

# What Inspires a Composer

For 5th-8th grades



## Lesson 2 — Musical Storytelling

### Objective

Students will learn the background and culture of a living composer. They will become familiar with a traditional American Indian story and be able to connect elements in the story to musical elements in selected repertoire. Students will use their new findings and knowledge of musical elements to create their own musical interpretation of a story.

### Suggested Materials

- Audio recordings
  - JEROD TATE “Coyote” from *Spirit Chief Names the Animal People* 
  - JEROD TATE *Spirit Chief Names the Animal People* 
- “The Great Spirit Names the Animal People: How Coyote Came by his Powers” story (provided)
- Behind the Music excerpts (provided)
- Classroom instrument (optional)
- Digital music software (optional)

### New York State Arts Standards

MU:Cr1.1.5a      MU:Re7.1.5a-8a      MU:Cn10.1.5a-6a  
MU:Cr2.1.4a      MU:Re7.2.5a-8a  
MU:Re8.1.5a-8a

### New York State English Language Arts & Literacy Standards

Reading, Standards 1-3  
Writing, Standards 4 & 5  
Speaking & Listening, Standards 1-4  
Language, Standards 1-6

### New York State Social Studies Standards

Standard 1: History of the United States and New York

### Procedure

- 1) Jerod Impichchachaaha' Tate is an American Indian classical composer and pianist who expresses his native culture through music. Have students read through the Behind the Music excerpt to learn more about the composer and his piece.
- 2) Have students read the story “The Great Spirit Names the Animal People: How Coyote Came by his Powers”
- 3) Have students listen to “Coyote” from *Spirit Chief Names the Animal People*. As they listen, ask students to write notes on the following:
  - a) Musical elements you hear (i.e. featured instruments, how rhythm is used throughout the movement, use of dynamics, etc.) What musical elements illustrate the story and help the listener picture what is happening?
  - b) How does the music make you feel?
  - c) How does background knowledge from the story inform your listening?

## Lesson 2 — *Musical Storytelling* (continued)

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- 4) Jerod Tate's *Spirit Chief Names the Animal People* includes three other character pieces representing Bear, Salmon, and Eagle. Discuss with students how they would musically represent each animal. Questions for discussion:
  - a) What instrument(s) might you use to reflect each animal?
  - b) What tempo and rhythms would help to illustrate the way each animal moves and acts?
  - c) What dynamics would aid in reflecting the behavior of each animal?
- 5) Have students listen to Jerod Tate's musical illustration of Bear, Salmon, and Eagle. 
- 6) After listening, have students share how Jerod Tate's musical interpretation of each animal compared or contrasted to their own thoughts before they heard the music.

## Lesson 2 — *Musical Storytelling* (continued)

### Extended Learning

Students may select a favorite story, legend, or excerpt from a book to set to music. If they were to write a piece of music that illustrated the story, what might it sound like? Have students set the story to music using instruments, computer program software, etc. that is available to them. If possible, have an opportunity for students to share the story and their musical interpretation with the class.

## BEHIND THE MUSIC

### **JEROD IMPICHCHAACHAHAH' TATE** (b. 1968)

Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate is an American Indian classical composer and pianist who expresses his native culture in symphonic music, ballet, and opera. He is a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma. Tate was the founding composition instructor for the Chickasaw Summer Arts Academy and has taught composition to American Indian high school students in Minneapolis, the Hopi, Navajo, and Lummi reservations and Native students in Toronto. He earned his Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance from Northwestern University and his Master of Music in Piano Performance and Composition from The Cleveland Institute of Music.



Mr. Tate's middle name, Impichchaachaaha', means "his high corncrib" and is his inherited traditional Chickasaw house name. A corncrib is a small hut used for the storage of corn and other vegetables. In traditional Chickasaw culture, the corncrib was built high off the ground on stilts to keep its contents safe from foraging animals.

### **SPIRIT CHIEF NAMES THE ANIMAL PEOPLE**

*Spirit Chief Names the Animal People* was part of the original version of *Winter Moons*, a four-movement ballet composed by Jerod Tate. The ballet is based upon American Indian legends from the northern Plains and Rocky Mountains, performed with a live storyteller to guide the audience. The title of the ballet, *Winter Moons*, derives from the American Indian tradition of telling stories during the full moon in winter. The ballet was Tate's very first composition, commissioned by and dedicated to his mother, choreographer Dr. Patricia Tate. Before the piece, Tate had never considered composing; but has said that the piece opened a door for him- showing that he could tell the stories of his people through composition.

*Spirit Chief Names the Animal People* is an Okanagan story of The Great Chief giving animals new names, and the animals petitioning for certain names and powers. The Okanagan People believe that they have come from the land and animals themselves. Before humans were created, animal people lived on the land and gave themselves up, along with their ways, beliefs, practices, and experiences for the people-to-be. In Tate's composition, the animals are represented in small character pieces, or movements: the mischievous coyote; the lumbering bear; the swimming and jumping salmon; the majestic eagle; and a reprise for the coyote, who wanted to be first to the naming ceremony, but slept in and arrived late.

Coyote is a major mythological figure for most Native American tribes. Like real coyotes, the mythological coyote is known for his crafty intelligence, stealth, and greedy appetite. Tate says, "For the Indian, the coyote represents the ultimate, negative example: a quick-witted schemer with a glib tongue. His greatest flaw is pride and self-importance. In his scheming ways, he always claims more than he is capable of, regardless of the consequences." Coyote is considered by some tribes to be a sort of spiritual chief of human beings, meaning that we learn how to be from his stories, though most often, we learn valuable lessons from his mistakes.

## Lesson 2 — *Musical Storytelling* (continued)

### **The Great Spirit Names the Animal People: How Coyote Came by his Powers (Okanagan)**

from *Coyote Tales* (1933) by Mourning Dove (Hum-isha-ma; Christine/Christal Quintasket)

The Great Spirit called all his people together from all over the earth. There was to be a change. He would give names to the people, and the Animal World was to rule. The naming was to begin at the break of day, each one having the right to choose his or her name according to who came first to the Spirit Chief's lodge. The Spirit Chief would also give each one their duty to perform in the changed conditions.

It was the night before the New World. Excitement was among the people. Each one desired a great name of note. All wished to be awake and first at the lodge of the Great Spirit Chief. Everyone wanted power to rule some tribe, some kingdom of the Animal World.

Coyote was of a degraded nature, a vulgar type of life. He was an imitator of everything that he saw or heard. When he asked a question, when he asked for information and it was given him, he would always say, "I knew that before! I did not have to be told." That was Coyote's way. He was hated by all the people for his ways. No one liked him. He boasted too much about his wisdom, about everything. Coyote went among the anxious people, bragging to everyone how early he was going to rise, how he would be the first one at the Spirit Chief's lodge. He bragged of the great name he would choose. He said, "I will have three big names to select from: there is Grizzly Bear, who will be ruler over all running, four-footed animals., Eagle, who will lead all the flying birds; Salmon, who will be chief over all the fish of every kind."

Coyote's twin brother, who took the name of Fox, said to him, "Do not be too sure. Maybe no one will be given his choice of names. Maybe you will have to retain your own name, Coyote. Because it is a degraded name, no one among the tribes will want to take it."

Coyote went to his tepee in anger. He determined not to sleep that night. He would remain awake so as to be the first at the Spirit Chief's lodge for the name he wanted. . . Coyote's wife (afterwards Mole), sat on her feet at the side of the doorway. She looked up at Coyote and said in a disappointed tone, "Have you no food for the children? They are starving! I can find no roots to dig."

"Eh-ha!" grunted Coyote sarcastically. He answered his wife, "I am no common person to be spoken to in the fashion by a mere woman. Do you know that I am going to be a great Chief at daybreak tomorrow? I shall be Grizzly Bear. I will devour my enemies with ease. I will take other men's wives. I will need you no longer. You are growing too old, too ugly to be the wife of a great warrior, of a big Chief as I will be."

Coyote ordered his wife to gather plenty of wood for the tepee fire where he would sit without sleep all night. Half of the night passed; Coyote grew sleepy. His eyes would close however hard he tried to keep them open. Then he thought what to do. He took two small sticks and braced his eyelids apart. He must not sleep! But before Coyote knew it, he was fast asleep. He was awakened by his wife, Mole, when she returned from the Spirit Chief's lodge, when the sun was high in the morning sky. . .

## Lesson 2 — *Musical Storytelling* (continued)

Coyote jumped up from where he lay. He hurried to the lodge of the Chief Spirit. Nobody was there, and Coyote thought that he was first... He went into the lodge and spoke, "I am going to be Grizzly Bear!"

The Chief answered, "Grizzly Bear was taken at daybreak!"

Coyote said, "Then I shall be called Eagle!"

The Chief answered Coyote, "Eagle has chosen his name. He flew away long ago."

Coyote then said, "I think that I will be called Salmon."

The Spirit Chief informed Coyote, "Salmon has also been taken. All the names have been used except your own: Coyote. No one wished to steal your name from you."

Poor Coyote's knees grew weak. He sank down by the fire in that great tepee. The heart of the Spirit Chief was touched when he saw the lowered head of Coyote, the mischief-maker. After a silence the Chief spoke, "You are Coyote! You are the hated among all tribes, among all the people. I have chosen you from among all others to make you sleep, to go to the land of the dream visions. I make a purpose for you, a big work for you to do before another change comes to the people. You are to be father for all the tribes, for all the new kind of people who are to come. Because you are so hated, degraded and despised, you will be known as the Trick-person. You will have power to change yourself into anything, any object you wish when in danger or distress. There are man-eating monsters on the earth who are destroying the people. The tribes cannot increase and grow as I wish. These monsters must all be vanquished before the new people come. This is your work to do. I give you powers to kill these monsters. I have given your twin brother, Fox, power to help you, to restore you to life should you be killed. Your bones may be scattered; but if there is one hair left on your body, Fox can bring you back to life. Now go, despised Coyote! Begin the work laid out for your trail. Do good for the benefit of your people."

Thus, Coyote of the Animal People was sent about the earth to fight and destroy the people-devouring monsters, to prepare the land for the coming of the new people, the Indians. Coyote's eyes grew slant from the effects of the sticks with which he braced them open that night when waiting for the dawn of the name giving day. From this, the Indians have inherited their slightly slant eyes as descendants from Coyote.