

G e n e r a l M u s i c

# Music, Philo and the



## National Standards 8 and 9 for Middle and High School

**C**lassroom music lessons are not usually a forum for addressing philosophical issues, but they can be. Through music and visual media, we can discuss music with middle and high school students in a way that expands how they think about music and their environment. In other words, we can open up space in our music classroom for philosophical thought.

What does it mean to have a philosophical discussion with our students in a music classroom? When adults speak philosophically, we may discuss questions like “Why is my world the way it is?” “How did I get to where I am today?” or “Why do some things change and others do not?” We may not find answers that satisfy everyone when we ask questions like these, but through discussion and reflection, we may find answers that satisfy ourselves. This can be the same for young people.

When musicians think philosophically about music, they may ask similar questions including “Why do I feel the way I do when I listen to music?” “What makes me like one piece of music more than another?” or “What does music tell me about my world?” As we search for answers to these questions, we begin to understand our music and ourselves.

As music teachers, we may be required to make meaningful connections among music and other subjects. National Standard 8: Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts, and National Standard 9: Under-

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# sophy, Civil War

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August 2004 43

standing music in relation to history and culture deal specifically with these relationships. Our framework for integrating music with other subjects could include philosophical discussions within the historical, social, or artistic context of a piece of music.

Music of critical times such as the United States Civil War can be especially useful to teachers and students. This period has been thoroughly researched and explored in print and visual media. Ken Burns's PBS documentary *The Civil War* provides an accessible entry point for student and teacher discussions. This documentary is a visual essay that helps the public understand a crucial time in the histo-

ry of the United States. The documentary can be used to address several philosophical issues:

- How is music useful, and why should it be part of our lives?
- How does music change our perception of those around us and ourselves?
- What is authenticity in music and media? Are visual or aural depictions of our viewpoints or other's viewpoints truthful?

The following three lesson ideas include exercises and questions a classroom music instructor can use to initiate philosophical discussions about music from the Civil War and

Ken Burns's documentary. These lessons are intended for middle and high school classes. You will need a CD player, a TV, and a VCR (or other playback system) for these lessons.

**THROUGH THESE LESSONS, TEACHERS** can initiate philosophical thinking about music and life, making significant connections among history, the visual arts, and other subjects. Teachers can use music lessons to teach not just about the concrete qualities of music, but also about the qualities of music that provoke thought and connect us to our world. That may be an important philosophical lesson for all of us.

## Lesson Idea 1: How Is Music Useful?

### Background

Music during the Civil War served a variety of practical and emotional purposes. Soldiers sang songs and played instruments to march in time, keep up morale, and intimidate their enemies on the battlefield. Slaves sang spirituals to express themselves and to escape the immense hardship of their daily lives. Those with loved ones fighting in the war wrote moving odes of longing and despair. Music became especially useful as a way for people to motivate and comfort each other during the conflict.

### Objective

Students will investigate how music was used during the Civil War and make connections to how we use music today.

### Materials

Ken Burns, *The Civil War: Original Soundtrack Recording*, CD, Elektra/Nonesuch 79256.

### Procedure

1. Introduce students to music from the Civil War. Provide background for how music was useful during the Civil War. See Music and the Civil War—Some Resources to Get You Started, on p. 45, for a few ideas.
2. Play recordings of music from this time, such as Ken Burns's *The Civil War: Original Soundtrack Recording*.
3. Ask students how music is useful today. Compare the purposes of today's music and the ways it was used during the Civil War. You may consider questions like these in your discussion:
  - Do we use music in our own culture for the same purposes?
  - Have events in recent history affected the ways we use music? Are these uses similar to or different from how music was used during the Civil War?
4. If students have spent some time studying the Civil War, you may open up further discussion with questions like

- How are today's beliefs about family, work, war, education, and music similar to and different from those of the Civil War era?
- Do society's norms and everyday customs affect the style of its music and how it is expressed?
- Is the way music is expressed directly related to the substance of our personal or social experiences?
- Are changes in societies' beliefs reflected in how they use music?
- Is music as much a part of our lives as it was during the Civil War?
- Have substantial changes in our society (such as new technology) directly changed how we use music in our daily lives?

After discussing questions like these, students may begin to understand how music is not only practical, but also meaningful in our everyday lives. Your class can explore both the values that were associated with music in the past and the significance of today's music.

### Follow-Up

You can supplement this lesson with a short demonstration comparing music played in different styles. For example, Stephen Foster's folk song "Hard Times Come Again No More" was meaningful during the Civil War. Three very different versions are on the following recordings:

- Yo-Yo Ma, Edgar Meyer, and Mark O'Connor, *Appalachian Journey*, CD, Sony Classical SK 66782.
- Jim Brown, Ken Burns, and Don DeVito, *Songs of the Civil War*, CD, Columbia B00000283E.
- Akiko Yano, *Love Life*, CD, Nonesuch 79279.

## Music and the Civil War: Some Resources to Get You Started

[http://www.archives.gov/research\\_room/alic/reference\\_desk/military\\_resources/civil\\_war\\_resources.html](http://www.archives.gov/research_room/alic/reference_desk/military_resources/civil_war_resources.html). U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Archives Library Information Center. A collection of articles, documents, and links on the American Civil War.

[www.civilwar.com](http://www.civilwar.com). Click on "The Music" to view information on and lyrics for songs from the North and South.

<http://civilwar.si.edu/home.html>. The Smithsonian Institution's Web site, where a wealth of primary resources can be accessed.

<http://memory.loc.gov/>. American Memory: Historical Collections for the National Digital Library. Search by topic (e.g., performing arts) or time period.

<http://www.nps.gov/gett/gettkidz/music.htm>. Gettysburg National Military Park Kidzpage.

[www.pbs.org/civilwar/classroom/](http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/classroom/). PBS's Web site includes teaching materials and other resources.

[www.us-civilwar.com/](http://www.us-civilwar.com/). An introductory Web site with pages about music and other aspects of the Civil War.

### Lesson Idea 2: Our Perception of Music

#### Background

The most often-played piece of music in Ken Burns's *The Civil War* is "Ashokan Farewell." It became popular immediately following the program's debut, and it remains the music that most people associate with the documentary, particularly with narrator Paul Roebling's reading of soldier Sullivan Ballou's heart-wrenching last letter to his wife.

But did you know that Jay Ungar composed "Ashokan Farewell" in 1982? For most of his documentary, Ken Burns consciously chose music from the Civil War era; however, when he heard "Ashokan Farewell," he thought it conveyed the feeling he wanted his film to evoke. In the context of the film, we perceive the music to be from the Civil War era and associate the music with other music of the period and with the thoughts and feelings expressed by those living during the Civil War.

#### Objective

Students will choose their own music for a film clip from *The Civil War* and discuss how the perception of a piece of music may rely on its context.

#### Materials

Ken Burns, *The Civil War*, VHS or DVD, Arlington, VA: PBS, 1990.

#### Procedure

1. Play a few film clips (about one to two minutes each) from *The Civil War* with sound and without sound for students. Discuss how music can alter the interpretation of these scenes.

2. Show students several contrasting film clips from *The Civil War* without sound.
3. Discuss visual elements of the film with students. Determine the time, culture, clothing, lifestyle, transportation, and so forth portrayed in each film clip.
4. Ask students to describe the music they would want to hear over the film clip.
5. Students may
  - Find a piece of music on their own that is appropriate for the film clip,
  - Choose a piece of music from a selection that you provide (this could be an individual or group activity), or
  - Compose their own piece of film music.
6. Play the film clips with the students' choices of music.
7. Discuss attributes including tempo, mode, and orchestration of the pieces your students have chosen. How does the music evoke the emotions they believe are expressed in the visual medium?

After this exercise, use questions like the following to stimulate additional discussion and reflection on our perceptions of music:

- How do our prior knowledge and associations color our perceptions of music?
- Does the true origin of a piece of music change our emotional perception of it?
- How does music change our perception of events?
- Does the understanding of our own perceptions change how we will listen to music in the future? In other words, will we listen (and watch) things differently after we become aware of how the composer or creator thinks we should feel?

## Lesson Idea 3: Authenticity in Music

### Background

Is music or how we treat music authentic? We often think "authentic" means "original." Period musicians play period music on original instruments in ways that were "originally intended" by the composers. However, it is difficult for historians to understand completely how music was (and is) meant to be heard. It is more useful for us today to think of *hearing* music authentically. That is, we can learn to hear and understand music in a way that is meaningful to us.

So, what is meaningful to us? Can music be manipulated so that its meaning is delivered to us in an understandable way? More specifically, in Burns's *The Civil War*, is our perception manipulated so that some viewpoints are ignored and never given voice? *The Civil War* is powerful because it manipulates us to feel a certain way. Burns uses music, images of soldiers and battlefields, and specific narration meant to invoke certain perceptions of war. When investigating sounds of the Civil War, we find music was used as a figurative hammer from each side of the polarized battlefield. The North sang songs like "We'll Fight for Uncle Abe," while the South sang "Oh, I'm a Good Old Rebel."

### Objective

Students will explore authenticity in music and discuss how music can be used to manipulate emotions.

### Materials

Jim Brown, Ken Burns, and Don DeVito, *Songs of the Civil War*, CD, Columbia B00000283E.

Irwin Silber, ed., *Songs of the Civil War*, New York: Dover, 1995.

### Procedure

1. Present music from the Civil War that was not included in the documentary.

2. Discuss Ken Burns's choice of songs for *The Civil War*. Consider questions like the following:

- Why did Ken Burns choose the pieces he did?
- Why might he have left a particular piece out?

3. Discuss how music can manipulate emotions and how this affects authenticity in music. Two books that have influenced my thoughts on the relationships among music, emotion, and philosophy are *Music Matters* by David Elliot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and *The Challenge to Care in Schools* by Nel Noddings (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992). These questions may help you stimulate a discussion:

- Can the listener overcome emotional manipulation?
- Is it necessary to overcome this manipulation to understand the music?
- Can we discern the original intent of the music from looking at the score or hearing the piece played?
- What benefit is there from looking for authenticity in the use of music and visual media?
- Is there a connection between music in visual media and real life?

### Follow-Up

Following the final lesson, these questions can help wrap up your discussions on how music is used, how we perceive music, and how we determine whether music is authentic.

- How does music intersect with and affect other parts of our lives?
- Do our perceptions of music simultaneously give us a personal identity and connect us with other participants in music?
- After having these discussions, will we approach music or visual media in a different way? ☺

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