The string family is the largest section of the orchestra. The four main stringed instruments look similar but are all different sizes. Each can be played by plucking the strings with the fingers or with a bow, which is pulled back and forth across the instrument’s four strings.

The VIOLIN is the smallest of the string instruments and can play the highest notes. Maybe this is why the violins are sometimes known as show offs! The violins often play the melody – this is the tune you will be humming after you leave a performance.

The VIOLA is slightly larger than the violin. Because it is bigger, it can play lower notes. Since the viola is only a little bit bigger than the violin it can be hard to tell them apart. Sometimes this makes the violists feel left out, but they get to play many beautiful melodies just like the violins.
The CELLO is much larger than the violins and the violas. It is so large that the cellist must sit on a chair holding the cello between his or her knees in order to play. The cellos often play accompaniment parts.

Because it is the largest of the stringed instruments, the DOUBLE BASS plays the lowest notes. This instrument is so large that the bass players have to stand up or sit on tall stools to play it. The basses often play accompaniment parts with the cellos.
Woodwinds

Woodwind instruments produce sound when players blow air into them. All of these instruments were originally made out of wood, which is why they are called woodwinds!

The **Flute** is made of metals such as silver, gold or platinum. The player produces musical notes by blowing air into a hole in the side of the instrument. Flutists change notes by pressing down round, metal buttons called keys. Flutes have a very high, light and beautiful sound which is probably why they often get to represent birds.

The **Oboe** makes its sound when the player blows air through a mouthpiece containing cut pieces of reed made of bamboo. In the case of the oboe, the player ties two strips of reed together to make a “double reed”. The oboe has a very clear, penetrating sound. It is a very important instrument, as the oboist is the player who tunes the whole orchestra before every concert.
The Clarinet looks much like the oboe, but is a little bit fatter. The clarinetist makes a sound by blowing through a single reed attached to a mouthpiece. Clarinets can play very high and very low, very soft or very loud. They are used for many types of music, including classical, jazz and folk.

The Bassoon is the largest of the main woodwind instruments. It looks like 3 wooden poles attached together. In fact, the Italian word for bassoon means “bundle of sticks.” The bassoon has the lowest sound of the woodwind instruments.
BRASS

The brass instruments are long brass tubes curled and bent into different shapes. They flare out at one end into what is called a bell. At the other end of the instrument is the mouthpiece. The sound of the brass instruments is produced by the vibration of the player’s lips as they blow through the mouthpiece. To change notes, brass instruments either have buttons, called valves, or a slide.

The French Horn is very long tube that is twisted and curled into an instrument about 1 foot wide. If you untwisted the tube, it would be 12 feet long! French Horns can have a very mellow sound, but they are also often used for hunting calls.

The Trumpet is the smallest brass instrument. It can play the highest notes of all the brass instruments. Trumpets often play in marches or fanfares.
The Trombone is the only brass instrument that does not use valves. Instead, the player moves a curved tube called a slide back and forth in order to change notes.

The Tuba is the largest and lowest sounding instrument in the brass section. If you uncoiled the tuba it would be 35 feet long!
Percussion

Percussion instruments make sound when players strike, shake or scrape them. This section contains many different instruments.

One of the most commonly used percussion instruments is the Tympani. Tympani are drums that look like huge copper bowls with a special covering stretched over the top. The tympani are played by striking the covering with padded sticks called mallets. Tympani are one of the only percussion instruments that produce a definite pitch. They come in many different sizes.

Other common percussion instruments are the Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Triangle and Cymbals. The Snare Drum, Bass Drum, and Triangle all make sounds when they are struck by a mallet or stick. Cymbals make sounds when they are clashed together.