

In the Classroom

En Classe

This section presents descriptions of teaching techniques or practical classroom activities.

Cette section est consacrée à la description de différentes techniques ou activités d'enseignement.

MUSIC HATH CHARMS: MUSIC AND STUDENT-CREATED STORIES IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

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With a minimum of preparation any teacher can always have at hand an activity that:

1. is suitable for learners from age 9 to adult;
2. is adaptable for high beginner through advanced levels;
3. incorporates all four language skills;
4. is adaptable to any theme or time restriction;
5. necessitates student input and real communication.

The above description is of an activity that you may already have tried in your classroom without realizing the many ways it can be adapted. I'm talking about the Music Story, where students, cued by a selection of music, create stories reflecting their own interests.

The only equipment necessary is a record player or cassette recorder and a selection of instrumental pieces. Songs can serve as the basis for valuable pedagogical activities; however, in this case, the lyrics only prove to distract students and restrict their imaginations.

Music which makes a strong statement should be chosen. It should be of the type which readily sparks images. Steer clear of so-called "elevator music," designed to lull the listener into passive oblivion. Instead, consider the following selections as examples of the type of music that will be successful: Paul Horn's *Haida* from the album *Inside II*, Rossini's *William Tell Overture* abridged from *Music from the Movie: A Clockwork Orange*, Bruce Cockburn's *Lightstorm* from *Night Vision*, Jean-Pierre Rampal's *Vélocé* from *Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano*, and Edmond and Quentin Badoux's *Vaca Loca* from *Sukay*, ancient music of South America.

PROCEDURE

1. Play the music and encourage students to listen while letting their minds wander.
2. Play the music a second time and ask students to jot down words or phrases that describe what they feel or imagine, in response to the music. Allow sufficient time for students to write up a short story inspired by the music—15 to 30 minutes depending on your expectations and the students' capabilities.
3. Divide the class into small groups of four or five to allow students to share their stories.
4. Replay the music and finish with a full class discussion about the stories, noting similarities and differences.

Music Stories is an activity covering an entire class period for students who already have some proficiency in reading and writing skills. However, the activity can also be adapted for use with beginning level students by simply having them tell their stories in small groups. Students can then regroup to narrate or perform their stories, incorporating the music as background.

Keep a selection of records or tapes on hand in the classroom and use Music Stories as a filler to help students unwind, or to introduce new themes or materials. In such instances, play the music and then move right into the whole class discussion.

If your classroom facilities incorporate a small audio centre with headphones, a tape could be left for students to work on individualized instruction programs. The stories could be kept in a diary or student file, and the musical selections changed on a regular basis.

These suggestions are meant to serve as a beginning. Once you've experimented with music, consider recorded sound effects using the same procedure. Audio libraries stock ready-made sound series, generally catalogued by type or theme. Use these sounds or combine them to create your own recordings. As a Hallowe'en or mystery activity try a ghoulish sequence like the following: heavy footsteps, a squeaking door opening, floor boards creaking, heartbeats, a lion roaring, a scream, more heartbeats, and maniacal laughter.

If you've never used Music Stories, try them. If you have used Music Stories, consider some of the variations mentioned here and go on to create others of your own.

THE AUTHOR

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