

The Story of J.S. Bach

Instructions: Read the story of J.S. Bach and complete the worksheet.

Suggested Listening (optional)

Instructions: After you have read the story and completed the worksheet, listen to the suggested listening.

Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring (J.S. Bach)

- <https://youtu.be/RdWVfrZ3MeQ>



Johann Sebastian

Bach... a composer from

*GERMANY who lived
during the BAROQUE
period of music...*

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Germany in 1685.

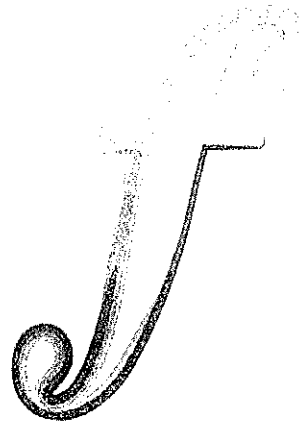
Going back many generations, the Bach family was known to be very musical—some played violin, some oboe, some organ and harpsichord. Others were music copyists. Though music was important to the Bach family, many of them worked as bakers, cobblers, weavers or hat makers to help support their families.

Bach's father, Johann Ambrosius, taught Bach to play the violin. His older brother, Johann Christoph, taught him organ, harpsichord and clavichord.

When Bach was nearly 10 years old, his parents died. He and his 13-year-old brother, Josef, went to live with Christoph and his wife. For the next five years, Bach lived with his brother, attended school and became an outstanding student. When he was 15, he left Johann Christoph's home and went to Lüneberg to become a choir-boy at St. Michael's Church.

In his lifetime Bach was known more for his excellent organ playing than for composing. Many years after he died, Felix Mendelssohn discovered Bach's compositions. He arranged for Bach's music to be played, because he wanted others to hear Bach's truly great music. He organized the compositions into 60 volumes of music.

Bach died in 1750 at the age of 65.



The Bach Family of Musicians

Johann Sebastian Bach, the great musician, sat at his harpsichord working very hard on a composition.

He was the organist and choir director for his church and he was writing an anthem called *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*. This piece was to be a part of a cantata for a special service.

He was concentrating so hard that he didn't notice the gentle tugging on his sleeve, until it became more insistent.

He heard three small voices saying, "Papa, we are hungry! May we have a snack?"

Pretending to be angry, Bach turned to face them and said with a deep voice and frown, "What? You are interrupting your papa's composing for a mere 'something to eat?'"

Then with a laugh he said, "Go ahead to the kitchen, I'll be right there!"

The children laughed as they hurried to sit at the long kitchen table. Soon their papa came and sliced a loaf of bread, buttered it and spread each piece with honey.

As the children were eating their snack, Johann Christian said, "Papa, please tell us about the time you walked so far to hear the great organist play."

"Once when I was in school," Bach began, "I heard about a wonderful organist and composer named Johann Adam

Reinken. I wanted so badly to hear him play. When I heard that he was playing a concert at a church in Hamburg, I decided that I would get there no matter what! I had no money to pay for a ride, so I packed a lunch and started walking. When I arrived in Hamburg, four days later, I was exhausted. However, that did not prevent me from going straight to the church to listen to Mr. Reinken practice. Oh! What beautiful music I heard! It filled my heart and soul. I wanted to

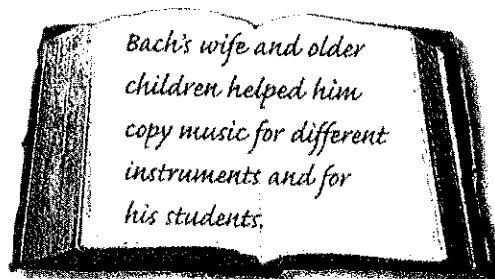
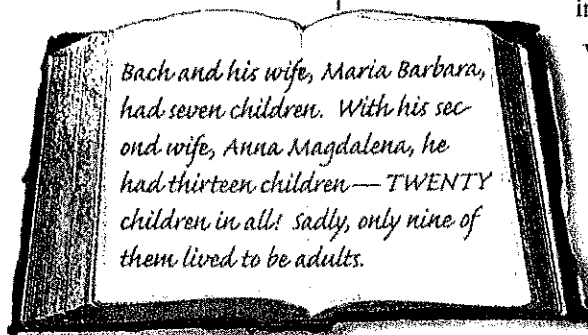
play like that!"

"But papa," said little Johanna Carolina, "everyone says that you are the very best organist they have ever heard! Maybe someone will walk a very long way to hear you play!"

"Well," said Bach, "I have practiced a lot of hours since those days."

"When will our next Bach family day be, papa?" asked Johann Christoph Frederick.

Bach smiled and said, "It will be next month. You will all be old enough to play



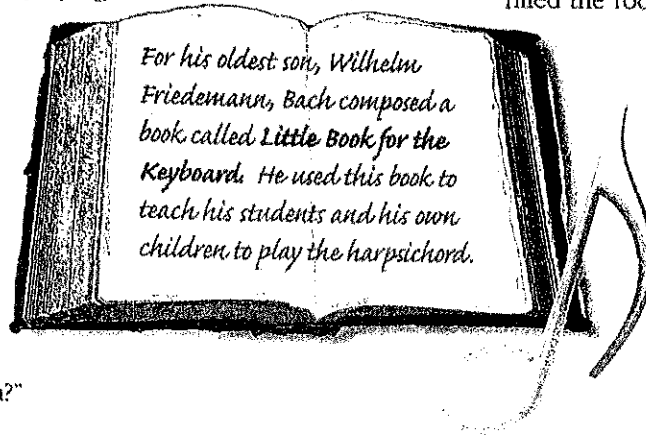
your instruments with us, except you, little Johanna. If you keep practicing, you may be able to play next year.

"Your uncles, older brothers and cousins will be here," he continued. "They will bring their different instruments. We will have such a good time playing old and new pieces. We'll have a wonderful meal and no one will want to go home! I can't wait, can you?"

"Will it be like our family gathering each night at evening prayers, papa?"

"Yes," said Bach as he gave each child a hug, "that reminds me, aren't you supposed to play your violins tonight? Come, all of you, let's go practice. You too, Johanna!"

Soon happy voices and beautiful music filled the room.



Important Compositions



*Tocatta and Fugue
in D Minor, BWV 565*



*St. Matthew Passion,
BWV 244*



Brandenburg Concertos

Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring

Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring is one of Bach's best known pieces. It has a lovely melody and a flowing accompaniment. This piece, originally written for chorus and orchestra, is from Bach's *Cantata No. 147*. A popular piece called *Joy* uses this melody and accompaniment. The example you will hear is played on an organ.

Bach Match

Draw a line to connect the circle with the square that matches.

The country where Bach was born

Baroque

Germany

The instrument Bach's father taught him to play

Violin

Twenty

The number of children Bach had

The musical period in which Bach lived



Johann Sebastian Bach
(at the keyboard)
and his family