

What Charlie Heard

by Mordicai Gerstein

Frances Foster Books (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

A Reading and Discussion Guide

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SUMMARY:

Charles Ives was a world-famous composer that almost wasn't. This book tells his story. The story describes the childhood of Charles Ives and the influence his musician father had on his life. Surrounded by music and intrigued by the sounds of his environment, this curious young man opened his ears and his heart to the noises and sounds around him and created innovative pieces unlike anything that had been heard before. However, because his music was so different, no one would play it. Those who heard it did not know how to respond to it. Despite the criticism, Charles Ives continued to compose music that expressed all that he heard. This story follows Charles' musical life – from childhood curiosities about the sounds of his environment to adult masterpieces that ultimately were heard throughout the world and continue to be heard today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author Mordicai Gerstein writes that "Charles Ives was born with his ears wide open." He listened creatively to all that was going on around him. Think carefully about all of the sounds that you might hear in the following places. Discuss these with a partner and share with the class: zoo, school, mall, pond at night, forest at night.
2. Charles Ives listened creatively, used his imagination, and experimented to create pieces of music. In what other professions could you use creativity, imagination, and experimentation?

ACTIVITIES:

1. Note the illustrations in the book. The illustrator shows us what could be seen and heard. Cut out a scene from a magazine or newspaper. Have students write in the sounds that might come from the scene.

2. Discuss onomatopoeia and how it is used in the illustrations. Have students act out a predetermined scene using only onomatopoeia. Can the other students understand what is happening?
3. Orchestras, bands, and choirs are groups of individuals who together make beautiful music with their instruments. Create a classroom band using classroom materials. Use the concept of vibration to motivate instrument making.
4. Charlie witnessed his father directing two bands playing different tunes in the town square. Charles Ives later composed the movement “Putnam’s Camp” from “Three Places in New England” which features two groups playing different tunes. Can you create your own version of this idea? Have the group divide into two smaller parts and have each group sing a recognizable song (Yankee Doodle & Twinkle Twinkle Little Star) simultaneously. Practice singing a round of the same song.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Adapted from <http://www.mordicaigerstein.com>

Along with writing and illustrating books for children, Mordicai Gerstein is a painter, sculptor, and prize-winning designer and director of animated films. Born in Los Angeles, Gerstein worked in New York for twenty-five years making animated films for television. In 1971, Mordicai collaborated with author Elizabeth Levy to create the 'Something Queer is Going On' series of mystery books for Delacorte Press. Gerstein began writing and illustrating his own books in 1980. He lives in western Massachusetts with his wife, Susan Yard Harris, who is also an illustrator, and their daughter, Risa.

HELPFUL LINKS:

Explore the following websites for lesson plans and activities (some online):

<http://www.pbs.org/harmony/teachersguide/index.html>

<http://www.sfskids.org/templates/home.asp?pageid=1>



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