

*Ravel needs a different emphasis from Handel, Telemann, and Beethoven. For Cambridge 9483 Section B, the required Ravel work is the song cycle **Histoires naturelles**, M.50, specifically the five songs Le paon, Le grillon, Le cygne, Le martin-pêcheur, and La pintade. It belongs to the “Natural World” theme, alongside Beethoven and Takemitsu.*

*And Part XI will permanently use “**Perform & Explore It — demonstrate the composer’s musical language on your preferred instrument or voice.**”*

Composer & Musical World — Teacher Answer Key

Maurice Ravel

Parts I–XVII

Course: Cambridge International AS & A Level Music 9483

Composer: Maurice Ravel

Dates: 1875–1937

Period: Late Romantic / Impressionist-associated / Early Modernist

Cambridge area: Paper 1, Section B — Understanding Music

2027–28 theme: The Natural World

Set work: *Histoires naturelles*, M.50

PART I — COMPOSER IDENTITY

Full Name

Joseph Maurice Ravel

Born

7 March 1875

Died

28 December 1937

Age at death: 62

Place of Birth

Ciboure, near Saint-Jean-de-Luz, southwestern France.

Place of Death

Paris, France

Nationality / Cultural Identity

French, with important **Basque heritage through his mother**.

His father, **Pierre-Joseph Ravel**, was Swiss-born and worked as an engineer and inventor.

His mother, **Marie Delouart**, came from a Basque background.

Why this matters

Ravel's cultural identity was not simply "Parisian French."

Basque and Spanish cultural influences recur throughout his musical imagination.

Students will encounter Spanish-associated works including:

Rapsodie espagnole

Boléro

L'heure espagnole

Alborada del gracioso

Primary Musical Period / Style

- ☐ Medieval
- ☐ Renaissance
- ☐ Baroque
- ☐ Classical
- ☒ **Late Romantic / turn-of-the-century**
- ☒ **Impressionist-associated**

- ☒ **Early Modernist**
- ☐ Atonal as primary style
- ☐ Serialist
- ☐ Contemporary

Important teacher clarification

“Impressionist” is useful but **not sufficient**.

Ravel and Debussy are frequently grouped under Impressionism, but Ravel's music often demonstrates exceptionally precise construction, clearly shaped forms and meticulous orchestration.

A stronger student answer:

Ravel was a French composer associated with Impressionism and early twentieth-century modernism whose music combines refined orchestration, harmonic colour, precise craftsmanship, formal clarity and influences including French, Spanish/Basque, jazz and earlier musical traditions.

Primary Genres / Styles

Ravel wrote:

orchestral music

piano music

ballet

opera

chamber music

songs / mélodies

concertos

He produced a relatively modest quantity of music compared with composers such as Telemann.

But his output is extraordinarily polished.

Teacher concept

Telemann → enormous output

Ravel → comparatively small, meticulously crafted output

Primary Instrument

Piano

Ravel studied piano extensively.

However, his historical importance extends far beyond piano writing.

He became one of music history's most celebrated:

ORCHESTRATORS

His orchestral version of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* is one of the most famous examples of orchestration.

Major Occupations

- ☒ **Composer**
 - ☒ **Pianist**
 - ☒ **Orchestrator**
 - ☐ Primarily conductor
 - ☐ Primarily teacher
 - ☐ Church musician
 - ☐ Court musician
-

PART II — FAMILY & EARLY INFLUENCES

Father

Pierre-Joseph Ravel

Engineer and inventor.

Why this is interesting

Ravel's father had a strong interest in:

machines

engineering

technology

precision

This provides an interesting contextual connection with Ravel's later fascination with mechanical precision and repeating musical processes.

Do not claim that his father's engineering *caused* Ravel's compositional style, but it is a useful biographical connection.

Mother

Marie Delouart

Of Basque heritage.

Ravel was particularly close to her.

She transmitted aspects of **Basque/Spanish cultural identity** to him.

Economic / Social Background

Ravel grew up in a relatively comfortable, cultured household.

The family moved to **Paris** while he was still an infant.

Therefore, although born near the Spanish border, Ravel essentially grew up within the cultural environment of Paris.

How Was He Introduced to Music?

Ravel began piano lessons as a child.

His family encouraged his artistic development.

Unlike the childhood narratives surrounding Beethoven or Handel, Ravel did not have to fight parental opposition to become a musician.

First / Primary Instrument

Piano

Important Teachers

Charles de Bériot

Piano teacher.

Émile Pessard

Harmony.

André Gedalge

Counterpoint and fugue.

Gabriel Fauré

Composition.

Most important name to remember

GABRIEL FAURÉ

Fauré was enormously important to Ravel's development.

Formal Musical Education

Paris Conservatoire

Ravel entered the Conservatoire de Paris in **1889**.

His relationship with the institution became complicated.

He studied there over an extended period but repeatedly failed to win the prestigious:

Prix de Rome

This eventually led to a major public controversy.

The Ravel Affair

“L’Affaire Ravel” — 1905

Ravel was eliminated from the Prix de Rome competition despite already being an established young composer.

The controversy contributed to criticism of the Conservatoire's institutional conservatism.

Teacher connection

This gives us a recurring history theme:

Who decides what counts as “good” or “acceptable” art?

Ravel was developing musical ideas that did not always fit conservative academic expectations.

Non-Musical Interests

Ravel was interested in:

literature

poetry

visual art

fashion

miniatures

mechanical objects

collecting

theatre

These interests become highly relevant to the Five Arts section.

Early Musical Influences

1. Gabriel Fauré

Refined harmony, French musical tradition and composition.

2. Emmanuel Chabrier

Colour, wit and Spanish influence.

3. Claude Debussy

Harmonic and timbral experimentation, although Ravel developed a distinct musical personality.

4. Russian composers

Especially orchestration and musical colour.

5. Spanish / Basque music

Rhythm, dance and colour.

6. Earlier French traditions

Including eighteenth-century French music.

7. Literature and poetry

Extremely important to his songs and dramatic works.

PART III — RAVEL'S LIFE IN THREE ACTS

ACT I — EARLY LIFE

approximately 1875–1905

CIBOURE → PARIS → CONSERVATOIRE

Ravel develops as:

pianist → composition student → emerging composer

His early works already show increasing individuality.

Representative Early Work

Jeux d'eau

1901

Piano work.

The title means roughly:

“Play of Water” / “Fountains.”

What should students hear?

fluid figuration

extended harmony

colourful registers

rapid arpeggiation

brilliant piano sonority

Cambridge connection

Water becomes a fascinating comparison later:

Ravel — *Jeux d'eau*

versus

Beethoven — “Scene by the Brook”

Two composers can represent or evoke water using completely different musical languages.

ACT II — MIDDLE / MATURE PERIOD

approximately 1905–1918

Ravel produces many of his most important works.

Examples:

Miroirs

Histoires naturelles

Rapsodie espagnole

Gaspard de la nuit

Ma mère l'Oye

Cambridge Set Work

Histoires naturelles, M.50

1906

This becomes our central Ravel work.

Texts are by:

Jules Renard

The five songs portray animals:

I. *Le paon*

The Peacock

II. *Le grillon*

The Cricket

III. *Le cygne*

The Swan

IV. *Le martin-pêcheur*

The Kingfisher

V. *La pintade*

The Guinea Fowl

Already students should see an enormous contrast with Beethoven.

Beethoven

Nature experienced by a human observer across an entire symphonic landscape.

Ravel

Individual animals portrayed through:

text + character + musical gesture + harmony + piano colour + vocal declamation

This comparison will become very useful for Section B.

First Performance

The cycle was premiered in **1907**.

The work caused controversy partly because of Ravel's approach to setting the French language.

He allowed the vocal writing to reflect **natural spoken French**, including unconventional treatment of normally silent final es.

Why this matters

Ravel is asking:

How does a person actually speak this language?

rather than:

How does academic tradition say a French art song should sound?

Daphnis et Chloé

1909–1912

Ballet written for the **Ballets Russes**.

This is one of Ravel's greatest orchestral achievements.

Five-Arts connection

MUSIC + DANCE + DRAMA + VISUAL DESIGN + STORY

Exactly the type of interdisciplinary connection this T5AA dossier is designed to reveal.

World War I

Ravel wanted to serve France.

He eventually worked as a **truck driver** in the French army.

The war and the death of his mother affected him deeply.

Le Tombeau de Couperin

Composed around the war years.

Each movement is dedicated to a friend who died in World War I.

Important teaching point

The music does not simply “sound like grief.”

Ravel uses elegant forms connected with earlier French traditions.

Again:

subject matter ≠ obvious musical stereotype

ACT III — LATE LIFE

approximately 1919–1937

Ravel's international reputation grows substantially.

Jazz Influence

Ravel encountered jazz and African-American musicians and musical styles, particularly during the 1920s.

Jazz influences become especially audible in works including:

Piano Concerto in G major

and

Violin Sonata No. 2

Students can listen for:

blue-note inflections

syncopation

jazz-associated harmony

rhythmic vitality

Boléro

1928

Perhaps Ravel's most famous composition.

Basic concept

One persistent rhythm.

One principal melodic idea repeated.

Changing orchestration.

Long crescendo.

Why is it important?

It is essentially an enormous experiment in:

ORCHESTRATION + TIMBRE + REPETITION + CRESCENDO

The underlying material changes remarkably little.

What changes most is **who plays it and how it sounds**.

Piano Concerto in G

1929–1931

Combines:

Classical clarity

jazz influence

virtuosity

orchestral colour

Piano Concerto for the Left Hand

Written for:

Paul Wittgenstein

a pianist who lost his right arm during World War I.

Important educational connection

Ravel demonstrates that instrumentation and physical limitation can become sources of creative invention.

Final Illness

During the 1930s, Ravel developed a progressive neurological condition that increasingly affected:

speech

writing

coordination

and eventually his ability to compose.

Evidence suggests that his musical imagination may have remained active even when he could no longer reliably express musical ideas through writing or performance.

Teacher caution

His exact neurological diagnosis remains uncertain.

Do not confidently diagnose him with a particular modern condition.

Death

Ravel underwent brain surgery in December 1937.

He died:

28 December 1937

in Paris.

PART IV — THE WORLD AROUND RAVEL

Area	What was happening?
Politics	French Third Republic; nationalism; imperialism; changing European power structures
Wars	Franco-Prussian aftermath; World War I; rising European tensions before World War II

Society	Rapid urbanisation, modern Paris, changing class structures, cafés, nightlife and expanding mass culture
Science	Einstein, relativity, radioactivity, psychology and major changes in scientific thought
Technology	Automobiles, telephones, recorded sound, radio, cinema and aviation
Philosophy	Modernism challenged nineteenth-century assumptions about art, perception and society
Literature	Symbolism and modernism; writers including Mallarmé and Proust
Visual Arts	Impressionism → Post-Impressionism → Fauvism → Cubism → abstraction
Dance/Theatre	Ballets Russes revolutionised ballet and interdisciplinary theatrical production
Music	Tonality expanded; new scales, harmonies, rhythms and timbres emerged; jazz increasingly influenced European musicians

Teacher concept

Ravel lived through an extraordinary transition:

HORSE-DRAWN WORLD → AUTOMOBILE → AIRCRAFT → RADIO → RECORDED MUSIC → CINEMA

That rapidly changing world is an excellent backdrop for his fascination with both **tradition and modernity**.

PART V — THE FIVE ARTS CONNECTION

MUSIC

Important contemporaries:

Claude Debussy
Gabriel Fauré
Igor Stravinsky
Erik Satie
Manuel de Falla

Additional context:

Richard Strauss

Arnold Schoenberg

George Gershwin



VISUAL ARTS

Important artists/movements:

Claude Monet

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

Henri Matisse

Pablo Picasso

Impressionism

Post-Impressionism

Fauvism

Cubism

Connection

Ravel's concern with:

colour

light

surface

detail

perspective

can provide useful cross-arts comparisons.

Again, teach these as **analogies**, not simplistic direct equivalences.



LITERARY ARTS

Important figures:

Jules Renard

Stéphane Mallarmé

Paul Verlaine

Tristan Klingsor

Ravel repeatedly set poetry and literary texts.

Most important for Cambridge:

Jules Renard → *Histoires naturelles*

The words are therefore not secondary material.

Students need to understand:

TEXT → CHARACTER → MUSICAL DECISION



THEATRE / DRAMA

Important Ravel works include:

L'heure espagnole

L'enfant et les sortilèges

and the ballet:

Daphnis et Chloé

Ravel had a strong theatrical imagination.

DANCE

Dance is everywhere in Ravel.

Important examples:

waltz

minuet

forlane

rigaudon

Spanish dance

bolero

He often reimagines older dances using twentieth-century harmony and orchestration.

PART VI — RAVEL'S MUSICAL DNA

Melody

- ☒ Lyrical
- ☒ Modal
- ☒ Diatonic
- ☒ Chromatic
- ☒ Motivic
- ☒ Ornamented
- ☒ Sometimes fragmented

Teacher answer

Ravel's melodies may be lyrical and memorable but frequently interact with modal, chromatic or unusual harmonic backgrounds.

Harmony & Tonality

- ☒ Major/minor tonality
- ☒ Modal writing
- ☒ Chromaticism
- ☒ Extended tonality
- ☒ Added-note chords
- ☒ Seventh and ninth chords
- ☒ Parallel chord movement
- ☒ Pedal points
- ☒ Whole-tone colours
- ☒ Pentatonic colours

- ☐ Primarily atonal
- ☐ Twelve-tone
- ☐ Serial

Critical distinction

Ravel often stretches tonality dramatically without abandoning tonal centres entirely.

Rhythm & Metre

- ☒ Regular
 - ☒ Irregular
 - ☒ Syncopated
 - ☒ Ostinato
 - ☒ Dance-derived
 - ☒ Repeated rhythmic patterns
 - ☒ Flexible vocal declamation
-

Texture

- ☒ Homophonic
- ☒ Contrapuntal
- ☒ Layered
- ☒ Melody + accompaniment
- ☒ Sparse
- ☒ Extremely dense

Teacher point

Ravel's textures are often extraordinarily carefully balanced.

Every note may contribute to **colour**.

Form / Structure

Ravel uses both traditional and innovative forms:

binary

ternary

variation

dance forms

sonata-related structures

through-composed song

cyclic relationships

He often combines **formal clarity with modern harmony**.

Instrumentation / Orchestration

This is essential.

Characteristic features include:

instrumental solos

extreme registers

unusual combinations

doubling for colour

harp

percussion

woodwind colour

muted strings/brass

harmonics

carefully layered textures

Timbre / Sound World

Model answer

Ravel's characteristic sound combines precision with extraordinary colour. He uses extended tonal harmony, carefully controlled textures, distinctive instrumental timbres, rhythmic clarity and meticulous orchestration to create music that can sound luminous, delicate, mechanical, exotic, humorous or intensely dramatic.

PART VII — HOW DO I RECOGNIZE RAVEL?

Clue 1

Highly refined orchestral or instrumental colour

Clue 2

Extended but usually still perceptible tonality

Clue 3

Modal, whole-tone or pentatonic colour

Clue 4

Very precise texture and articulation

Clue 5

Repeated patterns or ostinati combined with changing colour

Musical Fingerprint

I think this could be Ravel because I hear extended tonal harmony, unusual scale colours, carefully controlled texture and highly refined use of timbre and instrumental register.

PART VIII — TOP 10 WORKS

#	Composition	Date	Genre	Why Important
1	<i>Histoires naturelles</i> , M.50	1906	Song cycle	Cambridge set work
2	<i>Boléro</i>	1928	Orchestral/ball et	Orchestration, ostinato, crescendo
3	<i>Daphnis et Chloé</i>	1909–1 2	Ballet	Major orchestral achievement
4	<i>Gaspard de la nuit</i>	1908	Piano	Virtuosity, colour and literature
5	<i>Miroirs</i>	1904–0 5	Piano cycle	Colour and musical imagery
6	<i>Rapsodie espagnole</i>	1907–0 8	Orchestral	Spanish influence
7	<i>Ma mère l'Oye</i>	1908–1 0	Piano/orchestr al	Fairy-tale imagery
8	<i>La valse</i>	1919–2 0	Orchestral poem	Transformation/destruction of the waltz
9	Piano Concerto in G	1929–3 1	Concerto	Jazz + Classical clarity
1 0	String Quartet in F	1902–0 3	Chamber music	Early mature style

PART IX — MASTER COMPOSITION ANALYSIS

Histoires naturelles, M.50

Composer: Maurice Ravel

Text: Jules Renard

Language: French

Composed: 1906

Genre: Song cycle / mélodies

For: Voice and piano

Number of songs: 5

Cambridge theme: The Natural World

The five animals

I — *Le paon*

The Peacock

The peacock waits proudly for his imagined wedding.

Character

proud • vain • ceremonial • comic

Listen for musical gestures that suggest:

strutting

self-importance

expectation

The humour is psychological—not merely an imitation of an animal noise.

II — *Le grillon*

The Cricket

Much smaller, more intimate world.

Character

quiet • precise • miniature • secretive

The piano helps create the insect's tiny environment.

Students should consider:

register

short gestures

silence

texture

articulation

III — *Le cygne*

The Swan

Elegant surface, but the text is not simply a sentimental portrait of beauty.

The swan attempts to catch reflections/objects on the water and discovers they are illusions.

Important concepts

water

reflection

grace

illusion

fluidity

This gives us another excellent comparison:

Beethoven → brook

Ravel → swan/water/reflection

IV — *Le martin-pêcheur*

The Kingfisher

A person sits quietly while a kingfisher lands on a fishing rod.

Character

stillness • wonder • intimacy • observation

This is particularly important because Ravel does not need to create constant activity to represent nature.

Teacher concept

NATURE CAN BE REPRESENTED THROUGH SILENCE.

That is an excellent advanced listening idea.

V — *La pintade*

The Guinea Fowl

Very different character.

aggressive • noisy • comic • quarrelsome

Ravel uses sharper musical gestures to reinforce the animal's unpleasant personality.

Central Analytical Principle

Students should repeatedly ask:

How does Ravel translate Renard's words into musical decisions?

Analyse:

vocal contour

rhythm of French speech

harmony

piano texture

register

dynamics

articulation

silence

repetition

tempo

PART X — SCORE DETECTIVE

Choose three passages.

Passage 1 — *Le paon*

What happens?

Characterful vocal declamation and piano writing establish the peacock's pompous personality.

Why important?

Shows Ravel using music for **psychological characterisation**.

Passage 2 — *Le grillon*

What happens?

Small-scale gestures, carefully controlled register and space create a miniature sound world.

Why important?

Demonstrates:

economy + timbre + precision

Passage 3 — *Le martin-pêcheur*

What happens?

Stillness and restraint become central expressive devices.

Why important?

Demonstrates that:

silence and sparse texture are compositional materials.

PART XI — PERFORM & EXPLORE IT

Demonstrate the composer's musical language on your preferred instrument or voice.

1. Colour Challenge

Perform one note or phrase **three different ways**.

Change:

register

articulation

dynamic

tone quality

Ask:

Which version has the most interesting timbre, and why?

Teacher connection

Ravel teaches us that **how a note sounds can matter as much as which note it is**.

2. Scale Colour

Explore, where appropriate to the instrument:

major

minor

pentatonic

whole-tone

modal

Play the same short motif using two different collections.

Question

How does changing the pitch collection change the atmosphere?

3. Ostinato

Create a short repeated pattern.

Keep it unchanged while changing:

dynamics

register

articulation

or, in an ensemble:

instrumentation

Connection

This prepares students to understand Ravel's extraordinary use of repetition and colour.

4. Natural-World Challenge

Choose:

peacock

cricket

swan

kingfisher

or

guinea fowl

Create a **10–20-second musical portrait** on your preferred instrument or voice.

Do **not** simply imitate the animal's literal sound.

Represent its:

movement

personality

environment

or

human impression

5. Explain Your Choices

The student completes:

I represented _____ using _____ because _____.

Then identify:

Pitch: _____

Rhythm: _____

Dynamics: _____

Articulation: _____

Register: _____

Timbre: _____

Texture: _____

This keeps Part XI equally appropriate for **voice, violin, flute, trumpet, guitar, piano, drums, cello, clarinet—or any future student's instrument.**

PART XII — COMPOSE LIKE RAVEL

Choose three characteristics

Possible choices:

extended harmony

modal colour

ostinato

precise articulation

unusual register

timbre

nature imagery

silence

Task

Compose **8–16 measures** inspired by a natural subject.

The student chooses:

animal • plant • water • weather • landscape • season

Requirement:

Represent the subject without simply copying a literal sound.

Then explain the compositional decisions.

PART XIII — INFLUENCE MAP

Influences

Fauré

Chabrier

French musical traditions

Debussy / contemporary French modernism

Russian orchestral colour

Spanish/Basque traditions

literature

Later:

jazz

↓

MAURICE RAVEL

↓

Influence on:

twentieth-century orchestration

film scoring

modern piano writing

French composition

orchestral colour

PART XIV — THEN vs NOW

What did Ravel inherit?

functional tonality

Classical forms

French dance

Romantic harmony

piano tradition

orchestral tradition

What did he change?

He expanded:

harmony

timbre

orchestration

instrumental technique

musical representation

while frequently retaining formal precision.

What did he leave?

An extraordinary model of:

COMPOSITION AS SOUND DESIGN

His influence is particularly important for later:

orchestral composers

film composers

arrangers

instrumentators

PART XV — COMPOSER COMPARISON

Beethoven vs Ravel

This is now extremely valuable for Cambridge Section B.

Element	Beethoven	Ravel
Period	Classical → Romantic	Impressionist-associated / Modernist
Set work	<i>Pastoral Symphony</i>	<i>Histoires naturelles</i>
Natural subject	countryside / human experience of nature	individual animals
Forces	orchestra	voice + piano
Melody	thematic/motivic	speech-sensitive, lyrical, colourful
Harmony	functional tonality	extended tonality/modal colour
Rhythm	motivic, metric	flexible declamation + precise patterns
Texture	orchestral	intimate voice/piano
Nature technique	imitation + emotional expression	characterisation + text + timbre
Bird connection	nightingale, quail, cuckoo	peacock, cricket, swan, kingfisher, guinea fowl
Central question	How does nature make us feel?	How can music reveal an animal's character?

Most important similarity

Both composers use musical techniques to connect listeners with the natural world rather than merely reproducing literal environmental sounds.

Most important difference

Beethoven creates a large-scale orchestral journey through countryside experiences, while Ravel creates intimate literary-musical portraits of individual animals through voice and piano.

That is a potentially powerful Section B comparison.

PART XVI — 60-SECOND IDENTIFICATION CHALLENGE

Possible composer

Maurice Ravel

Possible period/style

Early twentieth-century French modernism / Impressionist-associated

Evidence

Melody: lyrical or speech-influenced

Harmony: extended tonal/modal

Rhythm: flexible or precisely patterned

Texture: carefully controlled

Timbre: highly important

Dynamics: finely graded

Form: clearly controlled despite harmonic complexity

Model conclusion

I believe this could be Ravel because the music combines an identifiable tonal centre with extended and colourful harmony, carefully controlled texture, precise articulation and a strong focus on timbre. Rather than relying only on melody and functional harmonic progression, colour itself appears to be an important structural and expressive element.

PART XVII — FINAL COMPOSER SUMMARY

Explain Ravel in Exactly Five Sentences

1. Maurice Ravel was a French composer whose music connects late nineteenth-century traditions with early twentieth-century modernism.

2. Although frequently associated with Impressionism, his music is distinguished by exceptional structural precision and craftsmanship.
3. He expanded tonal harmony through modality, chromaticism and colourful pitch collections while becoming one of music history's most influential orchestrators.
4. Literature, dance, nature, Spanish/Basque culture and later jazz all contributed to his musical world.
5. His music demonstrates how harmony, rhythm, register, texture and especially timbre can become fundamental elements of musical expression.

Five Words That Define Ravel

Precise | Colourful | Refined | Imaginative | Modern

Three Works Students Should Recognise

1. *Histoires naturelles* — Cambridge priority
2. *Daphnis et Chloé* — orchestral colour
3. *Boléro* — repetition/orchestration

One Innovation / Contribution to Remember

Ravel elevated orchestration and timbre into central compositional forces rather than treating instrumentation simply as the colouring of an already-complete musical idea.

One Historical Connection

Ravel lived during a period of enormous artistic and technological change in which nineteenth-century Romanticism gave way to modernism, recording, cinema, jazz and radically new approaches to visual art and literature.

One Five-Arts Connection

Histoires naturelles transforms Jules Renard's literature into music, while *Daphnis et Chloé* brings music, dance, drama and visual design together through ballet.

One Musical Feature to Demonstrate on Your Preferred Instrument or Voice

TIMBRE

Perform the **same musical idea in at least three different tone colours** without changing its basic pitch and rhythm.

Explain:

What did you change, and how did that alter the listener's perception?

CAMBRIDGE 9483 — RAVEL TEACHER QUICK KEY

Composer: Maurice Ravel

Dates: 1875–1937

Style: French early modernism / Impressionist-associated

Set work: *Histoires naturelles*, M.50

Year: 1906

Text: Jules Renard

Forces: Voice + piano

Theme: The Natural World

Five songs: *Le paon* • *Le grillon* • *Le cygne* • *Le martin-pêcheur* • *La pintade*

Essential techniques: extended tonality, modality, chromatic colour, text-sensitive vocal writing, precise rhythm, register, articulation, texture, silence and timbre

Essential relationship: WORDS ↔ MUSIC

Central analytical question: How does Ravel turn each animal's behaviour, personality and environment into music?

One sentence students should remember

Ravel uses precise harmony, rhythm, texture, language and timbre to transform observations of the natural world into highly individual musical characters.

PART XVIII — STUDY FOCUS CONNECTIONS

Study	Focus	Where can I hear this in this composer?
01	Motif & Development	Short ideas may return through changes of register, harmony, texture and timbre rather than only through traditional thematic development. Repetition and ostinato are especially important in works such as <i>Boléro</i> .
02	Harmony & Structure	Extended tonality, modality, pentatonic and whole-tone colour, added-note harmony, parallel chords and chromatic harmony create structure without abandoning tonal centres completely.
03	Contrasting Texture	Sparse voice-and-piano textures can suddenly become denser; foreground and background roles continually shift in <i>Histoires naturelles</i> .
04	Pitch Cells / Chromatic Organisation	Ravel provides an excellent bridge from tonal harmony to pitch-based thinking through modes, whole-tone scales, pentatonic collections and chromatic sonorities.
05	Instrumentation	One of Ravel's greatest strengths. He uses register, doubling, instrumental solos, unusual combinations, harp, percussion and precise orchestral colour as compositional tools.
06	Form & Development	Traditional forms remain important, but Ravel frequently develops material through colour, repetition, variation, text setting and carefully controlled large-scale structure.

Strongest Study Focus for This Composer:

Instrumentation

Composition Technique I Can Borrow:

Keep the basic musical idea but change its colour through register, articulation, instrumentation or harmony.

Musical Example:

Boléro — repetition with changing instrumentation and orchestral colour.

For the Cambridge set work:

Histoires naturelles — musical character changes through text setting, piano texture, register, harmony and articulation.

How I Could Use It in My Own Composition:

I could write one short melody and repeat it several times without changing it greatly. Instead, I could change the instrument, register, accompaniment, dynamics and articulation each time so that the same idea develops through timbre.