



CHOOSING AN INSTRUMENT

THE PROS & CONS OF EACH BAND INSTRUMENT

adapted from Greg Conway, Hopkins Junior High School

We hope that this document helps to introduce the different instruments of the band and to help with the selection process!

For each instrument, there is a listing of “pros” and “cons.” There is also an indication of whether each instrument can participate in traditional Jazz Bands and Orchestras at the more advanced levels.

Finally, we have indicated which instruments are best suited to start on for future instrument switches following 5th grade band, *if* a student wants to switch (staying on the same instrument is perfectly fine, too)!

Very much like any sports team, we need each position filled in order to have a complete team. A great band must have a balance of all instruments to be successful!

5TH GRADE WOODWINDS

FLUTE

The smallest and highest-sounding instrument in the band

PROS	CONS
<p>Small, easy to carry when in case. Relatively inexpensive to rent. Many private instructors available in the area.</p>	<p>This is the most difficult instrument to start on in beginning band. Some students cannot play this instrument well due to facial characteristics (lip size, etc.). Difficult to hold, especially with small hands. Many students play flute, so much more competition to get into advanced groups, honor bands, youth orchestras, etc. in the future.</p>
<p>Traditional Jazz Instrument: No</p>	
<p>Orchestral Instrument: Yes</p>	
<p>Good for switching to: (exists relatively on its own)</p>	

CLARINET

A single reed instrument, similar in size to flute and oboe when assembled.

PROS	CONS
<p>Small, easy to carry when in case. Relatively inexpensive to rent. Easily transferable to other instruments (bass clarinet, oboe, bassoon, saxophone). Many private instructors available in area.</p>	<p>Somewhat difficult to play at times. Students must have large enough hands to cover tone holes with all fingers. Many students play clarinet, so much more competition to get into advanced groups, honor bands, youth orchestras, etc. in the future (though often not as much as flutes).</p>
<p>Traditional Jazz Instrument No</p>	
<p>Orchestral Instrument: Yes</p>	
<p>Good for switching to: Bass Clarinet Oboe Bassoon Saxophone (Alto, Tenor, Bari)</p>	

5TH GRADE BRASS

TRUMPET

The smallest of the brass instruments. It is also the highest-sounding and "brightest" sound of the brass.

PROS	CONS
<p>Smallest of brass instruments. Relatively inexpensive to rent. Few supplies needed for purchase. Easily transferable to other brass instruments (French Horn, trombone, baritone, tuba). Trumpet is one of the most important instruments in the band. Is BOTH a jazz and orchestral instrument.</p>	<p>Difficult for some students to hold/play. Has a lot of resistance when blowing through. Most difficult of brass instruments to play well. Students who currently wear braces or who will wear braces in the future should consider a different instrument (or switching in the future) because playing on the trumpet with braces can be VERY painful!</p>
<p>Traditional Jazz Instrument: Yes</p>	
<p>Orchestral Instrument: Yes</p>	
<p>Good for switching to: French Horn</p>	

BARITONE

*One of the several instruments classified as "low brass." It is similar to trombone, except with valves.
Low brass instruments are **THE MOST IMPORTANT instruments in a band!***

PROS	CONS
<p>One of the easiest instruments to produce a sound on for almost all students. Easily transferable to other low brass instruments later on. Very important to the success of a band, making players in high demand at every level.</p>	<p>Expensive to rent/purchase (which is why we offer ones to rent through Redwood!). Not used in traditional jazz bands or orchestras. Somewhat large.</p>
<p>Traditional Jazz Instrument: No</p>	
<p>Orchestral Instrument: Not traditionally</p>	
<p>Good for switching to: Trombone Tuba</p>	

ADDITIONAL BAND INSTRUMENTS

(Available to learn in the future!)

OBOE	
<i>A double reed instrument, about the same size as a flute or clarinet when assembled.</i>	
PROS	CONS
Small, easy to carry when in case. Not as many students play this instrument, so more opportunities to play in groups.	Somewhat difficult to play at times. Private lessons are very strongly recommended. Instruments and supplies can be expensive. Limited number of oboists allowed in each group.
Traditional Jazz Instrument: No	
Orchestral Instrument: Yes	

BASSOON	
<i>A double reed instrument, the bass of the double reed family.</i>	
PROS	CONS
This is a very important instrument to the success of bands and orchestras at all levels. Not many students play Bassoon, leading to many opportunities for performances in different types of advanced level groups. Good bassoon players are always in high demand at every level of music!	Somewhat difficult to play at times. Private lessons are very strongly recommended. Expensive instrument to rent/purchase (which is why we offer ones to rent through Redwood!).
Traditional Jazz Instrument: No	
Orchestral Instrument: Yes	

ALTO SAX

A single reed instrument made of brass. It is larger than most other woodwinds..

PROS	CONS
Relatively easy to learn (although easy to learn “badly”). Easily transferable to other instruments (other saxophones, bassoon, bass clarinet). Many private instructors available in the area.	Large, heavy instrument. Difficult to manage for small students. Limited performance opportunities in advanced groups (not used in orchestras). Expensive instrument to rent (more than double the cost of some other instruments). Many students play alto saxophone, so much more competition to get into advanced groups, honor bands, etc. in the future.
Traditional Jazz Instrument: Yes	
Orchestral Instrument: Not traditionally	

TENOR SAX & BARI SAX

A single reed instrument made of brass. It is larger than most other woodwinds. Larger and lower-sounding than alto saxophone.

PROS	CONS
Relatively easy to learn (although easy to learn “badly”). Easily transferable to other instruments (other saxophones, bassoon, bass clarinet). Many private instructors available in the area.	Large, heavy instrument. Difficult to manage for small students. Limited performance opportunities in advanced groups (usually not used in orchestras). Expensive instrument to rent (which is why we offer ones through Redwood!).
Traditional Jazz Instrument: Yes	
Orchestral Instrument: Not traditionally	

FRENCH HORN

A mid-range brass instrument. It is highly recommended that students studying French Horn have had some previous musical experience (piano, etc.).

PROS

This is a very important instrument to the success of bands and orchestras at all levels. Not many students play French Horn, leading to many opportunities for performances in different types of advanced level groups. Good French Horn players are always in high demand at every level of music!

CONS

Difficult instrument to play and control. Private lessons are very strongly recommended. Expensive instrument to rent (which is why we offer ones through Redwood!).

Traditional Jazz Instrument:

No

Orchestral Instrument:

Yes

TROMBONE

*One of several instruments classified as "low brass."
Low brass instruments are **THE MOST IMPORTANT instruments in a band!***

PROS

The smallest of the low brass instruments. Easily transferable to other low brass instruments later on (baritone & tuba). Relatively inexpensive to rent and maintain. Is BOTH a jazz and orchestral instrument. Very important to the success of a band, making players in high demand at every level. One of the easiest instruments to produce a sound on for almost all students. We offer these to use through Redwood!

CONS

Because there are no keys or valves on a trombone, it is difficult to play fast moving notes.

Traditional Jazz Instrument:

No

Orchestral Instrument:

Yes

TUBA

One of several instruments classified as "low brass."
Low brass instruments are **THE MOST IMPORTANT instruments in a band!**

PROS

Essential to the success of a band, making players in high demand at every level. One of the easiest instruments to produce a sound on for almost all students.

CONS

Large instrument. Can sometimes be difficult to manage for small students (although 3/4 sizes are available). Expensive instrument to rent (which is why we offer ones through Redwood!).

Traditional Jazz Instrument:

No

Orchestral Instrument:

Yes

PERCUSSION

*A collection of instruments that involves the use of sticks or beaters. This is the only instrument section that is not a "wind" instrument (involving blowing air through the instrument). Students studying percussion **MUST** learn both drums and keyboard mallet instruments. **Piano experience is strongly recommended for percussionists!***

Percussion requires constant focus and concentration at very high levels all the time, much more so than ANY other band instrument. Students who have a difficult time focusing should NOT play percussion!

PROS

Does not involve "blowing". Very important to the success of a band/orchestra. Somewhat inexpensive to rent/purchase equipment at the elementary level (costs increase later).

CONS

Difficult to learn all of the different instruments (especially if no piano experience). Requires a lot of "musical independence," since there is generally only one person playing each percussion instrument at a time (especially at more advanced levels). A lot of students play percussion, leading to more competition to get into advanced groups, youth orchestras, honor bands, etc. Students playing percussion will eventually need to rent/purchase several different instruments, leading to higher costs.

Traditional Jazz Instrument:

No, unless student studies "Drum Set" privately in addition to concert percussion

Orchestral Instrument:

Yes