

Which Band Instrument Should I Play?

Learning to play an instrument is easy and fun! It is no more difficult than learning to rollerblade, ride a bike, or swim. Like any skill, it gets easier with practice. Learning to play an instrument will give you new skills and will help you to understand more about the music you hear every day.

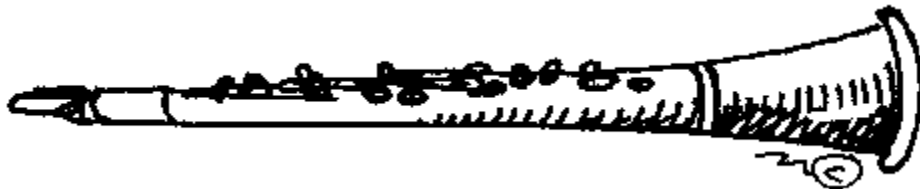
Which instrument should you play? It is important to go to concerts, listen to good recordings, or watch some instrument videos when you are trying to figure out which instrument you would like to play. The more you know about the instruments that you are choosing from, the better your choice will be.

You should begin by doing some research on the instruments that seem interesting to you. Attached is information on the instruments that we use in the sixth grade. Each paragraph tells what each instrument is made of, what kind of music it might play, and how much it might cost to rent or own. After you do your research, you should actually try to play some of the instruments that you are interested in. You will have an opportunity to do this at your elementary school later this spring. Your goal should be to find an instrument that you sound good on and that you like the sound of.

You should also keep in mind that band is kind of like a sports team. You can't have a baseball team with only pitchers - you need people to play lots of different positions. A band with 20 saxophones, 18 flutes and 16 drummers can play, but it isn't going to sound as good as a band that also has clarinets, trombones, trumpet, French horns, oboes, and tubas.

It's important to remember that both boys and girls can play every instrument. Some of the best flute players in the world are men, and some of the best trumpet players in the world are women. Choose the instrument that *you* want to play - don't let peer pressure make the choice for you.

Read about each of the instruments on the following pages to learn how they work and where you can play them. You have a better chance of doing well in the band if you've chosen the right instrument for you.



About the Instruments

FLUTE

Flutes are made of silver or composite metal. If you have ever made a sound by blowing across the top of a bottle, you can make a sound on a flute. Flutes play in concert bands, marching bands, and orchestras. We usually have between 8 to 12 flutes in the 6th grade band. Some flute players may switch to oboe or bassoon later in their first year. One reason my students like to play flute is because the flutes often play the melody, and the case is small, so it's easy to carry. It takes a lot of air to play flute. It costs about \$30 per month to rent a flute.

CLARINET

Most beginner clarinets are made of plastic, and intermediate and professional clarinets are made of granadilla wood. When air is blown into the instrument, it vibrates a reed and sound is made. Clarinets can play in concert bands, marching bands, and orchestras. We usually have between 18 and 25 clarinets in the 6th grade band. Some clarinet players switch to bass clarinet, bassoon or oboe later in their first year. Students with very small fingers may have trouble with the clarinet. Many of my clarinet players like this instrument because of its warm sound and that they get to play a variety of parts, from melody to harmony and rhythm. It costs about \$30 per month to rent a clarinet, and reeds cost about \$1.50 each.

ALTO SAXOPHONE

The alto saxophone is made of brass or composite metal. The sound is produced in the same way as the clarinet, using a slightly bigger reed. Saxophones come in different sizes; the one that our 6th graders play is the alto saxophone. We usually have between 7 and 10 alto saxophones in the 6th grade band. Some saxophone players learn to play the tenor or baritone saxophone later in middle school. Saxophones can be played in concert bands, marching bands, and jazz bands. Some of my saxophone players like this instrument because it is easy to get a sound out, and, like the clarinet, they get to play a variety of parts. The alto saxophone costs almost \$65 per month to rent, and is one of the most expensive instruments to buy. The reeds cost about \$2.00 each.

TRUMPET

The trumpet is made of brass or composite metal, and produce sound by “buzzing” the lips into a mouthpiece. Brass instruments can be a little more challenging than woodwinds, because you can make more than one note with the same finger position. You need a good ear to hear whether you are playing the right note. Trumpets can play in concert bands, marching bands, orchestras and jazz bands. We usually have between 15 and 22 trumpets in the 6th grade band. My students like the trumpet because it has a nice big sound and frequently plays the melody. Trumpet players sometimes switch to French horn, baritone, or tuba later in the year. Trumpets cost about \$30 per month to rent.

TROMBONE

Like the trumpet, the trombone is made of brass or composite metal, and produces sound by “buzzing” the lips into a mouthpiece. Since the trombone is bigger than a trumpet, it sounds lower. The trombone changes notes by moving a slide, much like a slide whistle. If you have very short arms, the trombone may not be for you. Trombones usually play harmony or rhythm parts in the band, but sometimes they get to play the melody. Trombones play in concert bands, marching bands, orchestras, and jazz bands. We usually have between 8 and 12 trombones in the 6th grade band. My students like the trombone because it is easier to buzz on the bigger mouthpiece and they like using the slide to change notes. Sometimes, trombone players switch to tuba later in the year. Trombones cost about \$30 per month to rent.

PERCUSSION

Our 6th grade percussionists use a bell kit in class that includes a snare practice pad and a small set of orchestra bells. My students play mostly the bells for the first semester, until I am sure they can read the notes. Then we switch to the practice pad for a few weeks, and after that my students must learn both drum pad and bells at the same time. Percussionists need to be hard working, responsible students since they are learning two instruments while everyone else is learning just one. You must have good physical coordination to be successful on percussion, and it helps to be good in math. Students that have taken piano lessons in the past typically do well on percussion since the bells setup is similar to a piano keyboard. We typically have 6 to 8 percussionists in 6th grade band and it’s important to stick to this number. This is because we have a limited amount of the larger percussion instruments needed for songs and most composers only write enough percussion parts to keep 7 or 8 students at most involved. A percussion kit costs about \$30 per month to rent.

When to Get an Instrument

This document is designed to give you some background information on each band instrument. All 5th grade students will go through an instrument fitting at their elementary school during the next few weeks. Each student will be given their own “fitting kit” that contains mouthpieces for the instruments listed above. A professional musician will guide students through making noises on each of the mouthpieces and help them choose an instrument to start on in 6th grade band. The goal is to select an instrument that the student would like to learn but also gives them a good chance for success.

Between now and the end of the school year I will be given a list of students who have chosen 6th grade band as an elective. I will then reach out for the final instrument choices of each student. Once I have this information, I will send out information regarding how to get an instrument. This will include recommended music stores, quality instrument brands, and when to get an instrument. Please wait to get an instrument until after I send out more information.