



# Yo-Yo Ma, Cellist

## Part 1

**Teacher Reads** Yo-Yo Ma has often been described as a child prodigy—someone who shows remarkable ability and skill at a young age. Born in Paris, France, to Chinese parents, Ma’s brilliant musical talent for the cello emerged when he was only four years old. Yo-Yo Ma has played thousands of concerts around the world and is considered to be one of the greatest cellists and musicians of our time.

Yo-Yo Ma was born into a musical family. His mother was a  
13 trained opera singer. His father was a music teacher, **orchestra**  
23 director, and composer. His older sister was an excellent  
32 violin and piano player at a very young age. Thus, Yo-Yo was  
45 surrounded by music from birth, whether it was his father or  
56 sister practicing or records playing in their home.

64 Yo-Yo’s first teacher was his father, an excellent but strict  
75 and demanding teacher. At two and a half years old, Yo-Yo  
87 began learning to play the violin. At three he was introduced to  
99 the piano. However, Yo-Yo wanted an instrument that was bigger  
110 than the violin. At four he got his wish, a **cello**.

121 From the beginning, Yo-Yo’s father selected difficult **pieces**  
130 of music for Yo-Yo to learn. His father explained that when  
142 something is hard, put it into parts and work on each part, one  
155 at a time. So, something that seems big can be mastered by  
167 working on each part. That helped Yo-Yo master challenging  
177 compositions that he would later play during his career.



## Part 2

**Teacher Reads** When Yo-Yo was seven years old, his family left France and moved to New York City. In New York, he continued to study the cello and performed with orchestras in large concert halls.

186        After they came to New York, Yo-Yo and his sister were  
198 asked to perform in a special concert. Yo-Yo played the  
209 cello, and his sister played the violin. Many famous people  
219 attended the concert, including two U.S. presidents. The  
227 concert was also broadcast on television. People were  
235 impressed with Yo-Yo’s high level of skill and the rich tones  
247 he produced.

249        Meanwhile, Yo-Yo kept going to school and taking music  
259 lessons. He performed in concerts and played with some  
268 of the best music performers and teachers. At age nine, he  
279 made his first **appearance** at **Carnegie Hall**. By his tenth  
289 birthday, he was an outstanding cello player.

## Part 3

**Teacher Reads** Ma has been performing for a long time, and he has won many awards and honors, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama and many Grammys for his albums.

296        Ma has been playing the cello for more than six decades  
307 (60 years)! But he still hopes to get better as a performer. So  
320 far, he has made more than 100 albums. He also made many  
332 appearances on children’s television shows including *Mister*  
339 *Rogers*, *Sesame Street*, and *Arthur* to introduce children to  
348 the cello and classical music.

353        But that’s not all. Ma started the *Silk Road Project*, which  
364 links artists from across the globe. The project helps them  
374 make music together. Ma thinks music is a way to bring  
385 understanding and healing to people from different parts of  
394 the globe. His desire to bring people together matches the  
404 meaning of his name, as *Yo* means “friendly” in Chinese.  
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