Excerpts from *Pictures at an Exhibition*  
by  
Modest Mussorgsky (1839 - 1881)  

*Lesson Plan by Kimberly Tower and Lynn Rubin*

Click here to watch the BSO perform this piece.

**About the Composition**

*Pictures at an Exhibition* was written in remembrance of Mussorgsky’s friend, painter and architect Viktor Hartmann. Mussorgsky used a technique called sound painting to describe pictures using instruments and sound. It was originally composed for piano in 1874 and is a suite of 10 pieces. It was arranged for orchestra by Maurice Ravel in 1922, which is the version most recorded and performed.

**Baba Yaga Background**

Baba Yaga is a witch from Russian folklore who dwells deep in the forest. Her hut has fowl legs and can also fly. The opening has a rhythmic pounding that suggests a giant bird bouncing on its legs. The main quarter-note rhythm (see lesson notes) has a chasing feel to it in which the hut is gaining speed and leaping into the air while looking for a victim to eat.

There are many folk stories printed about Baba Yaga that can be used for a further explanation of the piece.
Teaching Ideas

Activity 1: Form and Movement

Form
- The order and shape of the music
  Form of this movement: ABA which is also called Ternary form—a three-part musical form consisting of an opening section (A), a following section (B) and then a repetition of the first section (A).
  A - Loud, energetic, and rhythmic. Movements begins with a pounding or hopping rhythm emphasized by drums that describes the moving hut. The trumpets loudly play a phrase while the horns and trombones seem to call out call out and warn potential victims. There is a descending pattern on strings that adds to the tension in the music.
  B - Woodwinds play trembling rhythm throughout to continue the feeling of dread. The feel and meter change and softer, lower woodwinds play the main melody with the upper woodwinds playing the accents. The music fades to a pianissimo before coming back to the explosive A section.
  A - Comes back with an explosive fortissimo chord. Similar to the beginning with the pounding rhythms and leads right into the last movement, The Great Gate of Kiev.

Movement
- Divide students into 2 groups. One group can have warm colored props (like scarves or yarn) and the other has cool colored props. The warm colors move only on the A section and should have movements that correspond to the rhythmic, energetic theme. The cooler colored group moves appropriately to the slower B section with movements that reflect what they hear.

Reflect
- How does the music inspire you to move in the beginning and end?
- How does the music inspire you to move in the middle?

Activity 2: Ostinato

Ostinato: a continually repeated musical phrase or rhythm.

Main theme in simple rhythms for ostinato:

- Starting in the A section, students can start playing the rhythm when the theme is first played around 0:22 and continue until the B section.
- In the B section, they can make a quiet rumbling sound by rubbing rhythm sticks together instead of tapping the rhythm.
- Students can resume playing when the A section returns.