



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## The Four Seasons ('Le Quattro Stagioni')

Antonio Vivaldi



**1678-1741**

Antonio Vivaldi was an Italian composer and violinist.

Vivaldi composed over 500 concertos (pieces for solo instrument(s) accompanied by an orchestra). He also wrote 46 operas and numerous other pieces. His 'Gloria', for choir, sololists and orchestra, is a very famous piece of choral music and is still much performed today.

Nickname- The Red Priest.

He was called the Red Priest because he actually had red hair (he is wearing a wig in the picture) and he was an ordained priest. However, he much preferred composing and playing music to taking masses, and got out of his priestly work by claiming that his asthma meant that he couldn't say mass!



Stravinsky, the famous composer of *The Rite of Spring* and *the Firebird*, is meant to have said



"Vivaldi did not write 400 concertos; he wrote one concerto 400 times."

What Stravinsky meant by this is that they all sound the same. Which is: a) wrong, he wrote over 500; and b) mean

Le Quattro Stagioni is Vivaldi's most famous piece. It is actually a collection of 4 separate **violin concertos**. Each concerto is about one of the four seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter), and Vivaldi wrote a sonnet (a fourteen line poem) about each season which he then brought to life through the music he wrote for each concerto. It is one of the earliest forms of programme music (music that tells a story without using spoken or sung words) and in it we hear birds and nature, winds blowing, people slipping and falling on ice, hunting parties, dancing and drunks falling asleep!!





### Listening to Summer and Winter

Like nearly all of Vivaldi's solo concertos, these two concerti are split into three separate movements each. A movement is a bit like a chapter of a book, but rather than turning the page at the end of a movement you hear a moment of silence. The movements follow the plan **Fast - Slow - Fast**

Here are Vivaldi's poem for Summer and Winter, split up into their three movements

### Summer

#### *Allegro non molto*

Beneath the blazing sun's relentless heat  
men and flocks are sweltering,  
pines are scorched.

We hear the cuckoo's voice; then sweet songs of the turtle dove and finch are heard.  
Soft breezes stir the air...but threatening north wind sweeps them suddenly aside. The shepherd trembles, fearful of violent storm and what may lie ahead.

#### *Adagio e piano - Presto e forte*

His limbs are now awakened from their repose by fear of lightning's flash and thunder's roar,  
as gnats and flies buzz furiously around.

#### *Presto*

Alas, his worst fears were justified, as the heavens roar and great hailstones beat down upon the proudly standing corn.

### Winter

#### *Allegro non molto*

Shivering, frozen mid the frosty snow in biting, stinging winds;  
running to and fro to stamp one's icy feet, teeth chattering in the bitter chill.

#### *Largo*

To rest contentedly beside the hearth, while those outside are drenched by pouring rain.

#### *Allegro*

We tread the icy path slowly and cautiously, for fear of tripping and falling.  
Then turn abruptly, slip, crash on the ground and, rising, hasten on across the ice lest it cracks up.

We feel the chill north winds coarse through the home despite the locked and bolted doors...

this is winter, which nonetheless brings its own delights.



Vivaldi actually wrote the poems into the score, so that we know exactly which moments in the music are meant to correspond with the lines of the poems.

Listen to the two concertos here, with the lines of the poem appearing on the screen as they appear in the music:

Summer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ffUeiyPcpbl>

Winter: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2v-6YodcbDA>

### Classroom Activities

1. Split your class into groups. Each group must act out a movement of Summer or Winter, following the description given in the poem. Vivaldi makes use of repeats within the music to give each movement structure. Be sure to repeat actions when the music repeats!
2. Younger children might enjoy the drama of the middle movement of Summer, as it alternates from 'sleeping' music to 'thunder' music. Try lying your class down for the quiet sleeping section that you hear at the start (at 5'00 on the link above) and then asking them to stand up and react with terror to the thunder and lightening! When the quiet music returns they can lie down again, etc.
3. The first movement of Summer contains some brilliant imitations of the cuckoo, the turtledove and the finch. Have a listen! Now, using either voices or instruments that you have in your classroom, attempt to make your own musical imitations. You could do this in small groups, or even attempt a whole class dawn chorus. Here are some recordings of birdsong to inspire you:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTY26k0CA0I> (cuckoo)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_D37LbNt6S4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_D37LbNt6S4) (turtledove)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FntoLQqhTBQ> (finch)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qc0AyxhxzY4> (birdsong + cuckoo)



4. Draw either Summer or Winter, fitting as much of Vivaldi's description into your picture. Listen to the music while you work, for inspiration!
5. Listen to the slow movement of Winter (starting at 3'32 on the link above) and get to know the tune, and what the movement is 'about'. Now listen very carefully to the tune from 3'32-3'45. In this slow movement Vivaldi is presenting a song without words- a tune that might have been sung in one of his operas by a soprano. Your task is to write words that could be sung to the tune.

Practise clapping the rhythm first. It goes:

Tea Cof-fee Tea Cof-fee Tea Tea

Tea Cof-fee Cof-fee Tea Tea Tea Tea

Your words should fit this rhythm **exactly**, with one syllable per note. When you have finished writing the words sing them to the tune as the recording plays to see if they fit.