

The KEY to Music Journaling Incorporating CMT standards into Responding to Music

By Meredith Napolitano

In today's educational world of high pressure testing and an increased focus on literacy, we are being asked to support these skills more and more. Each year, as I set my own professional goals, my principal asks how I can support the building and town-wide goals of increased focus on reading and writing. It is important to me that whatever literacy integration I teach ties directly into my music curriculum and aligns with the National Standards.

I began having the third through fifth grade students keep listening response journals several years ago. I purchase composition books with my supply budget, but other teachers have used lined paper stapled together with a cover the student can design. Students keep these journals in the music folders and can write in them anytime in response to what we listen to, and make several "official" entries each year. All journal entries, in addition to asking the students to respond to music, focus on a CMT standard in either reading or writing. They need to make connections, give evidence, and explain their reasoning. The music can be a direct focus or a jumping off point for total creativity. To further the connection, their responses are scored by me according to the CMT system of 1-6 for creative writing, and 0-2 for short answer questions. Students spend fifteen minutes once or twice a month actively writing in their journals. I put the CD on repeat, and let them spread out in the room to relax and listen while they write.

Kindergarten, first and second grade students are also responding to music. Although they do not keep a true journal, once a month they do write about what they hear, on a level that they can do. Kindergarten students draw a picture of what they hear, and using invented spelling, label that picture and share it with the class. First and second grade students can add a sentence or two to their drawing, and answer short questions.

Here are some suggested topics and listenings to get you started:

- Villa-Lobos "The Little Train of Caipira"
 - This music is about a train ride. Listen to the music and write down some ideas about where the train is going, and what it might be passing on its way. Let the sounds in the music be your guide, and as you write down your ideas, give musical evidence for your thinking.
- Vivaldi "Four Seasons"
 - You are listening to ONE movement of the Four Seasons. Which one do you think it is? Support your answer with evidence from the music.
 - Think of a personal memory you have of this season. Make a connection between this music and your memory.
 - Do you like this music? Why or why not? Do you think people liked it when it was written? Why or why not?
 - What do you think Vivaldi will do to make music sound like the other three seasons? List the seasons and your predictions.
- Bach "Toccatto and Fugue in d minor" (or any "Halloween" piece – I rotate between 6 or so to keep it fresh)
 - Think of a good ghost story. Think of a scary movie. What makes the movie so scary? A lot of it is the soundtrack and the way the music plays with your emotions. Consider this music the soundtrack for your scary story. See if you can write something that frightens me!
- America the Beautiful and The Star Spangled Banner
 - The Star Spangled Banner was named our National Anthem in 1931. Some people think there is a better choice out there, and many people think America the Beautiful is that choice. List the possible reasons The Star Spangled Banner was suggested. List the possible reasons people have suggested America the Beautiful. Decide which YOU think

is a better choice. Write a letter to the president to convince him or her why your choice is better.

- Vivaldi – “Summer” – Movement III – Thunderstorm
 - Think of a thunderstorm and come up with a good snapshot in your mind. Use your different senses and write down five things you thought of. Brainstorm some words that describe the music. Pretend you are explaining it to someone who hasn’t heard it. How did the composer connect the music to your picture of a thunderstorm? Write a letter to someone describing a huge thunderstorm. Use ideas from your snapshot and what the composer did.
- Holst – The Planets – choose a movement!
 - One day you meet a creature from outer space. You are the only one who saw it. Use the ideas from the music to write a story telling about your adventure.
- Rimsky-Korsakov – Flight of the Bumblebee
 - You are outside relaxing when you see the hugest butterfly you’ve ever imagined. Use clues from the music to write a story about what happens next.
- Mussorgsky – Ballet of the Unhatched Chicken
 - You are a chicken farmer. One day your chickens start dancing and singing! What will you do with these amazing chickens?
- Your Choice of Favorites
 - What is your favorite song? Why do you like it so much?
 - Compare these two pieces. How are they like each other? How are they different?
 - Think of a picture to match this music. Why did your picture what you did?
 - To write music, a composer needs to be aware of what sounds inspire which emotions. What sounds suggest peace and calm? What sounds suggest excitement?

Be creative! Listen to some old favorites or music you already use in your curriculum and be inspired. Most of us already ask the students to respond orally – taking it to the next level helps the students in both music AND literacy, helping us to be a part of educating the whole child.