



*Literacy and Intervention*

## SAMPLE LESSON

# Claims to Fame<sup>®</sup>

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**Short Biographies Develop Comprehension and Writing Skills**

Grades 2–5



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## Book 1

What musical instruments would you enjoy playing?

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Photo by J. Henry Fair

## Yo-Yo Ma

1955–

Many people think that Yo-Yo Ma is the *greatest* living **cellist**. But Yo-Yo, who is known for his cheerfulness and great sense of humor, describes himself as “just a performing musician.” His success, he says, is due to the wonderful music that the **composers** wrote.

Yo-Yo was born in Paris, France, in 1955, the youngest of two children. His father was a violinist and music teacher, who had come from China, and his mother was a singer from Hong Kong. At first, both Yo-Yo and his older sister played the violin. But when he was four years old, he wanted “something different,” so he *switched* to playing the **cello** and piano. Since the cello was bigger than he was, Yo-Yo had to sit on a stack of telephone books to play it.

His father taught him only small parts of the music at one time. This way his son could learn it. Yo-Yo says it was not hard work. He practiced only five to ten minutes a day, but during that time he had to pay close attention.

When Yo-Yo was five years old, he gave his first concert, playing both the cello and the piano. A year later his family moved to New York City, where his father taught music. When one of his student’s fathers, a great violinist, heard Yo-Yo playing the cello, he was so impressed that he arranged for him to study with a famous and excellent music teacher, Leonard Rose.

In the beginning, Yo-Yo was so shy that he tried to hide behind the cello; he only spoke to his teacher in a whisper. But by the time he was seven, Yo-Yo played on a TV program shown throughout the country.

Yo-Yo finished high school when he was just fifteen years old. Then he went to a famous music school, but left to go to a regular college. Yo-Yo says, “I really wanted to go to college. Since I started very young, I was always in music. And I was interested in learning about all sorts of other things.”

Besides taking many kinds of classes, he also gave musical performances once a month. He performed all over the world. Yo-Yo says that he could do both because he did not feel that he had to get high grades or practice for many hours every day. He

worked when he needed to. This way he could do many different things. After he finished college, Yo-Yo spent most of his time traveling the world, giving concerts.

In 1977 he married Jill Horner. They have two children. Both his children and his wife play the piano. Yo-Yo is trying to get more people interested in good music; he has even appeared on “Sesame Street.” He tries to make every concert he plays special. Yo-Yo hopes that after hearing him play, “people will want to come to concerts.”

...**HELPFUL VOCABULARY**...

**cellist:** a person who plays the cello

**composer:** a person who writes something, especially a musical work

**cello:** a four-stringed musical instrument that is like a violin, but is larger in size and lower in tone

## THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE READ

1. How old was Yo-Yo when he started playing the cello?

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2. Who was Yo-Yo's first music teacher?

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3. How did Yo-Yo's father teach the cello?

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4. When Yo-Yo was a child, what was he like?

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5. What does Yo-Yo think is the reason for his success?

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6. Now what is Yo-Yo trying to do in music?

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## WORKING WITH WORDS

What three new words did you learn in the story?

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Try to use two of them in sentences.

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Yo-Yo Ma plays the cello and the piano. What are some other instruments people play?

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List as many adjectives (describing words) as you can that might describe Yo-Yo. Try to think of at least three.

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What does *greatest* mean?

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Try to use *greatest* in a sentence.

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What does *switched* mean?

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Try to use *switched* in a sentence.

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## WRITING SKILLS

Write about the instrument you play or would like to play.

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When Yo-Yo Ma was a child, he was very shy. Write and tell what you are like now. Try to write at least three sentences.

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