A Symphony Experience in Watercolor

Grade Level:

All Levels

Integrated Subjects

Visual Arts, Music

Lesson Overview

This lesson was designed for a 4th grade class, but is interesting and easy to adapt and use with all grade levels. The purpose of this lesson is for the students to paint their impression in watercolor of one of their experiences, following a performance of the symphony orchestra.

Student Learning Overview

After completion of this lesson the students will have a deeper understanding of the traditional forum used for orchestra performances, as well as a greater awareness of live music being performed by professional musicians, and a painting reflecting their impression of the concert experience.

Learning Sequence

The preparation for this lesson requires several weeks of discussion specifically focusing on the performance students will be attending. 1.) Initially, students discuss the role of the orchestra's conductor, musicians, and audience. 2.) Secondly, a lesson covering the family of instruments must take place. Strings, woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments and their positions in the orchestra would all be included in this discussion. The San Francisco Symphony’s sfskids.com website is wonderful for this segment of the lesson. 3.) Thirdly, the students have multiple listening experiences with the expected musical selections for the planned concert, and an opportunity to discuss each one. 4.) The next step is for the class to attend a live concert of the symphony orchestra. 5.) After attending the concert, preferably on the same day as the concert, the lesson would begin with a very brief talk about impressionist paintings and the fluid nature of painting from memory and from the feelings these memories stir inside. 6.) Let the students guide the discussion about their trip to the concert. Include mention of transportation, city scenes, music halls, the lobby, audience, stage, and so on. 7.) Set up watercolors, water, paper, and brushes for each student. 8.) Direct students to focus on one aspect of their concert experience and to paint an impression drawn from memory alone. 9.) Have students write a brief paragraph explaining the relevance of their artwork and how it reflects the symphony orchestra and their experience.
Assessment

The student work I assessed after the San Francisco Symphony’s Concert for Kids was a collection of watercolor paintings that depicted the trip to and from Davies Symphony Hall, the interior and exterior of Davies Symphony Hall, the conductor, the audience, and the instruments. Each painting was done on an 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper and was bordered by a fine black line around the edge of each picture. The paintings were backed up by black construction paper which served as frames to the artwork. Additional assessment was a brief paragraph written by each student about the artwork and its relevance to the concert experience.

Classical Music Used In This Lesson

The music used by my students was the program from San Francisco Symphony’s Concert for Kids 2010, "Music Here, There, and Everywhere". The pieces used included:

*Water Music* by George Frideric Handel

“Morning” from *Peer Gynt Suite* by Edvard Hagerup Grieg

*Fanfare for the Common Man* and “Hoedown” from *Rodeo* by Aaron Copland

“Storm” from *William Tell* by Gioachino Rossini

*The Stars and Stripes Forever* by John Philip Sousa

*The Ride of the Valkyries* by Richard Wagner

(Our class focus had been on Sousa's *The Stars and Stripes Forever* because it reflected other lessons we were covering regarding American Heroes.)

Materials & Equipment

CD with music expected to be played at the concert; class set of watercolor paints and brushes; paper (plain bond or watercolor paper); cups for water; paper towels; writing paper and pencils

Time Required

Preliminary lessons may take several weeks. The concert takes a large portion of the school day. The actual lesson, however, takes about one hour from beginning to end!

National Music Standards

Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

Evaluating music and music performances

Understanding relationships between music, other arts, and outside disciplines

Understanding music in relation to history and culture

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State Standards

California standards: English-Language Arts, Grade 4, Writing 1.2a; Music, Grade 4, 3-5

Connections to Pathways to Integration

YELLOW: Music supports other content areas

Teacher to Teacher

My intention was for this lesson to reflect impressionist paintings via watercolor. What I had envisioned quickly changed. In my class the paintings became expressionistic and quite bold - even when using watercolor! The black and red colors my students used to paint the conductor and the seating at Davies Symphony Hall brought forth the expressionist in many of my students.