

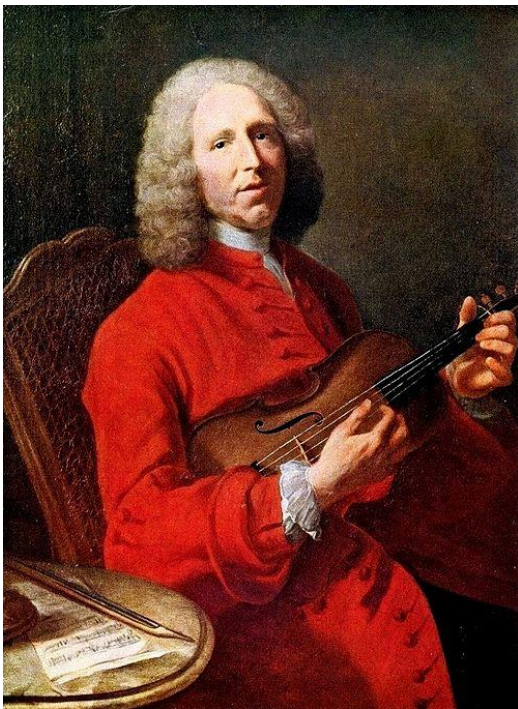
Opera Starts with Oh!

“Nature Spirits in Rameau’s Io!”

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Play-On Materials

April, 2023

INTRODUCTION || *Jean-Philippe Rameau*



Jean-Philippe Rameau was a French composer and a fanatic for music composition, which means he was totally obsessed! He didn’t have many interests in life except for music and composing, so he spent the majority of his time doing just that.

(Image: Jean-Philippe Rameau, by [Jacques Aved](#), 1728)

Not a lot is known about his early life, but what we do know is that even his wife didn’t know much about his early life...what a mystery! His father was an organist for several churches near *Dijon, France*, where he was born, and Rameau was one of eleven children.

He learned music before ever reading and writing, and was educated at the Jesuit college at Godrans in Dijon. He disrupted class quite a bit and had trouble focusing because his TRUE passion was only for music!

(Image: 1894 Dijon, France)



Rameau's earliest known published composition (or pieces of music that were printed and spread to the public) was in 1706, a harpsichord work. A *harpsichord* is played very much like a piano, with two rows of keys, and they can be bigger or smaller, and are usually decorated with images and designs!



Metropolitan Museum of Art - from 1650

He continued to publish music and take over his father's job as an organist at church, composing church music along the way. A few types of pieces he composed were:

Motets - a short piece of sacred or vocal music (or religious songs)

Canons - a piece for voices or instruments that sing or play the same music starting at different times

Instrumental Works - songs without voices, only instruments

Cantatas - a vocal composition with an instrumental accompaniment, often involving a choir of singers

→ [PLAY ON ACTIVITY - for 2 or more people] ←

Pick a tune that you and your music partner(s) both know, for example “Row Row Your Boat” ! One person begins singing, and when they finish the first sentence, the next person starts the song from the beginning, so you’ll be singing different parts at the same time! Do you notice that even though you’re singing different parts of the song, that it sounds beautiful together? This is a great way to make an old song sound brand new to your ears! This is called a “*canon*”.

Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream;
mer-ri-ly, mer-ri-ly, mer-ri-ly, mer-ri-ly, life is but a dream!

When Rameau was 50 years old, opera became his passion and he set his sights on composing all kinds of operas! A few kinds of operas he composed were...

Tragédies en musique - lyric tragedy, based on tragic stories

Opéra-ballets - ballet opera, where dance & music are equally important

Comédies lyriques - Comic opera

Comédie-ballet - Comic ballet

Actes de ballet - an opera ballet with a single act

With every story comes some downsides. Rameau was known for having a bit of a bad temper, so he rarely worked twice with the same *librettist* (person who writes the words vs. composer, who writes the music). Today we would probably say “he didn’t work well with others



Rameau was also a writer and music theorist, which is a field that mixes math, music, and philosophy. His publications are still studied today and he continues to be admired for both his brains and his music brawn!

WHO'S WHO || Characters in *Io*

Mercury - a messenger of the ancient gods - ruled over wealth, good fortune, commerce, etc.

Jupiter - also disguises as shepherd, **Hylas** - loves the nymph, Io - known as the king of all gods & protector of Ancient Rome

Io - fairy nymph - loved by both Jupiter & Apollo

Apollo - also disguises as shepherd, **Philemon** - loves the nymph, Io - has been recognized as a god of archery, music and dance, truth and prophecy, healing and diseases, the Sun and light. **Color him in down below!!**

La Folie (Madness) - she takes over Apollo's Mount Parnassus and is going to steal his lyre (when the story goes unfinished!)



The STORY || *Io*

Io is an unfinished opera, which means he stopped writing it after the first part. Here's what exists of Rameau's opera...

Rameau blended Greek & Roman mythology to create the characters in our opera, *Io*, but predominately Roman mythology. *Mythology* was a collection of myths, or stories and folktales passed down from one generation to the next, told by people to explain nature, gods, the lives of heroes and magical beings, and to explain why the world is the way it is. The Greeks and Romans both had their own myths, some of which crossed over. Mythology wasn't just a bunch of made-up stories. These were stories that Romans and Greeks believed to be true! They had a lot to do with their religion and explaining why we did things in a certain way.

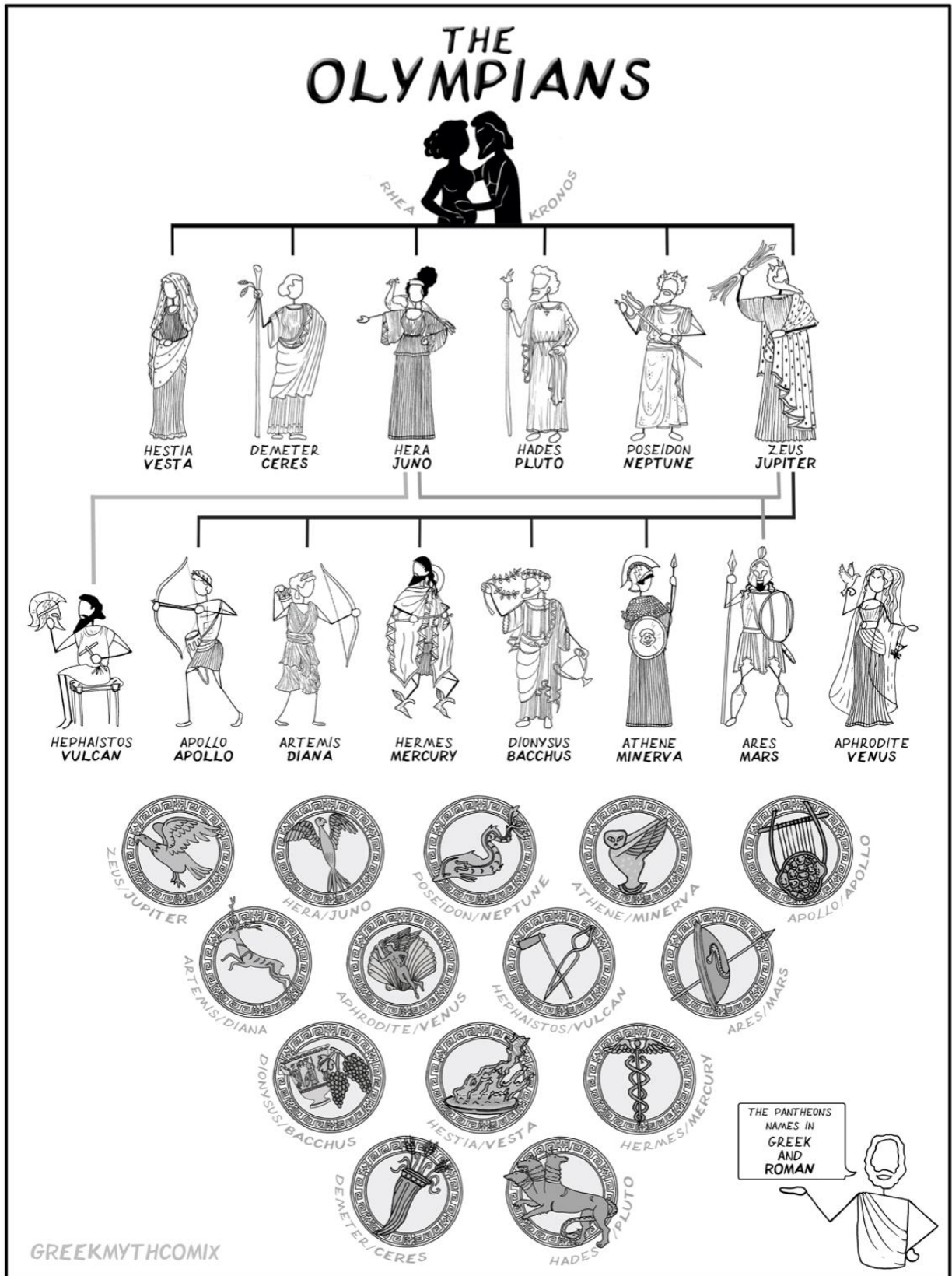
Below is a plate decorated with one of the Roman Myths: *The Mythology of All Races!*



→ [PLAY ON ACTIVITY - HISTORY] ←

Learn more about mythology [HERE](#).

And then take a look at the chart of Olympian Gods here & below!



So, we start with two ancient characters. **Mercury**, or the messenger to all ancient Roman Gods, and **Jupiter**, the king of all Gods and protector of Ancient Rome.

Mercury goes to Jupiter and says “Jupiter, Juno is coming soon and she does NOT seem happy”. (Juno happens to be the goddess protector of Rome...and Jupiter’s love)

Here’s our dilemma...Jupiter had told Juno that he loves her and made a big promise to her. Jupiter tells Mercury that he thinks he loves someone else, a fairy nymph named **Io**. Jupiter liking Io has obviously made Juno very upset!

Jupiter decided to pretend to be a shepherd in disguise, calling himself **Hylas**, because he thinks pretending to be the shepherd Hylas might make Io, the nymph, fall in love with him.

Enter another God, named **Apollo**, the god of music, poetry, art, truth, archery, sun and light...the list goes on! Apollo ALSO likes Io, the nymph. Uh oh! Apollo is also disguised as a shepherd, named **Philemon**. Philemon is also trying to make Io fall in love with him.

Both Hylas and Philemon compete to make Io fall in love with them, and Io realizes she likes Hylas. But then Philemon says he’s super sad and she starts to feel bad for him.

At this very moment a big storm breaks loose! Jupiter tosses his disguise aside, coming to the rescue and stopping the storm!

When Io sees this, she immediately realizes Hylas was Jupiter all along and they profess their love for one another.

We only have one other part of the story before it ends, unfinished!

La Folie, or Madness, announces to the world that Apollo has abandoned his home, Mount Parnassus, and that she, La Folie, has taken advantage of Apollo’s absence to steal his lyre, or a small harp.

And that’s where the story ends!

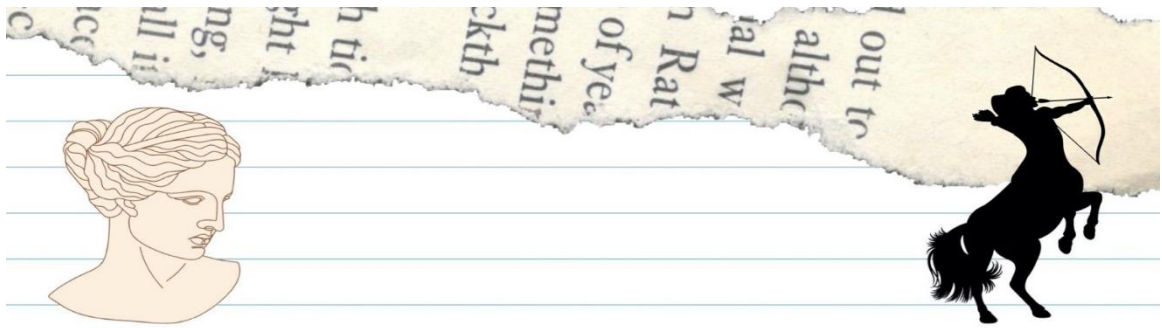


→ [PLAY ON ACTIVITY - WRITING] ←

How do *you* think the story ends?

On the next page you'll find some fancy paper to complete the story!

What do you think happens next? Are there any more characters that we learn about? Use your imagination to complete Rameau's *Io!*



Opéra-Ballets || *Ballet in the 1700's*

Ballet in Rameau's time of the 1700's was quite different than ballet today. Pointe shoes, the shoes that help dancers stand on their toes, hadn't been invented yet.



Instead, dancers wore soft leather shoes with a small heel. Up until around 1700, performers could include members of the royal court, including the king! Slowly, they were replaced with professional dancers.



Check out some wonderful work [HERE](#), where a dancer and historian have recreated what they believe various kinds of ballet-opera dances looked like!

→ [PLAY ON ACTIVITY - DANCING] ←

Watch this video of 18th century dancing!

https://eighteenthcenturyballet.com/videos_eighteenth-century_dance/

What about these dances looks different from ballet you've seen today?
Do you notice that the dancer's arms don't go above her head very often? This was seen as
indecent at the time to society!

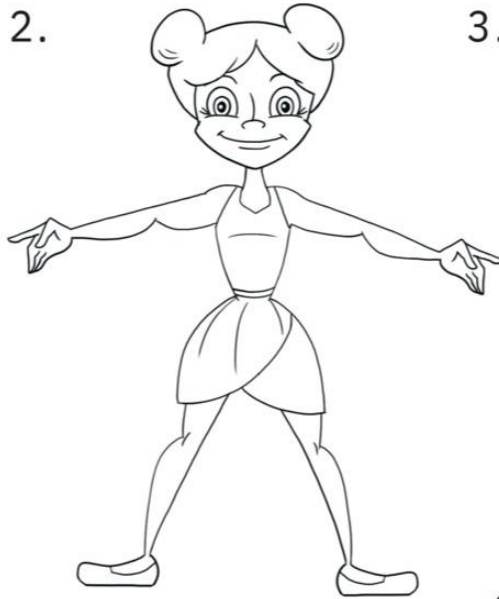
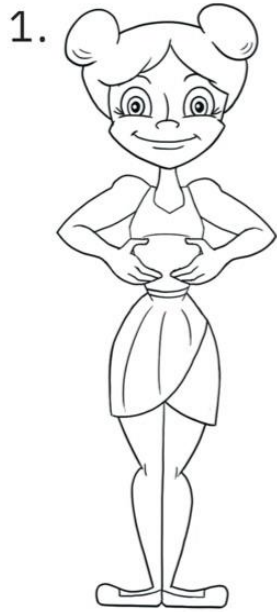
Can you mimic any of the movements?

Below, you'll find coloring sheets of a dancer and their positions of the feet!



Ballet

Ballet



Musical Instruments || *The Lyre*

A **lyre** (pronounce to rhyme with "fire") is an instrument which is like a mixture between a **harp** and a **guitar**. It is held in one hand and the strings are strummed using the other hand. Lyres were among the first **string instruments** to be invented. (Kids Encyclopedia)

You can learn all about the lyre instrument [HERE!](#)

Color this image of a woman playing the lyre below!



→ [PLAY ON ACTIVITY - BUILD AN INSTRUMENT] ←

<https://youtu.be/TWQelqMeykQ?t=65>

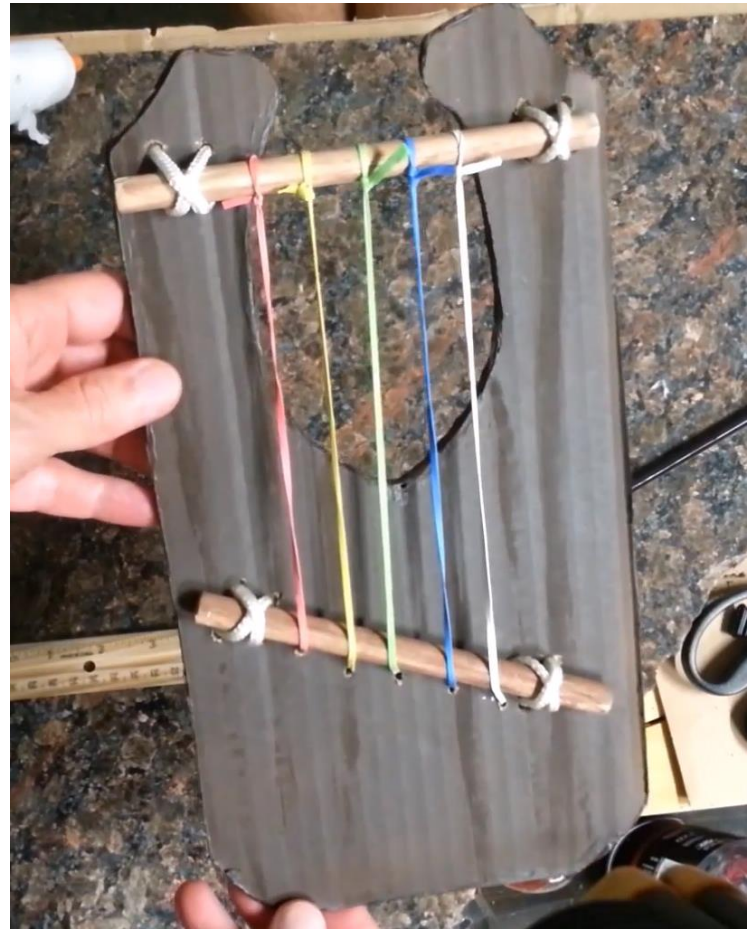
Learn to build your own lyre instrument, with the help of these folks above!

Crafting resources needed:

1. 2-ply (thicker) cardboard
2. Two 6-inch dowels) you could also use similar sized sticks you can find outside!
3. Paint, markers, etc.
4. 5 rubber bands
5. Thin (nylon) rope, yarn, twine, etc.

Crafting tools needed:

1. Utility knife (scissors are optional) – Make sure to have an adult help you with this!
2. Glue gun, or very strong glue
3. Ruler/measuring tape
4. Pencil
5. Scissors, or a drill with a bigger bit for the rope and a smaller bit for the rubber bands – anything you can use to poke holes in the cardboard!
6. A Q-tip or something small to push rubber bands through the cardboard
7. Tweezers
9. Round lid to use as a template for curves (optional)



Costume Design || *Machine Dazzle's Creations*

[Machine Dazzle](#) is the costume designer for Opera Lafayette's production of Rameau's *Io*, and here's a little sneak preview of his design for ***La Folie***...

