

HESPERUS

Creating Meaning through Music: Make your own Silent Movie Soundtrack Proposal for a 6-session Residency for grades 5-8

RESIDENCY OBJECTIVE: Students increase their media literacy, visual literacy, math skills and critical thinking skills, refining their ability to work collaboratively and make informed choices by using found objects as instruments to create a soundtrack for a five-minute silent film.

Contact

Dr. Tina Chancey, Project Director
HESPERUS
3706 North 17th Street, Arlington, VA 22207
(703) 407-0642
E-mail: tina@hesperus.org

Art Forms

Music, Visual Art/Communications

Tested SOL Subjects

Language Arts, Mathematics, Science

Students will apply the knowledge and thinking skills of mathematics, science, and technology to address real-life problems and make informed decisions. The task of synchronizing meaningful sounds with actions in film builds skills comparable to *fluency* and *comprehension* in reading.

Target Audience

Students in Grades 5 - 8

Residency length

SIX SESSIONS: Three 50-minute classroom teaching sessions, two 30-minute classroom activity periods, and one Saturday morning performance. The Saturday performance for friends and family takes place from 9-11 am at the Arlington Cinema 'n' Drafthouse, 2903 Columbia Pike Arlington, VA 22204.

Activities

Students will be organized in groups of 5-7 members. During each teaching session they will attend the opening 30-minute presentation together as a class, and then break into groups for the final 20 minutes of activities. During each activity period students will work in their groups, with the rotating supervision of the project director. Each group will:

- Choose up to 10 *portable* items in their schoolroom to use as instruments, such as retractable ballpoint pens, plastic water bottles, boxes of paper clips, rulers, etc.

- Experiment with different ways of making sounds with the chosen objects. Make a list naming, describing and characterizing 12 contrasting sound-bites (“1) Popping sound-10 ball point pens clicking at random-scary and confusing.”)
- Make a time-line of the events in the film on a three-column graphic organizer and time each scene (“Man walks down street-35”) Optional activity: make a storyboard of each event. Discuss how the sounds might be used to accompany a silent film: to provide sounds effects, accompany the action, and create moods. Add elements of pitch, tempo, rhythm, and dynamics to the created sounds, focusing on variety.
- Decide which of the twelve sound bites works best with each event. List the sounds on the appropriate line in the third column of the graphic organizer. (“Man walks down street-35”-Popping sound”).
- Rehearse the soundtrack with the DVD to develop fluency in “reading” the graphic organizer
- Perform the silent film/soundtrack at a public event at the Arlington Cinema and Draffhouse

Approach

The residency will:

- Provide a creative experience that transforms students from film consumers to film score composers.
- Enhance visual literacy and critical thinking skills by requiring students to analyze film images and make appropriate choices of sound
- Help the student understand the principals of acoustics by discovering vibration patterns and sound generating possibilities of each newly created instrument.
- Improve the students’ literacy and math skills through the use of graphic organizers and mathematical concepts related to measuring time
- Teach the student to observe and describe moods and then to evoke those moods through sound
- Lead students to develop their own definition of ‘music’—expanded from the original definition of ‘organized sound’

Results for Students

Students will:

- Learn about the role that sounds and soundtracks play in films and gain experience in being their own soundtrack designers.
- Realize that there are other ways to make music than producing sounds on a familiar instrument such as the guitar, violin or piano.
- Understand the connection between music and emotion
- Learn to manipulate three of the main building blocks of music--pitch, rhythm, and sound color
- Experiment with finding multiple solutions to a problem and making informed choices.

Rationale

Improving reading comprehension is an important goal in middle school classes. Strategies involved in visual literacy have been proven to increase language and comprehension skills, and in today’s culture, students relate to moving images of television, video games and movies, often experimenting in these media themselves. Musical literacy also

has proven to build reading comprehension skills. This project, which combines visual literacy and music literacy, has been designed to draw their attention to the action on a movie screen, tracking it visually, remembering and connecting sequences of images and responding to those images within the time constraints of the action. Participating in an ongoing *narrative* (unlike interactive computer and video games that have a premise but not a developing story) allows students to experiment with and choose sounds, understand the concepts of pacing and continuous rhythm (ongoing sounds in time), and develop skills that can be applied to fluency and comprehension.

Giving students the opportunity to work with film, not just watch it, will also lead to a more critical TV and movie viewing audience. In this project they make informed decisions about the interaction of music and action, theories of film scoring, and sound timbre and character. More advanced and older students can record their film soundtracks and make quicktime videos of their projects.

Description: Three 50-minute teaching sessions alternating with two 30-minute classroom activity periods, 1 performance

- **TEACHING SESSION 1**—50 minutes: **SOUND AND ACTION:** Project director runs workshop activities in making sounds, in characterizing and classifying those sounds, and in pairing them with actions. Students are formed into groups, and search the classroom for up to ten portable items to use as instruments.
- **CLASSROOM ACTIVITY PERIOD 1**—30 minutes: Students experiment with making sounds on their new instruments. Then they list 12 contrasting sounds by name, description and 'instrument'. Based on what they have learned in Session 1, students may bring one or two supplementary objects from home that meet the criteria.
- **TEACHING SESSION 2**—50 minutes: **CREATING A SOUNDTRACK:** Project director gives a short narrated slide show about early film and music. The film to be scored is then viewed, a time line is made of its main events, listing them in two columns of a 3-column graphic organizer, and a discussion is led on how to best reflect these events in sound. Students break up into their groups, improvise to the film twice with or without instruments, and then start planning their soundtracks.
- **CLASSROOM ACTIVITY PERIOD 2**—30 minutes: Student groups finish planning their soundtracks and graph them in the third column of the graphic organizer. They rehearse the sounds in sequence, paying attention to the flow between sounds. Then they watch the DVD and practice their soundtrack with the right sequence and timing.
- **TEACHING SESSION 3**—50 minutes: **PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP:** Each student group performs its soundtrack for the others and gets feedback. Students continue to rehearse.
- **PERFORMANCE**—On a selected Saturday morning from 9-11 am class members perform their soundtracks at the Arlington Cinema 'n' Draffhouse for family and friends. A lunch of pizza and milk will be served by the Draffhouse.

Equipment needed/ other requirements

- Video monitor(s) with DVD player. It would be helpful to have more than one, so groups could rehearse independently, but rehearsals can also be staggered.
- DVD (s) of a silent film short subject IN PUBLIC DOMAIN (provided by residency director, held by teacher)
- 1 stopwatch for each group of students (provided by residency director, held by teacher)
- Items in the classroom to use as musical instruments
- A room large enough for students to break into groups and make sounds in relative privacy
- Three-column graphic organizers (provided by residency director on CD-Rom for duplication-one student in each group would be scribe)
- HELPFUL: 4-6 volunteers to facilitate small-group work

Residency Leader's Background

Tina Chancey is a performer, educator and scholar. A former chair of the Early Music America Education Committee, Dr. Chancey has been a presenter at Orff-Schulwerk, ASTA, MENC, and Chamber Music America national conferences. For the past two decades, she has presented workshops and assemblies in the DC public schools through the Washington Performing Arts Society's "Concerts in Schools" program.

A participant in the Kennedy Center Education Department's seminar, **Artists as Educators: Creating Teachers' Workshops**, Dr. Chancey recently provided the music component for a teachers' workshop presented by Rebecca Arkenberg at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Entitled *Fame and Folly in the Renaissance*, the workshop integrated visual art, literature, and music. Dr. Chancey is presently developing workshops, residencies and accompanying resource materials to complement each of Hesperus' 'History's Soundtrack' productions. In March 2003 she was selected to represent the Smithsonian Institution in a week-long educational residency in Long Beach, CA.

A founding member and director of HESPERUS, an early/traditional music ensemble that tours nationally and internationally, she is a former member of the rock band Blackmore's Night, the Folger Consort and the Ensemble for Early Music. A multi-instrumentalist, she plays early and traditional bowed strings and has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts to support debut performances on the French baroque pardessus de viole at the Kennedy Center and Weil Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall.

Dr. Chancey attended Oberlin College and received Masters degrees from Queens College and New York University, and a PhD from the Union Institute. Her articles on early and traditional music appear in scholarly and popular publications (including Early Music America Magazine for which she is book review editor). She has recorded for a score of labels from Arabesque to Windham Hill, and also works as an independent recording producer. With her late husband Scott Reiss, she was the recipient of a two-year grant from Earthwatch for research on Irish music.