

Expressing Without Words	
<b>Written by</b> Melanie De Jesus	<b>Lesson Focus</b> Musical Learning, Social Emotional Learning
<b>Targeted Grade Levels</b> 4-5	<b>Duration of Lesson</b> 45 minutes
<b>Pennsylvania Academic Content Standards</b> Arts and Humanities: 9.1.5 C, E; 9.2.5.A; 9.4.5. D English Language Arts: CC.1.4.5.G; CC.1.5.5.A	<b>National Standards for Musical Education</b> MU:Re7.1.5a; MU:Re7.2.5a; MU:Re8.1.5a; MU:Re9.1.5a; MU:Cn10.0.5a
<b>Learning Objectives</b> As a result of this lesson, students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore how people express emotion and its connection to musical expression</li> <li>• Define "Vocalise"</li> <li>• Interpret the meaning/emotion of this piece through discussion, listening, and movement</li> <li>• Describe the background of Vocalise and the intention of the composer</li> </ul>	<b>Lesson Materials</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recording: (also linked in the Vocalise Listening Guide slides)<a href="#">Vocalise, Op. 34, No. 14 (arranged for violin and orchestra)</a></li> <li>• Class set of <a href="#">"Vocalise" Listening Map Worksheet</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Vocalise Listening Guide</a> slides to project</li> <li>• Technology: viewing/audio projecting device</li> <li>• Pencils for student use</li> <li>• Scarves (or other object that can be easily held and moved freely in the air)</li> <li>• Whiteboard, chalkboard, or smartboard</li> </ul>

### **Introduction**

1. Before the lesson begins:
  - a. Open your copy of the Vocalise Listening Guide (linked above).
  - b. Prepare a classroom set of Vocalise Listening Map Worksheets (linked above).

- c. Write two categories on the board: **Definition** and **Meaning**. Use the example below as a reference.

Definition	Meaning

- Engage students in a Think/Pair/Share: *"Have you ever felt an emotion(s) but struggled to express it? If so, how else could you communicate how you feel?"* (Possible responses: body language (facial expressions, movement of the shoulders or hands), writing/journaling, visual art/emojis, natural sounds like sighing, shouting, crying)
- Next, share with students that they will listen to a piece called Vocalise, composed by Sergei Rachmaninoff. He also sought to express emotion but did so through music. Ask them what they think the word vocalise means and record their responses on the board under the category titled "Definition." (Possible responses include: singing, vocalizing, talking, shouting, a professional singer)
- Go to Slide 2 of the Vocalise Listening Guide. Explain that a vocalise is "a vocal passage consisting of a melody (a series of notes that are sung one at a time) yet without words." Compare this definition to the responses recorded on the board.
- Listening Activity #1:** Have students listen quietly to the excerpt linked on Slide 2. After listening, ask volunteers what they think the song is about by sharing one-word responses or emotions that came to mind as they listened. Record their responses on the board in the category titled **"Meaning."**
- Then, ask students the following question: *"In the 'Meaning' category on the board, why are there several different responses? Is only one of them correct?"* Remind them to consider the definition of vocalise. Have two or three student volunteers share their thoughts.
- Explain that the possible meaning of this piece is open to each listener's interpretation because there are no words. While the general mood of the

piece seems sad, the sad feelings can vary. Listeners may recall homesickness, missing loved ones, or feeling sentimental about the past. In 1912, Rachmaninoff wrote this piece for a soprano named Antonina Nezhdanova. He purposefully wanted her to sing the melody without using words because he believed that her voice alone was enough to convey the emotions of the piece. Since then, it has been performed using various instruments, continuing the theme of wordless music and allowing audiences to interpret its meaning personally. Just as our body language and natural sounds can be enough to convey our emotions, this wordless music is enough to convey several emotions to the audience.

### **Development**

8. **Movement Activity:** Continuing the theme of wordless expression, go to Slide 3 of the Vocalise Listening Guide. Divide the class into groups of 4–5 students, giving each group one scarf or object they can easily hold and move freely in the air (single rhythm stick, conducting baton, pen/pencil). Explain to these groups that when the music plays again, one student from their group will move their scarf or object along with the melody to represent its **rhythm** and/or **pitch**. As the student moves to the music, the rest of the group will mimic them with their dominant hand.
  - a. **Pitch:** The specific sound of an individual note.
    - i. *Pitch Movement Example: As the notes go high or low in pitch, the holder raises or lowers the scarf/object.*
  - b. **Rhythm:** The pattern of sounds and silences in music.
    - i. *Rhythm Movement Example: As the music moves with short-sounding notes (eighth notes) or longer-sounding notes (half notes, whole notes), the holder bounces or waves the material to that rhythm.*

After 30 seconds or so, tell students to hand the scarf or object to the student on their right. The group will now follow this student's movements. Repeat this process until each student has had the opportunity to lead.

9. **Listening Activity #2:** Go to Slide 4 of the Vocalise Listening Guide and distribute the Vocalise Listening Map worksheet. Then, explain to students that they will listen to the piece once more, but this time in three sections (as linked / formatted on Slide 4). When the music starts, they will put their pencil on the letter "A" of their worksheet and, without taking their pencil off of the worksheet, create a line that reflects what they hear in the music. When the

segment is done, they should end at the letter "B" and lift their pencil. Like their previous activity, they should move their pencil to the piece's rhythm and/or pitch. Repeat this process for each of the sections on Slide 4.

### **Reflection/Conclusion**

10. Ask students to find a partner and share their listening maps. As they share, have students ask their classmates the following questions:
  - a. When you made your map, what aspect of the music did you follow?  
The rhythm or the pitch?
  - b. Which segment did you enjoy the most?
11. After this sharing time, students will write their final reflections on this piece in the Reflection section of their worksheet.
  - a. What emotion(s) do you think are being expressed in this piece?  
(happiness, sorrow/sadness, joy, longing, fear, anger, etc.)
  - b. What instrument would you choose to perform the piece Vocalise?  
Explain your response.

### **Adaptations**

- Allow invented or approximate spellings.
- Pair struggling students/special learners with a partner.
- To increase access for English learners and other students, post a word bank of emotions and the names of instruments.
- If you do not have scarves or objects for the movement activity, have students lead using hand movements.

### **Extensions**

- Have students switch their listening map with another classmate. Then, as you play the piece again, have students follow along with their new listening maps.
- In Slide 5, have students listen to the recording of soprano Kiri Te Kanawa performing the [Vocalise](#) and have them follow along with their listening maps. Students can then discuss (as a class or in small groups) the following questions:
  - In your opinion, does hearing the piece performed by a vocalist feel different and/or change the meaning of the piece? Explain.
  - Were you able to follow along with the vocalist using your listening map? If not, what would you need to change on your map?
  - Which performance did you enjoy the most? The vocalist or the violinist?

Name:	Date:
	Class:

Vocalise by Sergei Rachmaninoff

**Listening Map Activity:**

Place your pencil on the letter "A" under section #1. When the music starts, create a line that moves to the pitch and/or rhythm of the music. When the music ends, you should be on the letter "B." Remember, don't lift your pencil until the music is done! If you get to "B" before the music starts, simply stop and wait till the music is done. Repeat this for sections #2 and #3.

Section #1:

A

B

Section #2:

A

B

Section #3:

A

B

## Reflection

1. What emotion(s) do you think are being expressed in this piece? (Happiness, sorrow/sadness, joy, longing, fear, anger, etc.)

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2. What instrument would you choose to perform the Vocalise? Explain your response.

I would choose ----- because -----  
(Name instrument here)