

The Music and Life of Gershwin in Perspectives

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Jonathan Bogue at Holland High
3rd Hour, Music Appreciation B grades 9-12
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Content: I am teaching about George Gershwin; the students will learn about his life and his music, specifically “Swanee” and *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Instructional Strategies: I will use a KWL for the students to express their prior knowledge and give them a way to organize their thoughts. I will also use Read-Write-Pair-Share to give them a way to fully process an article they will read. Finally, I will use RAFT as their independent practice so that the students can show what they have learned in a creative way.

Audience: There are 28 students. 20 are male, 8 are female. White, Hispanic and African-American are all represented. English and Spanish are both spoken among the students. Some speak Spanish at home. A few have attention disorders. I am assuming they know what Mr. Bogue has taught them thus far in the class. Specifically I am assuming that they know basic music terms and have an idea of what different instruments sound like. Most of them have probably never heard of Gershwin but have likely heard his music on TV commercials or through other things without connecting the name to the work.

Length of Lesson: 73 minutes (breakdown throughout lesson plan)

Materials Needed:

Teacher

- handouts (3)
- burned CD
- Fantasia 2000*
- markers for the board

Students

- notebook
- pencil

Rationale: This lesson is important because it addresses a significant American composer in the twentieth century. This class doesn't really have a curriculum, so Mr. Bogue, the teacher, is just picking important contributors to music in the twentieth century.

Lesson Objective: The students will be able to identify instruments and distinguishing features of Gershwin's (an American twentieth century composer) music along with knowing about his life and what influenced his music by filling in a KWL chart.

GLCE: There aren't any GLCEs for music, but the Michigan arts education says that students should "demonstrate extensive knowledge and use of the technical vocabulary of music" and "analyze aural examples of a varied repertoire of music, representing diverse genres and cultures, by describing the uses of elements of music and expressive devices."

Classroom Organization: Students will sit in their assigned seats the whole time but will join with partners next to them or in front/behind them on one occasion. I expect that they will respect me and each other and their actions will follow accordingly. They will know to do this by the tone I set and by the prior knowledge they have in how to behave in this class. I will manage time by practicing beforehand and keeping an eye on the clock. Materials will be placed where I need them and will help with seamless transitions. To get the students' attention, I will stand in front of the room and verbally ask for their attention. I will maintain some of what Mr. Bogue does in the sense of reading a packet, listening to music and having students answer questions in their notebooks, but I will also change some things up to fit it in the direct instruction lesson plan.

<p>Anticipatory Activity</p> <p>Estimated time: 10 minutes</p> <p>I will use a KWL as the anticipatory activity. The students will each have their own KWL chart and fill it in themselves and then we will come together as a class to create a class KWL chart on the board that we can work off of for the rest of the class.</p>	<p>“Hello, everyone! I hope you are having a great day! Today we are going to learn about George Gershwin, but before I tell you anything about him, I want you to fill out the first two columns on the chart you got when you walked in the room. Fill the first column with everything that you know about Gershwin. Then, in the second column, write at least three questions about Gershwin that you would like answered by the end of our class.”</p> <p>(3-5 minutes for students to fill in chart)</p> <p>“Alright, I can’t wait to hear what you all wrote. Who has something they would like to share about what they know about George Gershwin?”</p> <p>ESR: “He was famous”</p> <p>“Yes, that is correct! Anyone else?”</p> <p>ESR: “He was a composer”</p> <p>ESR: “He wrote operas”</p> <p>ESR: “He is dead”</p> <p>“Anyone else have anything left to share? Well, this is a good start for our lesson today. Now, what questions do you have about Gershwin?”</p>

	<p>ESR: "What kind of music did he write?"</p> <p>ESR: "What instrument did he play?"</p> <p>ESR: "Where did he live?"</p> <p>ESR: "Why do we need to know who he is?"</p> <p>"Those are some great questions and I will do all I can to answer as many as I can during the time we have together today. As we go through the lesson, I invite you to fill in the "What have I learned?" column as we answer any questions you might have asked on your chart."</p>
<p>State the Objective</p> <p>Estimated time: 1 minute</p>	<p>"Today we're going to learn about Gershwin; his music and his life and how they affected each other. We will do this by reading, listening and writing."</p>
<p>Presentation of Content</p> <p>Estimated time: 50 minutes</p>	<p>"Let's start off with just some basics of his life. Gershwin's parents emigrated from Russia to the United States in 1891 and George was born in New York on September 26, 1898. He started off playing street sports with the other poor kids in his neighborhood. He didn't have any music experience until he was twelve years old.</p>

	<p>At that age, a piano was brought to his house for his older brother, Ira. George was a curious boy and experimented with the piano. He enjoyed playing it and learned to play some popular songs he had memorized from hearing at other times.</p> <p>He started taking lessons when he was thirteen for 50 cents a week. After four months of lessons, the lady who had been teaching him said she had nothing left to teach him, he knew all the basics that she had to pass on. Education was not something that was strongly encouraged in his family. Ira graduated high school and started college, but George didn't even finish high school.</p> <p>When he was fifteen years old, he quit school to become a pianist. He studied piano with a few other musicians and continued to learn. In 1916, when Gershwin was only 17 or 18 years old, he published his first song. Then two years later, he collaborated with Irving Caesar and wrote "Swanee."</p> <p>(listen to "Swanee," 2 minutes)</p>

	<p>"Now, I know this doesn't sound like a great song in 2011, but in 1920, it was on the charts for eighteen weeks and held the number one spot for nine! Over one million copies of the music were sold and over 2 million records were sold. At first, it didn't catch on, but Al Jolson heard Gershwin play it and he wanted to sing it! Al Jolson is the man who sang it in the recording we listened to. He was an American singer, comedian and actor and was dubbed "The World's Greatest Entertainer" in his time. So, Gershwin, who didn't graduate high school, had a famous man singing a piece he wrote when he was 21. That's pretty impressive! Gershwin composed so much; from songs to concertos to operas and everything in between. At age 38, he died of a brain tumor. He became famous from a mere 20 years of composing!"</p>

<p>Check for understanding: Knowledge</p>	<p>"I am now passing out the first of a few handouts that I would like you to read. They are all from a book called <i>Gershwin in His Time</i> edited by Gregory R. Suriano. This book has the <i>Foreward</i> which you are going to read now, followed by many articles that were printed in newspapers, magazines, and books of Gershwin's time. Some of them were concert reviews and some were personal friends writing about spending time with George. So, there's some background on what you're about to read. Now I'm going to give you a few minutes to read this short excerpt."</p> <p>(4-6 minutes to read)</p> <p>"What did you guys think of that story about Groucho Marx? Does anyone know who he is?"</p> <p>ESR: "Yea, he was a comedian."</p> <p>"Yes he was! Great job."</p> <p>ESR: "Uhhh....<i>blank stares</i>..."</p> <p>"He was a comedian. To give you a better idea of how well-known he was, did you know that he guest hosted <i>The Tonight Show</i> in 1962? He was a popular dude."</p>

Check for understanding: Knowledge and analysis	<p>"What does that tell you about George Gershwin or what did anything from the rest of the article tell you about him?"</p> <p>ESR: "Gershwin was famous."</p> <p>ESR: "He combined traditional European music with American jazz."</p> <p>ESR: "He wrote a ton of music."</p> <p>"All really great answers! Do we have any more information for our chart? Let's fill in what we have learned this far."</p>
Check for understanding: could be: knowledge, comprehension or analysis	<p>(fill in any answers we have discovered)</p> <p>"So, I mentioned Ira earlier, he was George's older brother. He started college, his parents wanted him to be a doctor, but he wanted to work with George. He was a lyricist; he wrote the words to nearly all the songs that George wrote the music for. Some of the best known of these songs are "The Man I Love," "I Got Rhythm," and "Someone to Watch Over Me." George and Ira also worked together to write some musical comedies and operettas. They won a Pulitzer Prize for drama for one of the musical/operettas they composed."</p>

<p>Check for understanding: knowledge, comprehension, analysis</p>	<p>"Not only did Gershwin compose pieces with words, but he also wrote some music for orchestra. One of the most well-known orchestral pieces he composed is called <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i>. Before we learn much about this piece, I would like you to read another article. This is from the same book as earlier, but this article was taken from <i>The Outlook</i>, a weekly magazine printed in New York City. As you read this, please keep in mind how different people might be responding to Gershwin's music at the time."</p> <p>(6-8 minutes to read "Gershwin and Musical Snobbery")</p> <p>"Please take out your notebooks and take a couple minutes to write down a few thoughts and reactions you had to this article."</p> <p>(2 minutes to write)</p> <p>"Now turn to the person next to you and tell them what you wrote."</p> <p>(1 minute to share)</p> <p>"Alright everyone, let's share with the class some of your thoughts and reactions."</p>

Check for understanding: Analysis	<p>ESR: "It's cool how the author relates Gershwin to some other composers we have studied."</p> <p>ESR: "It's interesting how the author takes back a statement he made earlier about how he disliked Gershwin."</p> <p>"Good, thanks for sharing your thoughts!"</p> <p>"Now that we know a bit more about what different people thought of this music, I would like you all to make your own judgment. I am going to show you a video. <i>Fantasia</i> was originally created in 1940. It was a Walt Disney Animated Classic that took many classical songs and put them to an animated story. In 1999, Disney created a sequel called <i>Fantasia 2000</i>. This movie has Gershwin's <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i>. This performance is done by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra featuring Ralph Grierson at the piano. Obviously, the song did not originally have this story and these pictures to go along with it, but I thought you all might enjoy it."</p> <p>(<i>Fantasia 2000</i>, 13 minutes)</p> <p>"What did you think of the piece?"</p> <p>ESR: "It was cool!" "It was long..." "It sounded like jazz, but different."</p>

<p>Check for understanding: comprehension and application</p>	<p>"Those are all great answers! Can you tell me what instruments you heard?"</p> <p>ESR: "Clarinet, piano, violins, basses."</p> <p>"Great! The clarinet has the solo at the beginning and the piano is featured throughout, and the whole orchestra accompanies them at different throughout the piece. Good listening."</p> <p>"This is about all the information we are going to have time for today, so let's fill in the rest of our chart with the information we learned today." (fill in chart with students' answers to questions)</p> <p>"We weren't able to cover all the questions you had, so if you are burning for an answer, I challenge you to look it up in the library or at home later today and we can talk about it tomorrow."</p>
<p>Check for Understanding Estimated time: 2 minutes</p>	<p>(a lot of check for understanding is done throughout while filling out "What have I learned?" section of KWL chart)</p> <p>"Let's quickly check to make sure you understand what we've talked about so far. Feel free to use your KWL charts. Thumbs up if what I say is true,</p>

knowledge	<p>thumbs down if it's false. Gershwin only wrote solo piano music. False, good job everyone!</p> <p>Alright, Gershwin combined traditional European music with modern American jazz. That is true, nice job! Last one: Gershwin was a stuck-up grouch. False, great job! Gershwin was well-known for being a kind person and being honestly excited about his music for the sake of music, and not bragging about how great <i>he</i> was.”</p>
<p>Guided Practice</p> <p>Estimated time: 3-4 minutes</p>	<p>(Filling in the KWL chart was the guided practice. The students learned about Gershwin by reading and listening and I helped them organize their ideas and express them in writing.)</p>

<p>Independent Practice</p> <p>Estimated time: 6-8 minutes</p> <p>Students will use RAFT to express what they have learned.</p> <p>This question is an application question in Bloom's Taxonomy.</p>	<p>"Now that you all know all there is to know about Gershwin, I have a fun project. It won't take very much time, but it will help you take a new perspective on Gershwin and his music. Right now, I am passing out a sheet of paper. You will find, on this sheet of paper, a role, an audience, a format and a topic. I would like you all to use what you know to take on the role of George Gershwin's parents writing an obituary. Their beloved son has just passed away and they are informing the public of the tragedy of his death. The audience is all the big newspapers throughout the United States of America."</p>
<p>Closing</p>	<p>"Thank you all for your time and focus today! I hope you enjoyed learning about George Gershwin. Please be sure you hand in the letters you wrote, but keep your KWL chart in your notebook for Mr. Bogue to check later."</p>

Assessment: Mr. Bogue collects notebooks every other week to check what the students are learning. The KWL will be in the notebook to be collected at a later date. I

will collect the RAFT assignment and read through them to be sure that the students have an idea of Gershwin's life and how his music affected those around him.

Meeting the Needs of All Students:

Student Needs	How I will address the need
Seven students speak Spanish at home	If I use a word they may not know, I will describe the word and continually ask to make sure the students are understanding what I am saying.
Three students have some form of ADD or ADHD	I will keep the lesson moving and try to keep the students focused by having one main thing going on at a time.

Technology: I will use the boombox for the CD of "Swanee" and I will use the projector and computer to play *Rhapsody in Blue* from *Fantasia 2000*. These two things will enhance the learning of the students by listening to the music. I will also use the document camera to show pictures of musicals Gershwin wrote and album covers.

Handout: I have two parts copied from the book *Gershwin in His Time* that will be handed out separately. These will allow the students to critically read about Gershwin's life. There is also the KWL chart that each student will receive to record what questions they have and what knowledge they gain during the lesson. Finally, there is the RAFT handout with a role, audience, format and topic that the students will complete for their independent practice and turn in.