

Music For Every Classroom: Listen Like You Read

by Elizabeth M. Peterson

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Listening to music is a great way to incorporate music into your everyday classroom. By making music a part of your classroom, you can help motivate students to use the skills they are already learning or enrich the experiences you give them every day. The key to allowing music to be a meaningful part of your classroom's curriculum is by having your students listen 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), actively listening to music engages your brain.

Relationship to Reading

The formula for a complete active listening experience is very similar to that of a reading program. In a reading program there are things done before, during and after reading. The same applies to listening to music. Before you listen, you must know some *background* about the genre, composer or piece. While you listen, you are concentrating on the *experience* by becoming familiar with the music as you listen to it many times. After you listen, you *interpret* what you have just experienced by making judgments about the music.

The Parallels Between Active Listening and Reading

	Active Listening	Reading
Before	Students gain background knowledge of genre, composer, time period of piece, piece, instruments in piece, etc.	Students are introduced to story or book, look at the title, pictures, skim through words, discuss vocabulary or learn about the author.
During	Students experience the piece by familiarizing themselves with it through repetitive listenings and teacher's guiding questions.	Students experience the story by familiarizing themselves with it through repetitive readings and teacher's questions that check for comprehension.
After	Students are allowed to respond to the piece by using the skills they have already been taught and those they are learning to convey their interpretations of their listening experiences.	Students are allowed to respond to the story using skills they have already been taught and those they are learning to convey their judgments on characters, plot, etc.

Knowing the *background* of the music we listen to can be beneficial. We can learn about the composer, the time in which he/she lived or the style of the piece. Learning about

and playing some of the instruments that are used can also provide students with some good vocabulary to use later as well as using vocabulary words learned in music class.

As soon as we begin to read a story we are *experiencing* it. The same goes for listening. The more we listen to a piece of music, the more we remember main themes, hear the detailed layers of the instruments, anticipate familiar or favorite parts and even pick up on new surprises. Listening to good music has the same effect as reading a good story: we want to listen over and over to continue enjoying the experience.

After we have experienced a piece, we are open to *interpretation*. We think about and discuss what the piece means to us, making judgments about it, the instruments and even the composer. It is in this stage that integration takes place. Your objective for your students will determine what activity your students may do after they listen. You may want them to write, draw, create something, or practice their speaking skills. The sky is the limit.

Integration Ideas

Here are two detailed ideas on how to “Listen Like You Read” and integrate the music into your curriculum. Although these examples seem specific, you can use many of the same concepts in any classroom.

Subject: Social Studies
Objectives: To discover how music is and has been influenced by national and world events throughout history
To discover how musicians use music to portray human emotions
Music Used: Symphony #3, *Eroica* by Ludwig van Beethoven

Before listening, students should know a little bit about Beethoven and the circumstances surrounding this symphony. Here is a concise summary: Beethoven lived in the time of the French Revolution. He himself was a man who believed in the ideals that many revolutionaries did: freedom, equality and justice. One man that Beethoven admired was Napoleon, who strove to uplift the “common man.” To revere him as a great general and person, Beethoven wrote his 3rd symphony naming it after him. However, after finding out that Napoleon proclaimed himself emperor, Beethoven decided against it, believing that a man should do such an audacious thing. He then renamed the piece *Eroica*, the “Heroic” Symphony.

The symphony consists of four movements or sections that total 45 minutes in length – the longest symphony written to date. Because of this, you will need to decide on what parts you want your students to focus. You may want to only listen to 2-3 minutes excerpts. Remember, your students’ “listening stamina” may be low.

During the listening experience, students should listen to how the music portrays heroism and other values implied during a revolution. The teacher should also ask some open ended questions concerning the music and students’ opinions about it. For example: What instruments are used and why? What was Beethoven trying to say/portray in this

music? What adjectives describe the way the music is played? Are there any patterns in the piece? What are some modern songs that have been written in response to national or world events?

After you and your students have listened to the piece many times, give them a way to reflect on the piece of music. This can vary depending on what skills you want your students to develop. You may want them to write a letter to Beethoven or Napoleon, write a music review for a newsletter set back in 1804, write a journal entry that addresses some of the open ended questions discussed from the experience or allow them to draw or write about the music itself.

Subjects: Language Arts

Objective: To write a story using music as inspiration

Music Used: *Sabre Dance* by Aram Khachaturian

This very exciting piece of music was written in 1942 by an Armenian/American composer. Its strong rhythms and lively melodies make it a great example of modern orchestral music. You will need to determine when you tell your students the title of the piece. As with any music that has a suggestive title, knowing the title ahead of time will lead to preconceived ideas and images. However, this is okay. Your students will still end up with original ideas. I have done this lesson both ways and regardless of when the title is disclosed, the stories are imaginative and original.

During the listening experience, students should close their eyes and pretend they are walking around in the music while it is playing. Tell them to use all their senses to experience the music. Since the objective of this lesson is to come up with a story idea, your students will need to be guided in their discovery of their setting, main character, problem, events, and solution. Simply asking them to find these story elements helps them to do just that.

After you have allowed your students to listen to the piece many times, you should allow them to get some of their ideas down on paper. Instead of having them write it with words first, let them draw it. Students come up with fantastic drawings to this piece of music. Have them draw a 4 panel cartoon or a story board. From there, your students can tell the story orally or write it down. Be sure to allow time for sharing!

“Listen-Alouds”

How often do we read aloud to our students and children? Sharing a listening experience with your students is just like sharing a good story. Let them listen to some of your favorite music and share some of your favorite memories. Let your students bring in some of their favorite music and tell you what it means to them. No matter what level you take the listening experience, whether you listen like it's an after lunch read aloud or turn the listening experience into an integrated lesson, you and your students will celebrate the enjoyment of listening ...just like reading!