

Music program hits all the right notes

By Star-Tribune, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.18.14

Word Count **421**

Level **530L**



Members from the Youth and Children Orchestras National System of Venezuela wait to perform in Caracas, Venezuela, in November 2011. The national network of orchestras, known simply as "El Sistema" or "The System," provides free musical instruments and lessons to the 250,000 children enrolled in its program. AP Photo/Ariana Cubillos

MINNEAPOLIS — Tremell Caldwell tapped his feet on the floor. The 7-year-old made funny faces. He wiggled the cello between his knees. A cello is a string instrument. It looks like a really large violin.

But then his teacher said "Bows ready!" Tremell stopped fooling around. He raised his bow, which is used to play the cello.

"This is my precious instrument," Tremell said. He likes the cello "because it's big and has the longest strings."

Caldwell is one of 18 kids in El Sistema Minnesota. El Sistema is an after-school music program. It teaches children in poor neighborhoods how to play instruments like the violin and cello. But the program not only teaches music. It teaches them to get along with others and how to study.

The children are all in first and second grade. After just one year in the program, they are kinder and more creative. They are faster readers, too.

The Classes Have Grown Around The World

El Sistema began about 40 years ago in Venezuela. Its purpose was to teach kids music. But it also changed the lives of some of Venezuela's poorest children.

“Poverty is not necessarily the lack of bread or roof,” said Jose Antonio Abreu. Abreu, a musician, started the program. It's "the feeling of being nobody.”

The idea has spread around the world. In the United States, more than 50 El Sistema programs recently began.

“Adagio means what?” asked music teacher Patricia Morgan-Brist. She was speaking about how fast to play the music.

“Slow motion!” her young students replied all together. Then they moved on to andante — “Walking speed!” — and allegro. Allegro means quickly in Italian.

“We never allegro in the hallways, right?” said Morgan-Brist. She started the music program with her good friend, violin teacher Kelly Carter.

Students begin the music program in first grade. They attend lessons four days a week. Each child gets an instrument and music lessons. They also get help with homework.

Everyone Is Proud Of Their Hard Work

To raise money for the program, the students gave a concert. The young students played the few notes they knew. Then they watched the older students.

Back in the music room, Tremell asked, “Can I go outside now?”

Morgan-Brist said yes. But she first asked him to read aloud from a note. It was written by a supporter of the program.

“I am proud of you,” he read slowly. “Your talent amazes me.”

Tremell gave a big smile. Then he ran for the door.

Quiz

- 1 How many students does El Sistema Minnesota teach?
 - (A) 7
 - (B) 18
 - (C) 40
 - (D) 50

- 2 Who among the following teaches violin to kids?
 - (A) Morgan-Brist
 - (B) Kelly Carter
 - (C) Antonio Abreu
 - (D) Tremell Caldwell

- 3 How is money raised for the El Sistema program?
 - (A) by organizing concerts
 - (B) by asking for donations
 - (C) by teaching private classes
 - (D) by giving Italian classes to students

- 4 Select the paragraph from "The Classes Have Grown Around The World" that shows when and where El Sistema started.