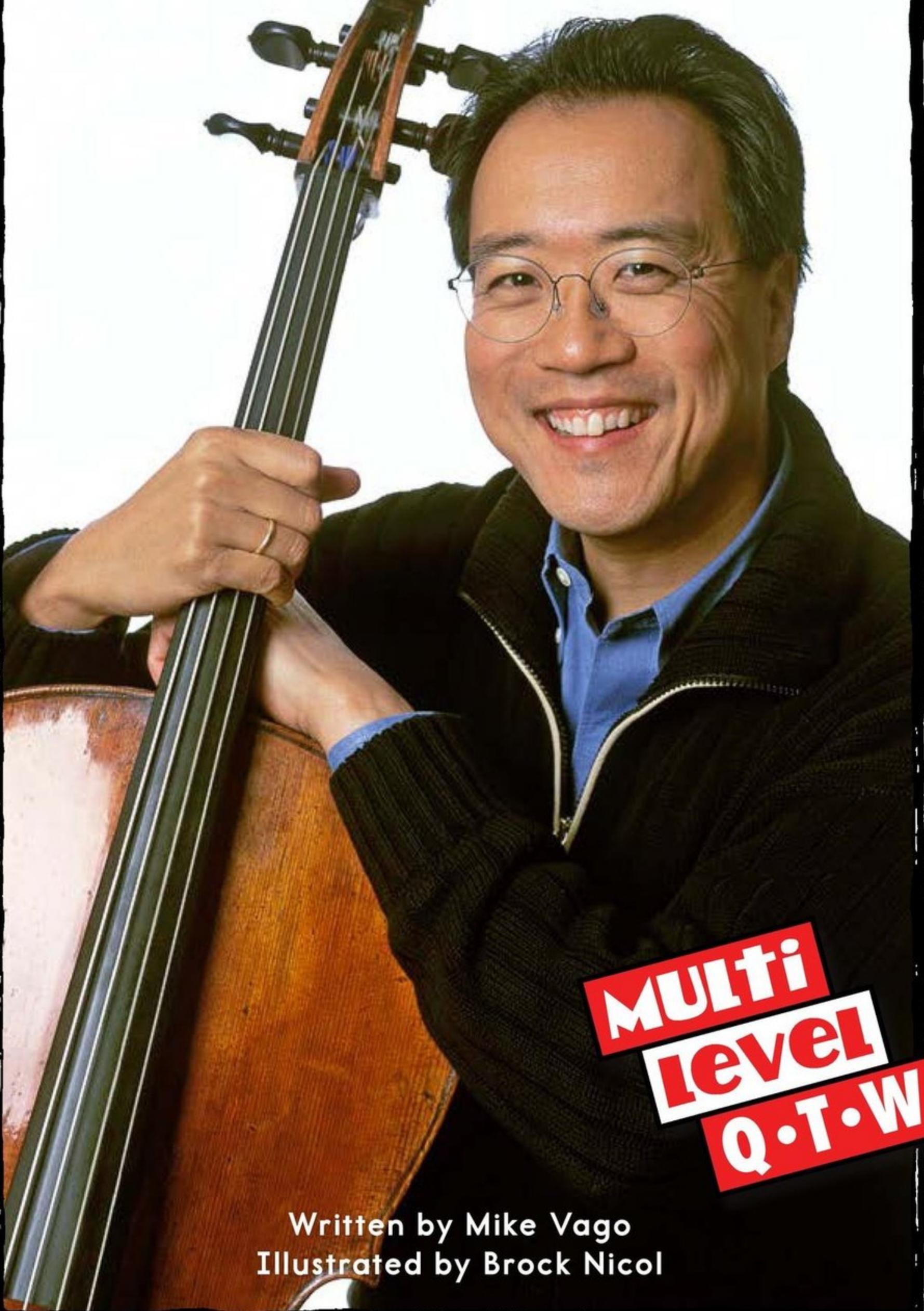


LEVELED BOOK • Q

Yo-Yo Ma



MULTI
level
Q•T•W

Written by Mike Vago
Illustrated by Brock Nicol

Yo-Yo Ma



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Focus Question

How is the Silk Road Ensemble a reflection of Yo-Yo Ma's background and music?

Words to Know

cello
classical
composers
cultures
ensemble

festival
orchestra
surgery
violin

Front cover: Yo-Yo Ma holds his cello, Petunia, in 2004.

Page 3: Yo-Yo Ma performs with a choir of high school students in 2012 in Chicago, Illinois.

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An Early Start

Yo-Yo Ma was born in 1955 in Paris, France, into a musical family. His mother was a singer, and his father played the **violin** and taught music. His older sister, Yeou-Cheng (YOO-CHANG), had also played the violin since she was a small child. Yo-Yo's parents were both born in China. They moved to France so his father could teach at a music school there. When Yo-Yo was seven, the family moved to New York City. Once there, Yo-Yo's father founded the Children's **Orchestra Society** to teach **classical** music to kids.

Yo-Yo's parents gave him a violin when he was only three. Ma says he sounded terrible and thought he wasn't any good. Yeou-Cheng says he smashed more than one violin in frustration. He quickly quit playing.





Yo-Yo (age six) and Yeou-Cheng Ma (age ten) play for members of the Denver Symphony Orchestra during a practice break in 1961.

Yo-Yo didn't stay away from music for long. A year later, his parents took him to a concert in Paris. Yo-Yo saw a double bass and decided he wanted to play it. A double bass is about 6 feet (1.8 m) tall. Yo-Yo's parents thought it was much too large for a four-year-old. Instead, they got him the second-biggest stringed instrument—the **cello** (CHEL-oh).

The Mas pushed both of their children to play difficult music. Their father said that any task could be broken up into smaller, easier parts. Their mother taught them to learn the notes so well that they wouldn't have to think about them. That way, they could think about the feelings behind the music instead.





A Young Star

In 1962, seven-year-old Yo-Yo performed for President John F. Kennedy. The following year, Yo-Yo and Yeou-Cheng played together on TV for millions of people. Most children that age are playing their first notes on the recorder. Ma was already one of the most famous musicians in the world.

At fifteen, Ma graduated early from high school. For college, he chose Juilliard, one of the best music schools in the world. Soon, however, he switched to a college where he could study other things besides music. Yo-Yo didn't want the cello to be the only thing in his life.



Yo-Yo Ma was already performing with many of the world's major orchestras by the time he became an adult.

Before Ma started at his new school, he played at a summer music festival. There, he met and fell in love with Jill Hornor. She was a college student who ran the festival. He went back to that festival every summer, playing music and spending time with Jill. They later married and had two children.



Yo-Yo Ma's wife, Jill Hornor, and children, Emily and Nicholas, accompanied him to Sweden in 2012 when he was awarded a Polar Music Prize for his work.



Yo-Yo Ma struggled with back problems as a young man.

Back Problems

As soon as Ma graduated, he had to stop playing cello. He had back **surgery** to correct scoliosis, a condition that makes the spine curve the wrong way. The surgery was risky. If it went wrong, he might never be able to play the cello again. Without the surgery, however, Ma could have a lifetime of back pain. He thought it was worth the risk and had the surgery. It was a success, but Yo-Yo was in a body cast for six months. He was unable to move around, much less play the cello. It was a very hard time.

However, as soon as the cast was off, Ma began playing all over the world. He started recording albums at age twenty-three. He has now made more than seventy-five albums and is one of the best-selling classical artists alive. The cello Ma plays was made in 1733 and is worth \$2.5 million. In 1999, he left it in a taxicab by accident. After the driver returned it, Ma recorded a message that played in every taxi in New York. It reminded people not to leave things behind at the end of their ride.



Yo-Yo Ma performs with the Silk Road Ensemble and dancer Charles "Lil Buck" Riley in 2011.



Yo-Yo Ma performs with pop musician Sting during the opening ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Three Different Points of View

Chinese, French, and American ideas have all shaped Ma's music. Although he started off playing European classical music, he soon branched out to other kinds of music. Ma has played bluegrass, Argentine tango, jazz, and traditional music from China, Japan, and Brazil. He has also played songs from Broadway musicals and movie soundtracks. He says that being open to new ideas is important to better understand both music and people.

The Silk Road

In 1998, Ma decided he needed a musical group that reflected his mix of **cultures**. He founded the **Silk Road Ensemble**. The group is made up of musicians and **composers** from twenty countries. They work together to make music that draws from traditions all over the world. The Silk Road was a trade route that stretched across Asia hundreds of years ago. It helped spread ideas all around the continent.



Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble perform in Central Park in New York City in 2011.



Yo-Yo Ma prepares to perform in Germany in 2001.

“I’m an Accident”

Many musicians say their success came from hard work or natural talent. Yo-Yo Ma says he has no idea why he became one of the world’s most popular musicians. “I’m an accident,” he once said. He says his success comes from many things. His parents, teachers, sister, wife, and children have all helped him. Living in Paris and New York and performing at a young age all shaped him. If any of those things had been different, he feels that he might not have become a world-famous musician. If he hadn’t seen that giant double bass as a four-year-old, his whole life would have been different.

Glossary

cello (<i>n.</i>)	a large stringed instrument in the violin family that a seated player holds upright between the legs while playing (p. 6)
classical (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to European music from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; of or relating to traditional Western music, such as symphonies and operas (p. 4)
composers (<i>n.</i>)	people who write music (p. 14)
cultures (<i>n.</i>)	the ideas and customs of different groups of people; particular societies, each with their own ideas and customs (p. 14)
ensemble (<i>n.</i>)	a group of people, such as actors or musicians, who perform together (p. 14)
festival (<i>n.</i>)	a celebration or an organized series of cultural events (p. 10)
orchestra (<i>n.</i>)	a large group of musicians who play together, often performing classical music on stringed instruments (p. 4)
surgery (<i>n.</i>)	medical treatment in which a doctor cuts into a patient's body to repair or remove damaged parts (p. 11)
violin (<i>n.</i>)	a stringed instrument that is held under the chin and played with a bow (p. 4)

Yo-Yo Ma

A Reading A-Z Level Q Leveled Book

Word Count: 832

Connections

Writing

Imagine you interviewed Yo-Yo Ma. Write a magazine article Q & A with the famous musician, using the text to generate both interview questions and Ma's answers.

Music

Research the parts of a cello and make a diagram labeling each part.

The logo for Reading A-Z features the word "Reading" in a large, bold, red sans-serif font. The letter "R" has a small sun-like icon above it, consisting of several short yellow lines radiating from a yellow circle. To the right of "Reading" is a large, stylized red letter "A-Z".

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