

Year 8 Music Worksheet: Theme and Variations

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part 1: Reading Comprehension

Imagine you take a basic white t-shirt. It's simple and recognisable. Now, imagine you tie-dye it, add some patches to it, or cut off the sleeves. It is still fundamentally the same shirt, but it has been transformed. In music, composers do the exact same thing using a structure called **Theme and Variations** form.

The **Theme** is the musical starting point. It is a simple, memorable melody that is played completely at the beginning of the piece. Once the audience has the theme stuck in their heads, the composer starts the **Variations**. Each variation is a new version of that original theme. The core skeleton of the melody remains the same, but the composer changes the musical ingredients around it to create a completely different mood.

How do composers change the music? They use several clever techniques:

- **Tempo (Speed):** They might make a variation lightning-fast or painfully slow.
- **Pitch and Melody:** They can add decorative notes (ornaments) around the main melody, or even flip the melody completely upside down.
- **Dynamics (Volume):** A variation might whisper softly before a sudden, explosive change in volume.
- **Texture and Instrumentation:** The theme might start as a solo piano piece, but Variation 1 might feature the heavy brass section, while Variation 2 uses smooth, legato strings.
- **Tonality (Key):** A famous trick is changing the music from a bright, happy major key to a dark, sad minor key.

One of the most famous examples of this is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's variations on a French folk tune you probably know as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" (originally called *Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman*). Mozart took a simple melody every child knew and turned it into twelve dazzling, complex variations that showed off his incredible imagination.

Part 2: Comprehension Questions

Section A: Knowledge Retrieval (Quick Fire)

Answer these questions using facts directly from the text.

1. What is the definition of a musical **Theme**?

2. What famous nursery rhyme tune did Mozart use to write twelve variations?

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3. Name **three** musical elements a composer can alter to create a variation.

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1. _____

○

2. _____

○

3. _____

Section B: Analysis & Understanding

Think a little deeper about how the music works.

4. Look at the provided historical sheet music image. Notice how after the first section, it says "**Var. I**". Based on the text and looking at the notes underneath that label, how does the look of the sheet music change when the first variation begins? (Hint: Think about note speeds).

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5. If a composer changes a variation from a **major key** to a **minor key**, how will the emotional mood of the piece change for the listener?
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Section C: Creative Application

6. Imagine you are a composer creating a piece called *The School Day: Theme and Variations*. Your basic **Theme** is a calm, steady melody representing waking up.

Describe how you would musicalise **Variation 1: Running late for the school bus** and **Variation 2: Sitting in a boring lunchtime detention**.

- **Variation 1 (Running Late):** Which instruments, tempo, and dynamics would you use, and why?

- **Variation 2 (Detention):** Which tonality (major/minor), tempo, and texture would you use, and why?
