

# Lesson Plan Combining Music and Science: *The Planets* by Gustav Holst

Enhance Studies of the Solar System With Music

<http://voices.yahoo.com/lesson-plan-combining-music-science-planets-3665045.html>

**Interdisciplinary lesson plan for general music class: students combine their studies in science of the solar system with the music of Gustav Holst.**

Materials needed:

- CD player and a recording of *The Planets*, a musical suite by Gustav Holst.
- Study materials about the solar system.

Student objectives:

- Students can define terms: suite, program music.
- Students can answer questions about the various planets in the solar system.
- Students can describe the music of each movement of *The Planets*.

Background:

Gustav Holst (1874-1934) was one of England's most well-known composers. His works run the gamut from symphonies and operas to literature for military band. His *First Suite in B-flat for Military Band*, *Second Suite in F for Military Band*, and *Hammersmith* are considered by many to be three of the masterpieces of concert band literature.

Holst's most popular work was an orchestral suite titled *The Planets*. Written in 1915, *The Planets* is a suite of seven tone poems, each symbolizing a different planet. The first movement Mars, *the Bringer of War* - is a loud and raucous piece based on a pulsating 5/4 rhythm. *Mars* appears to have influenced many other space-like compositions, and upon hearing it, the listener might wonder if it was the inspiration for composer John Williams and his music for *Star Wars*.

*Mars* is followed by Venus, *the Bringer of Peace*, and Mercury, *the Winged Messenger*. The fourth movement is happy, playful music that celebrates *Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity*. This is followed by the more solemn *Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age*. The final two movements are *Uranus, the Magician*, and *Neptune, the Mystic*.



Student Activities:

1. Study the planets of the solar system, diagram their positions and sizes, draw or make models.
2. Read biographical information about Gustav Holst.
3. Listen to a recording of *The Planets*.
4. List descriptive words while listening to each movement.

It might be best to listen to the music before giving the title of the movement so that students are freer in their responses. Then after linking the descriptive words to the actual title, listen again. Depending on the age of the students, this project could be drawn out over several weeks, or perhaps the focus could be limited to one or two movements of the work. The most well-known movements are *Mars* and *Jupiter* so these would be good choices.



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