

Ribbons of Life – Interpretive Program Outline

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Theme: Generations of composers have tried to capture the inspirational beauty of water in their music.

Location: Bobolink Trailhead at South Boulder Creek

Props: Have some laminated pictures of some of the birds we might see; picture of chorus frogs and bull frogs, picture of the Front Range during the Ice Age.

iPod and portable speakers

Introduction

- Share quote: If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water. – Loren Eiseley
- Water inspires us. We all love the beauty of reflections on a lake, or the sound of water flowing or falling. Examples – where people build their homes, how water adds magic to a garden.
- Water is essential to life – our planet orbits in the Goldilocks zone where liquid water is possible. Water may have come from ancient comets crashing into the earth, or released by ancient volcanoes from deep in the core of our planet. Scientists are even looking at moons in our solar system where liquid water may be present, as locations to search for life.
- Streams wind their way through the landscape like ribbons, creating meandering paths of green that are conducive to life.
- Without water, there is no life. But water is so much more – it is magical, and inspires artists. Generations of composers have tried to capture the inspirational beauty of water in their music.
- We'll walk along the creek, looking for things that inspire us, and I'll play musical selections that show how composers have used water in their music. As we go, imagine that you are a composer, and that you are trying to capture Boulder Creek in your music – what aspects of the creek would you include? What parts of this hike would make it into your composition? And how would you musically describe what you observe?
- Introduce Bedric Smetana with a little background info about his life. Play excerpt from Smetana's Moldau and link it to Boulder Creek – how did the composer capture the feeling of a river?

Stop 1: Creek overlook

- Why do we find water so comforting? How does water create such a nice place to walk, or to picnic?
- Beethoven loved water, and the countryside. He took great inspiration from nature, and its calming effects.

- Play excerpt from Beethoven’s 6th Symphony – 2nd movement “By the Brook” – how did he capture the peace and tranquility of spending time by the river? Walk to next stop with music playing.

Stop 2: Reflecting pool by the downed trees

- Encourage people to notice the reflections in the water at this point. Point out how reflections also inspire painters: if you were to paint this scene, what colors would you use? How would you capture the ever-shifting surface of the water?
- Play excerpt from Debussy’s *Reflections on the Water*. How did Debussy create a feeling of colors and shimmering textures in the music?

Stop 3: Trout “hole” by downed trees

- Water (“green ribbons”) attracts life, and composers try to capture that aspect of water too.
- Imagine being a fish – if this were your home, what would it be like?
- Explain how trout hang out under snags and in deeper pools in the water, near riffles where they can dart out to catch food.
- Camille Saint-Saens (a little background about his life) captured the world of fish in *Carnival of the Animals* – play excerpt from *The Aquarium* – I would be a fish if I could sound like that!

Stop 4: Canada Geese (work in at whatever stop is appropriate, where geese are present)

- Background natural history on geese and ducks –
- Territorial behavior of geese – may be able to observe – notice all the honking and vocalization
- Play excerpt from Rautavaara’s *Cantus Arcticus* (give a little background about his life and this piece of music) with honking geese and twittering curlews
- Point out that swans are closely related to ducks and geese, and they have also been inspiration to composers.
- Play Saint-Saens’ *The Swan* while walking to next stop

Stop 5: Point where trail curves out of the trees into the creekside meadow

- We’re seeing this scene by day, with all the activity – but imagine how different it would look at night. Would the water have a different character at night or in a different season?
- Play excerpt from Liadov’s *Enchanted Lake* – musical depiction of starlight on a lake, mysterious (give a little background about Liadov’s quirky personality)

Stop 6: Irrigation Ditch Diversion structure

- Rivers and lakes have always been important to human settlements.
- Water is vital for life. People have used water in the West to survive and raise crops.
- Irrigation structure built in the 1800s to move creek water through ditches to local farms.
- The creek, and the system of ditches, made life possible for pioneers in this arid climate.
- Composers have tried to capture this aspect of water, too: play excerpt from Smetana's Moldau – the dancing peasants along the river.

Stop 7: Bridge to East Boulder Recreation Center

- Creeks and rivers change over time. We view them as static, but the flood last fall showed us that creeks really have a mind of their own. They change course, can swell or shrink with water availability.
- They provide migration corridors for animals that can use the “green ribbon” as shelter to move far out on to the prairie, never far from water or a quick place to hide.
- We see Boulder Creek as it is today, rather small. But at the end of the Ice Age it was a vast river as it drained the melting glaciers of the high peaks.
- Imagine that – Boulder Creek maybe a half mile wide, with mammoths wading through it.
- Majesty of rivers – play excerpt from Strauss' Blue Danube

Conclusion – part way back to parking lot, by the flooded wet meadow

- Recapitulation – water is vital to life – for animals, for plants, for our crops.
- Water is also magical and inspirational, to us and to artists and composers – as we have heard.
- After your walk along Boulder Creek, what would you incorporate into a musical composition? How would you musically characterize the things that you experienced during this walk, or that you like about water?
- Thanks them for coming, and walk back to the cars playing an excerpt from Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake.