiliar to the students, the meaning of which is supported by the context or clarified by photographs and/or written explanations

Each student must pass the “instrument test” before they can take a real stringed instrument home. They must be able to:

- take the instrument out of its case carefully
- loosen and tighten the bow (which is made of horse hair)
- rub the bow with a special wax called rosin
- show their tutors that they know how to practise their tunes by themselves.

The students also need to think about when and where they will practise their instrument and where they can safely keep it at home.

When Sistema Aotearoa started in 2011, the students played only violins and cellos. Now some of them are big enough to play woodwind and percussion instruments. Some of the

**Instruments**  
Orchestras are made up of four groups of instruments. These groups are called sections.

- The **string section** has the instruments with strings, such as the violin, viola, cello, double bass, and harp.
- The **brass section** has the instruments made of brass, such as the trumpet, trombone, French horn, cornet, and tuba.
- The **woodwind section** has the instruments that were once made from wood, including the flute, clarinet, oboe, bassoon, and saxophone. (These days, some parts of these instruments are made from other materials, such as plastic or metal.)
- The **percussion section** has the instruments that are hit, such as the claves, drums, and triangle.

other visual language features that support the ideas and information, for example, headings, bullets, a sidebar, and photographs

## Possible curriculum contexts

### THE ARTS (Music – Sound Arts)

Level 2 – Explore and share ideas about music from a range of sound environments and recognise that music serves a variety of purposes and functions in their lives and in their communities.

### ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 2 – Language features: Show some understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

### ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 2 – Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing some understanding of their effects.

### Possible reading purposes

- To find out about a special group of musicians
- To identify the things you need to learn and do when you are in an orchestra.

### Possible writing purposes

- To describe the first time you tried something new (a musical instrument, game, activity, or sport)
- To describe what it's like to learn to play or do something new
- To recount an experience of when you had to practise hard to be good at something.



## Text and language challenges

### VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “tutors”, “pretend”, “body language”, “community”, “confident”, “responsible”
- Subject-specific words related to music, such as “orchestra”, “instrument”, “violin”, “cello”, “rosin”, “string section”, “brass section”, “woodwind section”, “percussion section”, “tutti”, “conductor”, “forte”
- Instruments listed in the information sidebar, including “viola”, “double bass”, “harp”, “trumpet”, “trombone”, “French horn”, “cornet”, “tuba”, “flute”, “clarinet”, “oboe”, “bassoon”, “saxophone”, “claves”, “drums”, “triangle”
- Place names such as “Otago”, “Otago town square”, “Auckland”, “Town Hall”, “Government House”, “Hamilton”, “Venezuela”, “South America”; proper names “Sistema Aotearoa”, “OMAC (Otago Music Arts Centre)”, “El Sistema”, “José Abreu”
- Metaphors: “whisper instrument”, “fingers dance”.

### Possible supporting strategies

Some of these suggestions may be more useful before reading, but they can be used at any time in response to students’ needs.

- Make sure you are clear about the pronunciation of any unfamiliar Māori and Spanish names, and if necessary, review these with students.
- Build knowledge of unfamiliar topic vocabulary by brainstorming and building a word web around “orchestra”. Encourage students to share their prior knowledge and experience of playing and listening to instrumental music. You could also build knowledge by sharing and discussing a video clip or photographs of an orchestra in action.
- Identify other unfamiliar vocabulary.
- Have the students review strategies they can use to work out meaning from the surrounding text.
- Provide a list of sentences, using the words for students who need support. Have the students work together to discuss the meanings. They could use a dictionary to check their thinking.
- *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
- See also [ESOL Online, Vocabulary](#), for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

### SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

- Some understanding of what an orchestra is and how it works
- Some awareness of playing and practising a musical instrument
- Some awareness of the different instruments in an orchestra.

### Possible supporting strategies

- Have students share their experiences of playing and performing music. You could build on the orchestra activity suggested in the vocabulary section (above). Prompt them to discuss the different instruments and sections of the orchestra and the role of the conductor.
- To build background experience, students could create their own percussion section and accompany a piece of music. Alternatively, they could role-play conducting as they listen to a piece of orchestral music.
- Ask students who learn an instrument to share what they do to learn to play it and to look after it. They may be able to bring their instrument to class to show other students and possibly play something they are practising.
- Bring a selection of the school’s musical instruments to class. Students could discuss the different sounds they make.

### TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- A report about being in an orchestra with a short introduction and subheadings
- Photographs that support the information in the text
- A sidebar about the various sections of the orchestra
- Bullets to break technical information about the “instrument test” into smaller chunks
- Quotes ascribed to students and parents, presented as “talking heads”
- Narration in the present tense
- Several longer compound and complex sentences
- Use of noun phrases – these can be difficult for students learning English.

### Possible supporting strategies

- Review their knowledge of reading factual texts that use subheadings. Remind them that the subheadings should give them a clue to the content of each section.
- Have them skim through the text to confirm their thinking and remind them to use the photographs to clarify meaning. Draw their attention to the purpose of the sidebar, and if necessary, discuss the layout and how to read pages 6–9 (“talking heads”).
- Explain that the narration is in the present tense and make sure they understand that it gives a sense of telling the story “as it happens”. If necessary, share an excerpt from a previous article they have read that is written in present tense and look closely at the verb forms to get the sense of “happening now”.
- Provide support for students who need help to understand longer sentences by:
  - using link words, pronouns, and commas to identify the clauses that make up each idea
  - answering the questions beginning with “who, what, when, and how”.
- Break down sentences into the noun phrase (telling who or what), the verb (telling what the subject is doing), and the object. Play some sentence-building games in which students take turns to add one or more words to a sentence.



# Instructional focus – Reading

**The Arts** (Level 2 – Music – Sound Arts: Explore and share ideas about music from a range of sound environments and recognise that music serves a variety of purposes and functions in their lives and in their communities.)

**English** (Level 2 – Language features: Show some understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.)

## First reading

- Share the purpose for reading with the students.
- Tell the students to read and discuss the connections between the title, the photograph, and the opening paragraph on page 2 to clarify the context of the article and to make predictions about how the title relates to the article.
- Remind the students that the sidebar on page 5 is background information and will help them to understand more about the instruments that make up an orchestra.
- Draw their attention to the layout on page 6 in order to make connections between information in the first paragraph and the student comments.
- Ask questions to encourage students to reflect on the reading purpose and their earlier predictions, for example: *Were your earlier predictions confirmed? What do you think now about why the article has its title? Were you surprised by any of the information? Is anything still unclear? What helped you to follow what was happening in the “instrument test”?*

### If the students struggle with this text

- Break the first reading into shorter chunks by reading and discussing one or two sections at a time.
- Prompt them to refer back to the subheading and photographs as they read each section.
- Ask questions or prompt them to use their experience to help them understand the information. For example: *What happens if you don't practise something you are learning? What do you hear when you whisper?*
- To help clarify vocabulary, prompt them to use strategies they are familiar with, such as rereading the sentence and nearby text for clues as well as looking for parts of the word they recognise.
- Support them to understand the ideas in longer sentences by reminding them to use strategies such as noting the punctuation, identifying clauses, and connecting pronouns to preceding nouns.

## Subsequent readings

### The teacher

Support the students to clarify the main ideas in a section of text and justify their thinking. For example:

- Reread the first paragraph on page 2, and *think, pair, share* with a partner what you think is the main idea.
- Reread the last paragraph, and share what you think the paragraph is telling you.
- What information does the quote add?
- How many things can you hear at one time? What about when you are concentrating on your work and people are chatting about something else at your table?
- Put your ideas together, and decide on the main idea of this section.

### The teacher

Prompt the students to identify and discuss the role of the conductor by analysing information and making inferences as they reread the section “Tutti Means Together”.

- What can you infer about the conductor in the sentence that begins, “The conductor tells the orchestra ...”?
- How do the words “body language” help you make your inference?
- What can we learn from the quotes?
- When you read this section the first time, many of you were puzzled about the subheading. What do you think about it now? Why?

### The teacher

Encourage the students to think critically about the things other than how to play an instrument that the children learnt by being in the orchestra.

- Ask the students to share what changed after they learned to ride a bike (or skateboard, scooter, etc). *How did you feel on the bike? What could you do? Where could you go?* Record their ideas.
- Direct the students to reread the section “More Than Music” and identify what has changed for these children since they joined the orchestra.
- Support them to reflect on both examples and decide what's good about learning to do something that you haven't been able to do before.

### The students:

- reread and discuss their ideas with their partners and decide that the words “must agree” drew them to the main idea
- reread the second paragraph and question each other about who is being quoted and what it means
- reread the quote and then make connections with their own experience to understand how hard it must be to listen to others as they are playing
- draw on information from across the paragraph to decide on the main idea.

### The students:

- reflect on the previous sentences to infer that the conductor is in charge of what the children do, that the word “play” refers to the instruments, and that she is telling them whose turn it is, when to start playing, and what the music must sound like
- infer from the words “body language” and the photograph that she is not talking, but the way she moves is showing the children what to do
- make connections to the earlier information to realise that the conductor has taught the children the actions and to confirm their inferences about her role
- discuss and share their opinions about the subheading.

### The students:

- make connections with their prior experience to share ideas about what was different once they could ride a bike
- reread the section “More Than Music” and work with a partner to identify what has changed for the children
- discuss what they notice from their experiences and the children's experiences and draw conclusions about what's good about learning new things.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- Some of the longer sentences were tricky to follow. You made good use of the punctuation and some link words to work out the meaning of the sentences. Remember, when you are tracking the pronouns, to look for “who” at the beginning of the sentence.
- I heard you suggest to your partner that you needed to think about more than the first sentence to decide what the main idea was. Looking at the subheading and rereading the rest of the paragraph helped you to be more certain about the main idea.

### METACOGNITION

- How did visualising help you work out what the children needed to do in the “instrument test”?
- How did thinking about your experience of learning to ride help you to understand the section “More Than Music”?



Reading standard: by the end of year 4



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

# Instructional focus – Writing

**The Arts** (Level 2 – Music – Sound Arts: Explore and share ideas about music from a range of sound environments and recognise that music serves a variety of purposes and functions in their lives and in their communities.)

**English** (Level 2 – Ideas: select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.)

## Text excerpts from “Starting with Strings”

### Joining the Orchestra

To join Sistema you have to be a student at a primary school in Otara.

### Tutti Means Together

When you are part of an orchestra, you can't just play music whenever you want to.

### Instruments of the Orchestra

Orchestras are made up of four groups of instruments. These groups are called sections.

The **string section** has the instruments with strings, such as the violin, viola, cello, double bass, and harp.

The **brass section** has the instruments made of brass, such as the trumpet, ...

The first instrument a student gets is one they make themselves out of cardboard or light wood. They play it with a pretend bow, which is also made from wood. This is known as a whisper instrument because it “whispers” as it's played.



## Examples of text characteristics

### SELECTING AND ORGANISING INFORMATION FOR A REPORT

*A report format helps the writer select and organise information, and it supports the reader to understand the process being described because it groups information into manageable sections.*

### TECHNICAL INFORMATION

*Describing technical features allows those readers who are not experts, but are curious about an activity, to learn more about it.*

### ADDING PHOTOGRAPHS

*Using photographs provides the reader with further information to help clarify or extend the meaning of the text.*

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Support students to select their information and organise their ideas by providing a simple planning web.

- *What do you need to tell your readers? Think about why you want to learn, who teaches you, where you practise, and what's hard and what's easy about what you are learning.*
- *Will you use subheadings? What information could you show with photos or illustrations?*
- *What other facts about your activity do you think readers might like to know?*
- *What sort of photographs might help your description?*

English language learners may benefit from the use of sentence-starter scaffolds to support their writing, for example, *I am learning to ...*, *It is difficult learning to ...*, *It is easy to ...*, *With practice, I could ...*

Explain the reason for adding technical information to a text, and use the excerpt to have students consider what technical information has been included and how the layout helps them to read it.

- *Discuss with a partner why you think the writer added a description of the sections of an orchestra.*
- *Brainstorm technical information that might be interesting in sports, music, games, or crafts.*
- *Discuss why the information on page 4 is bulleted.*

Remind the students to check their facts before adding them to their description. Encourage them to organise their facts using a similar format.

Ask questions to clarify the use of photographs in an information text.

- *What does this photograph show?*
- *How does it help you understand this section of the text?*

Explain that photographs can show something more clearly or provide extra information. Encourage the students to bring a photo, take a photo, or find a picture they can copy to tell the reader something more.

- *Share your draft with a partner to find a place where information could be clarified or added to by using a photograph.*

## GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You added more information to your plan after you spoke to your football coach. Checking your information before you start writing means you can be accurate and more detailed in your description.*
- *I was hooked by your subheading “What's Changed?” It helped me to understand why you enjoy going swimming now. That was a great message for other people who are nervous about the water.*

## METACOGNITION

- What did you learn by using a list format for your technical information?
- How does this photograph link to your information? How can you help your readers to know that it links?

Writing standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions