

Music For Every Classroom: Inspired by...Listening

by Elizabeth M. Peterson

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We provide inspiration for our students everyday: a poem, a personal story, a famous quote, artwork. Music is also something that inspires students. They may enjoy playing it, composing it or performing it, but don't overlook listening to it. Listening to music is the most basic of all ways to appreciate music and yet it is often overlooked as a means from which students become inspired to learn. Whether you are a music teacher or not, listening to music can be part of your teaching repertoire. You can use listening experiences to teach, reinforce and enhance the curriculum you currently teach.

Listening Actively

Before you have your students listen to music in a classroom setting, you must explain to them how they should be listening...actively. Unlike listening to music passively (with music as the background to another activity) or responsively (when you respond to the music by singing or dancing, for example), actively listening to music engages your brain as you think about what is happening in the music. The brain is active rather than the body.

Sometimes people actively listen when they are trying to learn or understand the lyrics of a song. At other times, active listeners want to study the melody of a song, so that they can play it on an instrument.

Often when people actively listen to music, they will imagine stories that are happening inside the music or even relate the music to their own lives.

Some teachers carry on the idea of active listening into their everyday classroom language, "Did you actively or passively listen to the directions?"

Listening Experiences as Inspiration

Providing for a listening experience is simple. All you need is to pick out music and set aside some time (about 8-10 minutes). The music should be relatively short since many students don't have the listening stamina to listen for more than about 3 minutes. (This will change the more you practice listening, of course.) There are a few times during the day that can be set aside for listening time: first thing of the day, morning meeting, snack time, after lunch or at the end of the day. If you decide you want to use a listening experience for a one time project, then you will probably allow time to listen at the beginning of that class or lesson. Do what fits right with your teaching situation and the needs of your students.

These active listening experiences are similar to taking your students on a field trip. You give them experiences outside the regular norm and then build upon them when you "get back." These listening field trips can be used as inspiration for your students to work on many different activities and assignments that connect to your curriculum. In my new

book, Inspired by... Listening, these strategies of teaching through active listening are explained with practical uses for both music teachers and classroom teachers.

Are You a Music Teacher?

Actively listening to music is one of the best ways to teach your students about music theory, history and appreciation. You can use the strategies described in Inspired by... Listening as a complete unit of study that includes introductory lessons, vocabulary practice and even an assessment project. Your students will be better able to respond to, interpret and speak intelligently about music. Regardless of what grade you teach, teaching your students to listen actively will be valuable and adaptable to your individual situation.

Are You a Classroom Teacher?

Once your students have had “field-trip” listening experiences, you will have new and exciting opportunities to integrate with your current curriculum. You don’t have to be a musician-teacher to use these strategies. All you need is an enjoyment for listening to music.

You can use this method all year long, for a one-time project or a mixture of the two. When I taught second grade, my students and I listened to music everyday, all year during snack time. We concentrated on one composer or genre a month and listened to one or two pieces of music each week. (This allowed for repetitive listenings, which are important when you are listening actively.) Every once in a while, I would take a listening experience and use it as inspiration to teach a lesson in language arts. Once, my students practiced their letter writing skills using Für Elise by Beethoven. Another time, they wrote narratives using Sabre Dance by Aram Khachaturian.

Inspired by...Listening is a complete resource and includes information for the teacher, activities to advance students’ listening skills, ready-to-use lesson plans for both musical and core curriculum based lessons, vocabulary usage, project ideas, reproducible worksheets, rubrics and a list of practical resources you can use to implement the strategies that are introduced.

With Inspired by...Listening, you are able to use these listening experiences to enhance your curriculum, especially in the language arts. You can do something as simple as journal writing in response to your class discussions or as complex as write a story using the music as an inspirational springboard. Here are some other ideas:

Just providing time to listen to music with your students is enjoyable and rewarding as you share experiences together through music.

- Brainstorm some words and/or phrases that come to mind as you listen to the music. Use these words/phrases to create a poem.
- After listening to two different pieces of music, have students write a comparison paragraph. Have them use music vocabulary or focus on a part of speech you are currently teaching.

- Use a graphic organizer to develop a story including: character, setting, problem, details and solution. Have students fill out the graphic organizer using their interpretations of the music as inspiration. Students then write the story or tell it orally.

Collaboration

Inspired by...Listening is a great way not only to encourage the integration of subject areas, but also the collaboration between teachers. For example, the music teacher can introduce the music to the students, continue to teach the students about the musical aspects of the piece and then the classroom teacher can use the listening experience to develop skills she is teaching in her classroom.

Music is all around us: in our cars, in our homes, on our computers, on TV; the list could go on and on. Not only is music everywhere, but it is motivating to young minds. Now, at the beginning of a brand new year, you can add music to your repertoire of teaching tricks without being overwhelmed as you allow your students the chance to be inspired by listening!