

With 15 kids, Chicago's musical Kelly family is an orchestra all its own

By Chicago Tribune, adapted by Newsela staff

CHICAGO, Ill. — The family of young musicians took the train to downtown Chicago, lugging their instruments on their backs.

They set up their small orchestra at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Randolph Street. And for two hours on a warm weekday evening, the delicate music they played softly flowed in the bustle of rush-hour traffic.

Surprising Sight, Cool Sounds

Passers-by stopped to listen or to snap a picture. Many were surprised by the unfamiliar sight of a group of young African-Americans playing a harp, a cello and four violins.

A bus driver, stopped at a red light, opened his door and leaned from his seat so he could better hear. A street beggar took a dollar bill from his stash and dropped it in an open violin case lined with cash. Occasionally, the musicians broke their intense concentration to offer a courteous smile to the onlookers.

Playing music for donations one or two days a week was their summer job.

By the time they boarded the train back home, the group had collected \$240, which would come in handy for the family of 17.

"Music Is Our Sanity"

With the oldest six children grown and out of the house, 11 people cram into the three-bedroom, one-and-a-half bath apartment that the family owns.

Inside the Kellys' home, music fills the small rooms, drowning out the noise from their inner city neighborhood.

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“Music is our sanity in the madness,” said La Shone Kelly, who is the mother of the family. “When we make music, everything is OK.”

The father of the family, Jonathan Kelly, grew up in the building, where he learned to play the violin. It was his idea to introduce music to his children, he said, so that they could experience the joy and discipline it can bring.

“I know that music is best learned at an early age,” Jonathan Kelly said. “Then it becomes something you can do your whole life. When we get together and sing and play, we do it for ourselves. If others enjoy it, that’s a good thing.”

Personal Instruments

The children said they were given instruments based on their personality.

“I enjoy playing sad songs. I chose the cello because it’s deep,” said La Shone.

For Joseph, the harp was a natural fit.

“The first time I played the harp, the teacher told me to close my eyes and play whatever I felt. I just started doing it,” he said. “It sounded magical to me.”

La Shone Kelly admits that she was worried when her husband suggested the children start taking music lessons in 2009. That was a tough year financially, because her husband was suddenly without a job, and the family’s income was at its lowest.

They spend about \$1,300 each month on music lessons and renting instruments. Some of the adult siblings, including a son in the Navy, help out, but the family has had to give up a lot.

Tremendous Financial Sacrifice

The house is in need of repairs, and the walls could use a fresh coat of paint. They shop for clothes at thrift stores, and they used to have a 15-passenger van, but now they take two cars.

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La Shone Kelly said the family has made a tremendous financial sacrifice to enable their children to learn the instruments. “The children understand that if we’re going to shell out that kind of money, they have to take it seriously. They have to practice.”

On the second floor of the Garfield Park Fieldhouse, in a West Side neighborhood full of crime and poverty, children as young as 3 years old are learning the art of the violin. The program is Chicago West Community Music Center, and the Kellys are also enrolled.

During the school year, 50 young people from the neighborhood get an introduction to music they might otherwise never hear. They get to play music from the classical composers Bach, Vivaldi and Strauss, but also Motown, jazz and blues.

Kids "Have A Gift"

On Saturdays, professional instructors come from across the city to teach violin, viola, cello, guitar and harp. The lessons only cost \$100 a month, but the majority of the students, including the Kellys, receive scholarships to cover some costs. The only requirement is that the parents must be present.

For La Shone and Jonathan Kelly, that means a full-day commitment. But they say it has been worth it, because their children have developed a love for music.

Darlene Sandifer, who began the program with her husband, Howard Sandifer, said that music changes the heart and mind, and helps people find calm. “I am convinced that if our children had access to these kinds of opportunities, they wouldn’t be running around with guns trying to kill each other,” she said. “These kids on the streets have a gift. They just need someone to channel them in the right direction.”

"See The Possibilities"

Over the summer, the older students held several performances at public parks, but they drew the biggest crowd at the final performance on the last day of camp. La Shone

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showed off her singing voice, and her backup band included two siblings on the violin, and a third on the bass guitar.

As Jonathan and La Shone Kelly cheered their children on, they said that their sacrifice was worth it.

“We just want them to see the possibilities,” their father said.

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1. Select the paragraph from the section "Tremendous Financial Sacrifice" that states a central idea of the article.
2. Which of the following answer choices is NOT a thorough summary of the article?
 - A) The Kelly family is involved in music despite having to make personal sacrifices to afford instruments and lessons. The Kelly parents want their children to enjoy music and learn discipline from it.
 - B) The children of the Kelly family spend much of their free time practicing and performing music. They make sacrifices to keep playing, and everybody helps out to engage in this opportunity.
 - C) Jonathan and La Shone Kelly value their children's musical experiences despite struggling financially. The children are involved in several programs available in Chicago for music and the arts.
 - D) Programs are available for young people in Chicago to study music and the arts, and provide scholarships and financial assistance to families. The Kellys receive assistance to enroll their children in these programs.
3. Which statement MOST LIKELY describes how Darlene Sandifer, co-founder of the Chicago West Community Music Center, feels about music programs for young people?
 - A) Music schools provide valuable skills for young people, both musically and mentally, that could develop into potential careers.
 - B) Children can learn to enjoy many kinds of music through arts programs, as well as learn how to be disciplined in pursuing their interests.
 - C) Music programs provide a place for young people to find and pursue their talents, giving them a way to express themselves without violence.
 - D) Music schools should only be available for serious, disciplined children who want to learn new skills, and funding should be saved for the most talented students.
4. According to information in the article, which of the following is NOT one of the benefits that can come from playing music?

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- A) learning self-control
- B) finding a high-paying job
- C) finding peace when life gets crazy
- D) exposure to new types of music

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Answer Key: With 15 kids, Chicago's musical Kelly family is an orchestra all its own

1. La Shone Kelly said the family has made a tremendous financial sacrifice to enable their children to learn the instruments. "The children understand that if we're going to shell out that kind of money, they have to take it seriously. They have to practice."
2. D
3. C
4. B

- 1 Skim read the article and comments from an online magazine. Choose the best word to complete the title of the article.


Psychology of Art magazine






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Why do people *make* / *buy* / *like* art?

People often ask “what is art,” but to psychologists, this is not the most important question. What they are exploring is a more fundamental problem facing the psychologists of art: why does art exist at all?

What motivation can we identify that makes human beings create performances and works of art, and what makes people all over the world so eager to “receive” art? The first answer to these questions came from the ancient Greeks, who claimed that art exists universally because it gives pleasure. Humans enjoy creating and seeing the results of the creative process.

A different answer connects the desire to create art to a more general human desire, namely the desire to act on all the potential abilities of our minds and bodies as fully as possible. Humans have the ability to discover, to enjoy, to think, and to construct, and perhaps just having the ability to do these things is what actually causes us to want to do them. In their specific field, artists feel compelled to explore the entire range of human experiences and to describe and represent them. Creativity-wise, this answer suggests that pleasure is not actually the reason for making art, it is merely a (fortunate) result; artists cannot stop creating, whether they are enthusiasts for the artistic process or not.

Of course, most artists do enjoy the process. Psychologists have found that one of the most attractive motives of artistic creation is that of inventing an ideal state of being. The artists use their imagination, with different degrees of realism, to explore their idea of perfection. However, there is a danger that the motivation to please oneself will lead the artist to use cheap effects to produce their vision; indulging this motivation can reduce the artistic value of the piece. It can lessen the impact of the art, especially if the world the artist produces is unnaturally perfect. From an outward view the art is visually pleasing, but from an inward perspective, the observer may find it difficult to believe in it.

All of the above relates to the motivation of the individual artist, but social art psychologists view motivation from a different perspective: the position and function of art in society. In early societies, performers and art makers were so closely integrated in the community that their motivational objectives coincided with those of the group. Performances of dances and other ceremonies were shared by all for a common purpose, often sacred, and craft work was done by everybody, not only by high-profile artists. Even when the arts became specialities with a narrower scope, there was no noticeable distinction between the objectives of the artists and those of the community in early societies. Only in ages of individualism, such as that of the Renaissance in the Western world, did artists stop being directed by society and start developing their own artistic values. The social perspective, above all, demonstrates how literature and painting tend to mirror the social conditions of the time; they vary from period to period, illustrating artistically the differences between different political realities.

—Adapted from *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 1st ed., by Michael Kelly

Comments

Comment 1 Come on! I read the article, but I must confess I found it a bit weird. I mean, who really cares why artists make art? There are super-cool cave paintings made 15,000 years ago—it’s just what humans do! But I get it about social art. Artists are controlled by the time they live in—that’s why art is so terribly boring when society is boring and so absolutely fantastic when something is going on, like in the 1960s.

Comment 2 The Greeks right, as always! Artists paint and write and make sculptures for enjoyment, period! We don’t have to look for deep meaningful motivation—it’s really simple. I mean, what’s nicer than taking a blank piece of paper and turning it into a picture or a story (I’m a paper person...give me paper over a screen any day...).

2 Read the article and number the main ideas in order. Two of them are not needed.

- ___ Creativity is a natural human instinct
- ___ Aiming to please only themselves can cause problems for artists
- ___ Younger artists are more creative than older ones
- ___ Art was created for and shared with others more in the past
- ___ Artists aim to represent their view of what is perfect
- ___ Art is created because people enjoy making art
- ___ Artists are driven to create
- ___ Artists will be more supported in the future
- ___ Artists started working for themselves rather than society

3 Read the article again. Choose *True*, *False*, or *Not Given*.

	True	False	Not Given
1 The concept of motivation has little connection with the arts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 The ancient Greeks believed artists were happier than non-artists.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Humans naturally wish to explore their whole range of capabilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Enjoyment of the act of creation is a recent theory of why people produce art.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Psychologists have only recently begun investigating art and creativity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 The writer suggests it is not important how the artist produces their vision.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Artists used to produce for collective objectives rather than have their own goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 The aims of artistic creation have changed over time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

READING SKILL: Recognizing and understanding register and style ▶1.1

4 Identify the informal section of the text.

- ___ Paragraph 1
- ___ Paragraph 2
- ___ Paragraph 3
- ___ Paragraph 4
- ___ Comments

5 Review the informal section and find at least two examples of the following features of informal text.

- Informal word choice _____
- Incomplete sentences _____
- Exclamation marks/dashes _____
- Extreme adjectives and adverbs _____

- 6** Analyze the style register and style of the two sentences below. Choose the most suitable ending for the article.
- a For art audiences, looking for clues as to the motivation of the artist while engaged with a piece of art may provide a whole new perspective.
 - b So, next time you are engaged with a piece of art, why not look for clues as to the motivation of the artist? It might provide you with a whole new perspective on it.