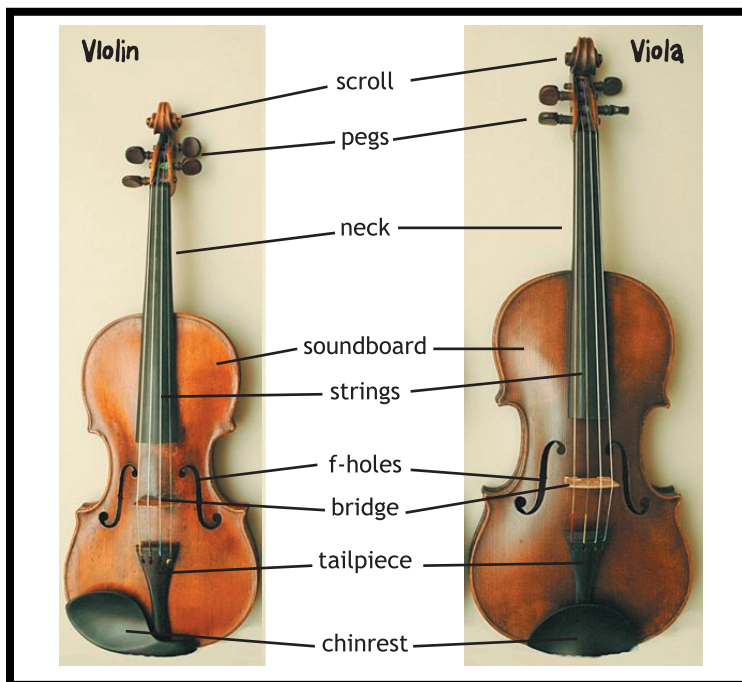


The **violin** and the **viola** are the two higher-pitched members of the string family. They both have four strings. The violin and the viola look very similar, but the viola is a little bigger and can play lower pitches. These instruments were invented in **Italy** in the 16th century, and they haven't changed much since. They are usually made of spruce and maple wood. The sound of string instruments actually improves with age, so the best old instruments are worth millions of dollars!



Players of the violin and viola hold the instrument under the chin with the chinrest. With the right hand, they move a bow back and forth across the strings to make them vibrate. The bow is a curved stick holding a tight ribbon of horsehair. The horsehair is covered with sticky rosin to grab the strings and help them vibrate better. The left-hand fingers press strings down at various places on the neck to make different pitches. The tailpiece keeps the strings in place and the bridge holds them up off the instrument. The soundboard picks up and amplifies the sound made by the strings, and the f-holes let the sound out from inside the instrument. (They are called "f-holes" because they look like fancy letter fs.) The pegs are used to tune the strings, to make them play exactly the right pitches. The fancy woodwork of the scroll is just for decoration.

When you watch violin and viola players, you will see them gently rocking the left hand. This is called vibrato because it makes the pitch waver up and down slightly, and this makes the sound more beautiful.

Most of the time players use the bow to play, but they can also pluck the strings with their fingers. This plucking technique is called pizzicato.

There are more violins than other instrument in the orchestra, up to 30 of them. The violins are divided into first violins and second violins and they play different parts in the music.

The orchestra contains up to 12 violas.

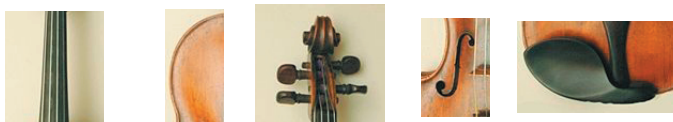
Viola Player



1 Scattered Parts Puzzler

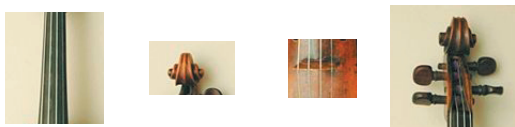
Label the parts of the violin and viola below. For each part, find the correct part name in the list at the right, then write the letter for that name under the picture. When you get them all right, you will spell out the answer to this riddle:

Q: What do an equine stylist and a violinist have in common?
A: They both need _____ to do their jobs!



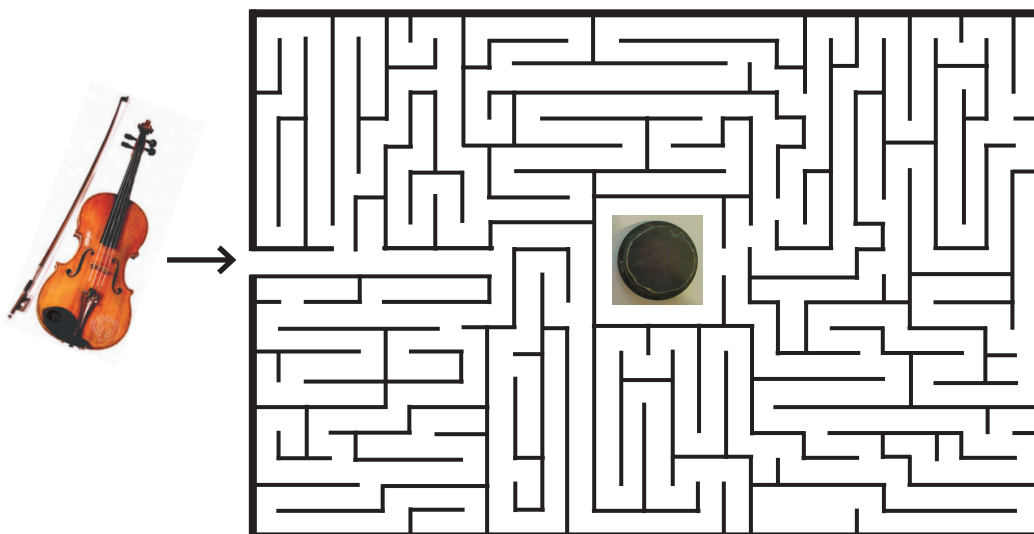
Part names

- S f-hole
- O soundboard
- I bridge
- A scroll
- R pegs
- H neck
- E chinrest



2 Rosin Maze

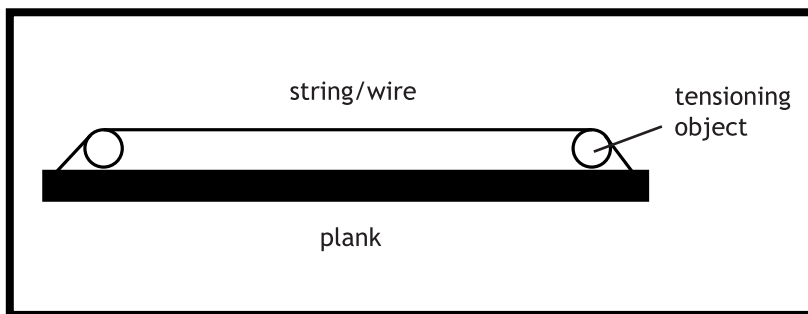
The viola needs rosin for its bow! Help the viola find it in the center of the maze.



Lesson Plan Ideas

1 Gather objects of different sizes, or collect pictures of such objects, or simply make a list of such objects (e.g., elephant, mouse, airplane, bicycle, etc.). Show or speak pairs of objects, and have the students indicate the relative size relationships with the words "violin" (for small) and "viola" (for large). For example, "elephant, mouse" would be "viola, violin" and "bicycle, airplane" would be "violin, viola." This will reinforce the relative sizes of these instruments, which may be a little tricky to remember.

2 Make a diddy bow (a rudimentary single-stringed blues instrument) by stretching some kind of instrument string or wire on a wooden plank. Insert objects beneath the string at either end to elevate the string and increase its tension. Use the diddy bow to explore the effects of string tension and string length (you can effectively shorten the string by pressing down on it with a finger). Greater string tension and shorter strings lead to faster vibrations, which in turn produce higher sounds.



3 Recommended listening/viewing: Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for Violin, Viola, and Orchestra in E-flat Major, K. 364. This work features violins and violas both as orchestral instruments and as soloists. Many fine recordings of this well known work exist; the audio is also available at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinfonia_Concertante_for_Violin,_Viola_and_Orchestra

A recommended video recording of the second movement of this work can be found at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wJTQSo-NDk

Note that the viola soloist also acts as conductor for the group.

Additional Resources

<http://www.theviolinsite.com/> is a good place to start for further exploration of all things relating to the violin, including violin construction and famous violinists.

<http://www.viola-in-music.com/> is a similar site for the viola.