

What this is about

The children use a branching database program to build an identification key for musical instruments. The children will need to observe carefully, sort things out, work methodically and test their ideas. This page sets out how you might run this activity - adding some ideas which focus on the science of music rather than other aspects.

Good starting point

You can start by talking about musical instruments and how we can sort them out into families. You might focus on how they work (moving strings, moving air) rather than where they come from.

You may have a CD-ROM of musical instruments to 'bring' less common instruments into the classroom.

What to do

Play the game Twenty questions. In this game, one member of the group plays the 'thinker'. The others have to guess the musical instrument they are thinking of.

What to say to the 'thinker'

You have to think of a musical instrument. Choose one you know something about. You might choose from a flute, a violin, a guitar or a drum. The others have to guess what it is by asking questions. You can only answer their questions with a 'yes' or a 'no'.

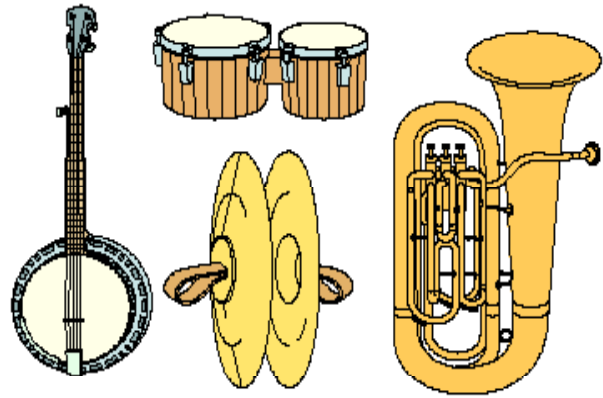
What to say to the others:

You have to guess the musical instrument by asking the 'thinker' questions. Your questions will only get a yes or no answer. To make the game more scientific, you have to ask questions about how the instrument works, what it is made from or what makes the sound. For example:

You may ask: "does it have strings" but not "does it begin with 'p' "

You may ask: "is it made of wood?" but not "is it brown?"

You may ask "do you play it by blowing ... ?" but not "do you play it on the floor?"



Playing the computer sorting game

Get the Sorting game* program running.

Use the old game called Music on the disc and start the game.

Think of an organ and answer yes or no to the questions.

If the computer guesses the organ correctly, think of another and play the game again.

If the computer gives up and asks you what it is, tell it. Then, very carefully, follow the instructions on the screen.

Save your work on the disc from time to time. Do not save any mistakes on the disc.

Continue until your time is up.

Note

The children will appreciate having a book of musical instruments. As the instructions show, it is quite important not to enter the wrong questions and answers. To get off to a healthy start, 'prime' the computer with two instruments before the children begin. Simply, get the program running and start a new game called Music. You might then enter two instruments, the flute and the piano and the question "does it have strings?"

*These are also known as branching database, tree database, sorting game, dichotomous key or binary key programs. See the Reference section for titles.