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# AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

G E R S H W I N

## Lesson Segments

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1. Storymaking
2. Playlet 1
3. Playlet 2
4. About the Composer
5. About the Music

## Storymaking

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1. *When George Gershwin wrote this music, he was trying to tell us a story. Listen to this music, then I'll ask you what you think it's about.*
2. After listening to the first 12 seconds of the recording, ask the children if they know what story Gershwin was trying to tell through his music.  Track 1
3. *Gershwin wrote this music about being an American, but the American is in a city far away. This American is in Paris. Have you ever heard of that place? Where is that city?*
4. *Paris is a very large city with lots of places to go and lots of people to see. I think Gershwin's music suggests a happy walk. If you were to show us how you would walk if you were happy to be in the big city of Paris, what would that look like?*
5. Children take turns walking with a bounce in their step, swinging their arms and smiling as the recording accompanies their movements.  Track 1 (first 12 seconds of the recording)

very safe, even though they are going all directions. Give children many opportunities to practice their safe, Paris driving.



4. *We are Americans in Paris, and we need to cross the street in this crazy traffic!* Make the crossing of the street fun by having near-collisions and taking children into the “traffic” that their classmates are creating

Select a safe number of children to be the Paris traffic. When the music begins, the Tour Guide takes the hands of two children and takes them into the traffic to cross the street. Then they turn around and come back across the street through the traffic.



## About the Composer

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**George Gershwin** (1898 –1937) was an American composer who often collaborated in his writing with his brother Ira. George would write the melodies, and Ira would write the words; Ira was a lyricist. Born George Gershowitz, George decided to change his name to Gershwin after he became a professional musician.

Gershwin wrote the tone poem *An American in Paris* in 1928 intending to bring the same sights and sounds of Paris to the American listening audience that he had experienced when he lived in Paris. When the piece premiered at Carnegie Hall in New York, audience members may have been surprised to hear the automobile horns that were written into the composition. Gershwin had brought some taxi horns from Paris for just that purpose.

In 1951 MGM produced the movie *An American in Paris* which later that year won the Best Picture Oscar. Part of the composition is also featured in the 1997 movie *As Good as It Gets*.

## About the Music

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A **tone poem** is a composition that purposely depicts a story or scene. The music is contained in one movement, rather than separated into several, shorter sections. Gershwin, using instruments of the orchestra, conveyed the sense of hustle and bustle that he experienced on the busy sidewalks and streets of Paris.

*An American in Paris* is performed by an **orchestra**. An orchestra typically includes stringed (**violins, violas, cellos, string basses**), percussion (**drums and marimbas**), woodwind (**flutes, clarinets, oboes, bassoons**), and brass (**trumpets, trombones, tubas, and French horns**) instruments.