

NAME _____

READ THE ARTICLE. ABOUT "EL SISTEMA".

EL SISTEMA

Venezuela has a revolutionary and inspiring music education program, which aims to improve the lives of disadvantaged children and their families. *El Sistema* – meaning "the system" – is a total-immersion¹ program that brings children together to play music every day. Preschool children sit on their mothers' knees to sing, play rhythm games, or play with paper instruments that they make themselves. At age five, children start to play a real instrument, which is a thrilling experience for them. As soon as the children are good enough, they teach the younger ones. The program is highly successful. By high school, students are tackling some of the most difficult pieces of classical music. However, the program is demanding, and participants need to be committed; they practice after school every day and on weekends.

There are now some 500 or so orchestras throughout the country, some of which perform internationally. Many of the young musicians have even become professionals. *El Sistema* graduates include conductors of the Venice Opera and Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic's youngest player ever. According to British conductor Sir Simon Rattle, "There is nothing more important in the world of music than what is happening in Venezuela." These young musicians must surely be motivating role models² for other young people in their home country.



However, music wasn't the primary goal when the program began in 1975 with just 11 students in a garage. *El Sistema*'s founder, José Antonio Abreu, was interested in "human development," or social action through music. Abreu's slogan, "*Tocar y Luchar*," (Play and Struggle) describes his hope that learning and playing music together helps children overcome academic, social, and economic obstacles. "If you put a violin in a child's hands, that child will never hold a gun," he is quoted as saying. Interestingly, 90 percent of the program's funding comes from social service agencies rather than cultural organizations. Since 1975, *El Sistema* has made an amazing difference in many lives. Two million graduates have become skilled musicians, and according to Abreu, they are resilient, flourishing citizens, as well. More than 25 countries, including the United States, Austria, and India, have since copied *El Sistema*'s groundbreaking³ model⁴.

1 *total-immersion*: constant involvement in an activity
2 *role model*: someone that other people respect and copy

3 *groundbreaking*: completely new
4 *model*: type of program

A. Read the following comments from six people about *El Sistema*. Are their impressions correct? Choose YES or NO. Support your answer with evidence from the article.

10 A program like that can't really work. I mean, they can't teach them to play advanced pieces.

YES NO

20 The children must spend hours practicing.

YES NO

30 Sir Simon Rattle must be really impressed with the program.

YES NO

4. Some of the students may come from wealthy families.

YES

NO

5. They must get a lot of their money from arts and music organizations.

YES

NO

6. Programs like that can't work in other countries, though.

YES

NO

B. Listen to three conversations about the people and organizations below and write 3 things each organization does.



Janine Licare

1. Kids Saving the Rainforest



Arn Chorn-Pond

2. Cambodian Living Arts



Ardena Gojani

3. The International Book Project