

Teaching Theory, Performance, and Aural Skills through Popular Music

A Curriculum Unit Project

Josh Layton

Bridgewater College

**Rationale:** The way we study music at the secondary level and beyond is based largely on tradition. For example, we usually perform in the same few types of ensembles, often using a particular set of instruments, and even selecting pieces from our proven pool of composers. This can be problematic for a few reasons, however. After years of having our students learn by assigning them the same few pieces written centuries ago by dead composers, a lack of interest in studying music has developed in many young people. If music itself can evolve and innovate, then the way we teach it should evolve with it. Students have just as much to learn from the Bruno Mars songs they hear on the radio than they do from classic Chopin and Beethoven. Additionally, composing music can be more accessible to students than ever before if we allow our definition of composing to be more inclusive. Young people can use free software on laptops to make music at a level that audio engineers in professional studios ten years ago couldn’t dream of achieving.

The focus of this unit will be to use music that is current and relevant to students’ daily lives to teach music fundamentals. Students will use this experience to both build an understanding of what goes into creating a song, and to foster an interest in music and potentially participating in musical opportunities that present themselves in the future.

**Context:** This curriculum project is deigned with to be applied to a fourth grade general music classroom meeting for 30 minutes.

**Goals:** At the end of this unit, students will be able to identify key characteristics in popular songs, understand techniques associated with composing popular music, and demonstrate basic knowledge of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic music concepts.

In order to meet our goal, we consider that at the end of the unit students will need to be able to:

* Identify differences between classical and popular music
* Respond to different types and genres of popular music
* Identify different time signatures used in current songs
* Perform popular songs on multiple instruments
* Differentiate between major and minor chords
* Create chords and chord structures used in popular music

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Lesson Title  Pop Music Curriculum 1 | | | | | | Grade 4 |
| Long Term Goals/Big Idea (connect to State or National standards)  4.1 6. identifying the meaning of the upper and lower numbers of simple time signatures  4.6 The student will create music by 2. composing short melodic and rhythmic phrases within specified guidelines  4.3 5. accompanying songs and chants with I, IV, and V(V7 ) chords  4.2 2. singing diatonic melodies | | | | | | |
| Learning Objectives for this Lesson  1. As a result of the lesson, students will be able to distinguish between songs in 2/4 or 4/4 and 3/4 meter.  2. As a result of the lesson, students will be able to compose a passage of music using I, IV, and V7 chords as a group.  3. As a result of the lesson, students will begin to understand how to accompany the song “Best Day of my Life” with ukulele. | | | | | | |
| Music Engagements and Experiences | | | | Concepts | | |
| X sing (performing)  X play (performing)  X compose/arrange (creating)  ☐improvise (creating)  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | ☐move (responding)  X listen (responding)  X analyze/evaluate (responding)  ☐relate to historical/culture/other subjects (connecting)  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | ☐beat/pulse  ☐rhythm  X meter  ☐tempo  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | ☐pitch  ☐melody  X harmony  ☐dynamics  ☐texture  ☐timbre | |
| Procedures to Support Learning  2 min Students will come into the classroom and sit in their assigned circle spots according to established classroom procedures. The teacher will greet the class and explain the daily agenda.  10 min The teacher will explain the Smartboard game in which students will listen to a song and drag the song into a bin based on whether they think it is in 4 or 3 time. The students will use their prior knowledge of big beats to perform this task as a group. During this time the teacher can informally asses students’ knowledge of basic meter.  10 min The teacher will distribute Orff instruments. Using the template on the Smartboard, students will fill in the boxes with I, V7 or IV as a group. Students will then perform their composition as a group using chord borduns.  8 min Students will begin working on the ukulele play-along to “Best Day of my Life.” We will continue working on this song for the next two lessons in preparation for our spring concert. | | | | | | |
| Assessment Techniques | | | Materials/Room Set Up | | | |
| ☐performance task  ☐recording  ☐self/peer assessment  ☐test/quiz | ☐journal  ☐portfolio  ☐essay/report  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | Smartboard slides for meter game and chord composition activity, Ukuleles, Orff Instruments and mallets, playback device <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAzqewpjji0> | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Lesson Title  Pop Music Curriculum 2 | | | | | | Grade 4 |
| Long Term Goals/Big Idea (connect to State or National standards)  4.3 5. accompanying songs and chants with I, IV, and V (V7) chords  4.2 2. singing diatonic melodies  4.7.2. placing musical examples into categories of style  4.4 The student will perform rhythmic patterns that include dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. | | | | | | |
| Learning Objectives for this Lesson  1. As a result of the lesson, students will be able to accurately distinguish between popular musical genres.  2. As a result of the lesson, students will be able to assign basic rhythms to a composed passage.  3. Students will continue practicing the ukulele play-along of “Best Day of my Life” | | | | | | |
| Music Engagements and Experiences | | | | Concepts | | |
| X sing (performing)  X play (performing)  X compose/arrange (creating)  ☐improvise (creating)  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | ☐move (responding)  ☐listen (responding)  ☐analyze/evaluate (responding)  ☐relate to historical/culture/other subjects (connecting)  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | X beat/pulse  X rhythm  ☐meter  ☐tempo  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | ☐pitch  ☐melody  ☐harmony  ☐dynamics  ☐texture  ☐timbre | |
| Procedures to Support Learning  2 min Students will come into the classroom and sit in their assigned circle spots according to established classroom procedures. The teacher will greet the class and explain the daily agenda.  10 min The teacher will explain the activity in which students will play four corners using musical genres. Students will listen to a song determine which genre of each song (pop, rap, country, rock) and stand in a corresponding corner of the room. During this activity the teacher may assess students’ prior knowledge of musical genres.  10 min The teacher will pull up the smartboard slide from the previous lesson that students used to compose a passage using chord borduns. The students will use the same process to assign each chord a basic four-beat rhythm. Students will then perform the composition with the new rhythms on Orff instruments.  8 min This time will be used to continue practicing the ukulele play-along for the spring concert. | | | | | | |
| Assessment Techniques | | | Materials/Room Set Up | | | |
| ☐performance task  ☐recording  ☐self/peer assessment  ☐test/quiz | ☐journal  ☐portfolio  ☐essay/report  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | Ukuleles, Orff instruments, Smartboard slide, playback device <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAzqewpjji0> | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Lesson Title  Pop music curriculum 3 | | | | | | Grade 4 |
| Long Term Goals/Big Idea (connect to State or National standards)  4.3 5. accompanying songs and chants with I, IV, and V (V7) chords  4.2 2. singing diatonic melodies  4.1.7. identifying dynamic markings (e.g., p, mp, mf, f) | | | | | | |
| Learning Objectives for this Lesson  1. As a result of the lesson, students will respond to and demonstrate a knowledge of dynamic levels.  2. As a result of the lesson, students will complete the ukulele play-along of “Best Day of my Life.” | | | | | | |
| Music Engagements and Experiences | | | | Concepts | | |
| X sing (performing)  X play (performing)  ☐compose/arrange (creating)  ☐improvise (creating)  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | X move (responding)  X listen (responding)  X analyze/evaluate (responding)  ☐relate to historical/culture/other subjects (connecting)  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | ☐beat/pulse  ☐rhythm  ☐meter  ☐tempo  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | ☐pitch  ☐melody  ☐harmony  ☐dynamics  ☐texture  ☐timbre | |
| Procedures to Support Learning  2 min Students will come into the classroom and sit in their assigned circle spots according to established classroom procedures. The teacher will greet the class and explain the daily agenda.  8 min Teacher will explain the dynamic activity. Students will move around the room and respond to the dynamic level of the music. If the music being played is softer, students will move more subtly. If the music is louder, the students will move more exaggeratedly. It is crucial that students spread out and respect each other’s space if this activity is to work.  10 min Students will complete the assessment based on the material covered by the previous activity and the previous two classes. The teacher will briefly review all material. Students will need to listen to songs and write corresponding genres and meters. There will be a bonus section in which students can sort dynamic markings from softest to loudest.  10 min. Students will use the remaining class time to finish rehearsing the “Best Day of my Life” ukulele play-along for the spring concert | | | | | | |
| Assessment Techniques | | | Materials/Room Set Up | | | |
| ☐performance task  ☐recording  ☐self/peer assessment  X test/quiz | ☐journal  ☐portfolio  ☐essay/report  ☐\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | Ukuleles, Smartboard, playback device, Quiz, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAzqewpjji0> | | | |

**Quiz Time!!!!** Name: Date:

**Directions: For each song you hear write the GENRE. (Rap, Country, Rock, or Pop).**

1.

2.

3.

4.

**Directions: Fore each song you hear, write the METER. (4/4 or 3/4).**

1.

2.

3.

4.

**Bonus!!!!: Sort the following dynamic markings in order of softest to loudest: f, mf, ff, p, mp.**