

Listening Like a Musician: Practicing Active Listening Skills

Learning Objective

Students will demonstrate an understanding of active listening by identifying specific musical elements in a selected musical piece and articulating their observations through both guided and unguided prompts

Standard(s) Addressed

American String Teachers Association String Curriculum

- Content Area 3B – Historical and Cultural Elements
 - 1.2 & 2.2 – Students identify, describe and compare distinguishing characteristics of composers and styles from selected repertoire
 - 3.2 & 4.2 – Students analyze and classify music according to style, composer and genre
- Content Area 3C – Evaluation of Music and Musical Performance
 - 1.2, 2.2, 3.2 & 4.2 – Students describe personal preference in music listening and group performance
 - 4.4 – Students compare and contrast performances of various interpretations of the same piece, using appropriate terminology and informed value judgements

2014 National Core Arts Standards for Music (Developed by NAfME)

- MU:Re7.2.E.5a – Identify how knowledge of context and the use of repetition, similarities, and contrasts inform the response to music.
- MU:Re7.1.E.5a – Apply teacher-provided and collaboratively developed criteria to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of music and musical performances.
- MU:Cn11.0.E.5a – Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

Suggested Materials List

- Audio player (or access to streaming music)
- Selected piece of music
- Student handouts with active listening prompts
- Pencils/pens
- Optional: projector or board for group discussion visuals

Activity Description and Outline

Introduction (5 min)

- Define and briefly discuss passive vs. active listening
- Ask students to reflect on when and how they've participated in each type

Pre-Listening (5-7 mins)

- Distribute guided listening handout
- Review elements that the handout will ask them to focus on, such as dynamics, tempo, texture, instrumentation, phrasing, emotional response, etc.

First Listening (8-10 minutes)

- Play the piece without interruption
- Ask students to jot down freeform observations as they listen

First Reflection (5 minutes)

- Prompt students to fill out section 1 of the handout

Second Listening (10-12 minutes)

- Replay the piece, this time ask that the student focus on the elements outlined in section 2 of the handout

Second Reflection (5 -10 minutes)

- Allow students 5 minutes to complete notes and/or thoughts on the second listening
- For the remaining five minutes, prompt students to complete section 4 of the handout

Group Reflection

- Facilitate a full class discussion on what the students noticed in each section of the activity
- Discuss the role of active listening in performance, ensemble awareness and musical growth.

Take-Home Reflection

- As an extension to the in-class lesson, have students fulfil one of the prompts in section 5 as a take home reflection of the piece.
 - *Though they may not have the piece in front of them to listen to, it will force them to recall the things of the piece they remember based on the notes of their observations on the handout*

Time Estimate

50-60 minutes + 10 minute take home exercise. The exercise can be split over two or more sessions as needed with the take-home reflections completed in between each session.

Grouping Strategy

Individual work (listening and notes)

Whole class collaboration (reflections and debriefs)

Assessment

Informal: participation in discussion and completion of the listening handout

Formal: collect handout and evaluate based on the following criteria;

- *Depth of musical observation.*
- *Depth of connection to non-musical elements (emotions, life experience, pop culture references etc.).*

Adaptations

Beginner and/or younger student demographics should have the prompts focused on broader categories. Teacher can adapt materials as needed

Advanced students should have analysis of harmonic structure, historical contexts (time period), specific expressive techniques used, and/or musical form added for additional challenge and skill development.

For students with auditory processing difficulties, the use of a visual aide, such as a video recording of a performance instead of a streamed recording would allow for observation based on visual performance in addition to the auditory performance cues.

Follow-Up Activity Ideas

- Have students create a visual map or drawing of the piece based on their listening.
- Ask students to bring in a piece of their choosing and lead a brief peer listening group.
- Repeat the activity with ensemble recordings from class performances.