

Lesson The Marines' Hymn

Lesson

Marines Hymn – Marching to the Music

Grade(s)

1-3

Objectives

Students will:

- Sing *The Marines' Hymn* and listen to Offenbach's *Gendarmes' Duet*.
- Identify whether a phrase begins on low do or high do, using Kodály hand signs.
- Learn about Jacques Offenbach and how his melody was later used in *The Marines' Hymn*
- Participate in a marching game that reinforces musical phrasing, rhythm, and movement coordination.

Materials

Audio equip.
Space for marching activity
Recording of The Marines' Hymn
Recording of Offenbach's *Gendarmes' Duet*
Image of Jacques Offenbach

National Standards

Performing

- **MU:Pr6.1.2a** – Perform music for a specific purpose with expression and technical accuracy.

Creating

- **MU:Cr1.1.3a** – Improvise rhythmic and melodic ideas for a specific purpose.

Responding

- **MU:Re7.2.3a** – Demonstrate and describe how a musical selection uses elements of music to communicate.
- **MU:Re8.1.3a** – Demonstrate understanding of expressive qualities (such as dynamics and tempo) in a musical selection.

Connecting

- **MU:Cn11.0.3a** – Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and other disciplines, culture, history, or personal experience.

Introduction/Warm up

1. Have The Marines' Hymn playing as children enter, some students may march into your room naturally. Once seated, stop the music and ask students if anyone has ever heard the song.
2. Tell the students they heard a song that is especially for the United States' Marines. Some students may have military relatives, so a short discussion or explanation of the various branches of armed forces might be helpful before you bring it back to the Marines.

Transition

Sing the first line of The Marines' Hymn (while hand signing the beginning and ending pitches of each phrase, while singing words). The foreign words will be of interest, so explain Montezuma and Tripoli are places that our Marines have been, they are fun words to sing, and continue to sing, teaching the song (phrase by phrase) by rote.

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Singing High and Low "Do"

1. Demonstrate the phrases that begin, "Do-mi-sol", sing solfege syllables for those first three notes, then sign the three pitches while singing words.
2. Have the students sing the beginning three pitches of each similar phrase. I like to call these similarities, "BOGO" (Buy One Get One free) phrases, or "BOGO" beginnings. Phrases that start on low Do are: 1) "**From the halls...**" 2) "**We will fight...**", and 3) "**We are proud...**"
3. Then demonstrate, similarly (using Curwen hand signs and singing solfege syllables, to contrast singing with words), the two (middle) phrases that begin on high Do with "do-ti-la." These phrases are 1) "**First to fight**" and 2) "**And to keep.**"

You may skip step three and cover the phrase endings.

4. The phrases that start on low Do also end on low Do. You may want to teach those solfege syllables to older children (Fa-Re-**Do** for "Tri-po-li," "land, and **sea**," and "States Ma-**rines**"). Otherwise, you should point out that the phrases end on low do, and have them hand sign a low Do as they sing.

This solfege syllable emphasis can be placed on various syllables, depending on what you are wanting to stress. This is a great song for outlining the tonic major triad. In preparation for the marching game, it would be wise to have the students keep the steady beat as they sing the song.

Legendary Listening

Who was Jacques Offenbach? Show a picture of Jacques Offenbach.

Explain:

- Offenbach was born in **Germany in 1819** but lived in **France**.
- He loved writing **funny operettas** with catchy tunes.
- He wrote *The Gendarmes' Duet*, a song about two **silly soldiers** bragging about how tough they are!
- The melody was later **borrowed for The Marines' Hymn**, which is much more serious!
- Compare the first phrase of Offenbach's *Gendarmes' Duet* to see if students can identify the starting pitch as high or low Do.
- Students can compare the moods of *The Gendarmes' Duet* with *The Marines' Hymn*

Marching Game

Tell students they are soldiers and the first two notes (Do-mi) is the call of their drill sergeant so they can be ready to start on beat one with the left foot.

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Play the recording and have all students sing together. They march only on the steady beat, beginning on beat one, (e.g. "Halls") after the two preparation notes, (e.g. "From the"). You could blow a whistle to have the students freeze or stand at attention on the long, low Do, phrase endings (as described in step 4 of the singing). Students resume marching with the left foot on beat one of the next phrase, and so on.

Alternate game adaptation: Switch between serious and silly marching styles depending on whether students hear *The Marines' Hymn* or *The Gendarmes' Duet* is being played.

Assessment Options

Informal: Observe students marching to steady beat; observe student demonstrations of hand signs identifying high and low Do.

Wrap-Up & Reflection

Ask: Why do you think music is used in the military?

Sing one last phrase from the Marines Hymn. Have students provide the handsign for high or low Do for the starting pitch of the phrase.

Resources

Sheet Music on website [AmericanHeritageSongs.com](https://www.americanheritagesongs.com)

Website

John Gregory Knowles – Topic. (2022, October 22). *The Gendarmes Duet*. [Video]. YouTube.

<https://youtu.be/b2RrWv3xf5o?si=lirqBAIQX6B9XA2b>

The Knowles YouTube video (link above) contains an audio recording of Offenbach's The Gendarmes Duet, only in a folksy and comically orchestrated arrangement that young students should understand as happy/funny, for the purpose of the marching game. You won't have to discuss the lyrics. Although, if you have high school students, there are several versions available that would be fun to address in class.

JR Videos. (2018, February 16). *The Marines' Hymn (lyrics) – USCM hymn*. [Video]. YouTube.

<https://youtu.be/Qqv6tzeJ9R4?si=9qe6c80ZXXz-c5v>

The Marines' Hymn in the JR Videos link (above) plays the song in the key of C Major and shows lyrics (for karaoke singing in older grades). This video could be used as audio for the marching game and/or as a sing along accompaniment.

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Connections

The *Marines' Hymn* and opera share a direct link—its melody comes from Jacques Offenbach's opera *Geneviève de Brabant* (1867). Specifically, the tune is adapted from the "Gendarmes' Duet" (*Couplets des deux hommes dames*), a lighthearted song performed by two comedic soldiers in the opera. So, in a way, every time the Marines sing their hymn—"From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli..."—they're carrying a piece of opera with them. It's a fitting connection, given that both the Marines and opera are steeped in tradition, discipline, and grand storytelling.

Thoughts for upper grades: What do the Opera and the Marines have in common?

At first glance, the U.S. Marine Corps and opera might seem worlds apart, but they actually share some surprising similarities:

1. **Discipline & Training** – Both require intense preparation and rigorous training. Marines undergo physical and mental conditioning, while opera singers spend years perfecting their vocal technique and stage presence.
2. **Precision & Performance** – Whether it's executing a military maneuver or delivering a flawless aria, both demand precision under pressure.
3. **Tradition & Heritage** – The Marines have a long-standing history of honor and duty, while opera has centuries of artistic tradition dating back to the Renaissance and Baroque periods.
4. **Power & Projection** – Marines project strength and leadership on the battlefield, just as opera singers must project their voices over an orchestra without a microphone.
5. **Brotherhood & Ensemble** – Marines rely on teamwork and camaraderie, much like opera performers must work together—singers, musicians, and stage crew—to bring a production to life.
6. **Iconic Mottos** – The Marines have *Semper Fidelis* ("Always Faithful"), and opera has *The show must go on!*—both reflecting dedication to their respective callings.

Extra Excursions

If you'd like to explore more music of Jacques Offenbach, I recommend these for elementary students:

"Can-Can" from *Orpheus in the Underworld* – Fast, high energy piece that can also tie into lessons on American French connections in Louisiana – taking you into some Cajun/Zydeco music.

"Barcarolle" from *The Tales of Hoffmann*—slow, mellow, simple melody, facilitates Orff instrumental activities well.

"Galop" from *Le voyage dans la lune* – nice STEAM tie-in for days of lunar eclipse and inclusion with "Planetary" composers – Gustav Holst (*The Planets*); Claude Debussy (*Clair de Lune*); Beethoven (*Moonlight Sonata*); Mozart (*Jupiter*); John Williams (*Star Wars*). You can see the list is endless!