

Connecting *Moscow, 1941* to the Historic Event

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Description of Student Population:

My eighth grade band has 32 students. Eight of these students, 25 percent of the students in this class, speak a language other than English in their homes. Six of them speak Spanish, one speaks Polish, and one speaks Mandarin. I have four other students who speak English at home but are fairly familiar with other languages their parents speak: Mende, French, and Tagalog. All of these students have reached the point where they are comfortable communicating verbally in English with their teachers and peers; all but two can communicate in written language correctly and accurately and the other two struggle with spelling and order of words in writing. Those who still struggle with written English are both Spanish speakers at home.

Three of my students have IEPs, and three of my students have 504s. Five of my students have also been diagnosed as gifted. Only one of the ELLs has a 504 and none have IEPs or have been diagnosed gifted. The student who has a 504 and is an ELL has a 504 for anxiety which does not have to do with her language learning.

Language Objectives: Students will explore the German attack on Moscow in 1941, collect information, and write how they believe Moscow, 1941 (a piece we are playing) reflects the historical experience.

Description of Lesson:

We have been working on *Moscow, 1941* by Brian Balmages for about a month. The students know that it is about an attack during World War II, but the purpose of this lesson is for the students to do some research and learn even more about the timeline of the German's attempt to invade Moscow in 1941 and how the Russians successfully held them off. Then, they will use that information to narrate which parts of the song we are playing reflect different parts of the invasion attempt timeline. The students have learned the basics of this song, but I believe it is important for students to have a purpose in the music they make. The hope is that after this lesson, they can understand the victory Moscow felt in holding off the German invasion and portray that well through their playing to our audience at our concert in April.

I will provide the students with the lyrics to *Meadowlands*, the song this piece is based on and encourage them to use their Chromebooks to do further research. Then, the students will be provided with a piece of paper with the sections of the piece outlined and will be asked to write what part of the invasion they believe is happening in each of the musical sections. They will share with a small group and our goal will be to come up with one timeline that we all can agree on.

Text Material:

The text the students will receive is the lyrics to *Meadowlands*, a Russian folk song sung from the perspective of a member of the Russian army during World War II. There have been many renditions of this song made since the original in 1933, but the lyrics remain powerful throughout the many arrangements.

Meadowlands, meadowlands,
Through you heroes now are treading
Red army heroes of the nation
Heroes of the mighty Red army, ah!

Maidens are weeping
Their solitary vigils keeping
Weeping for their sweethearts who are fighting
Fighting in the mighty Red army, ah!

Gay roads are winding
The sunlight on them now is shining
Over them the heroes are passing
Heroes of the mighty Red army, ah!

Let ev'ry maiden
With heart no longer heavy laden
Strike up the singing now more loudly
Sing our fighting song so proudly, ah!

Lesson Activities

1. Students enter classroom and listen to *Moscow, 1941* by Brian Balmages over the speakers as they enter
2. Students are asked what they know about this piece (think-pair-share)
3. Students will watch a short video on Discovery Education (<https://app.discoveryeducation.com/learn/videos/3014fd28-7581-46e5-8a08-20518235a643/>) to give context to the attack on Moscow
4. Students are provided with lyrics to *Meadowlands*, the Russian folk song this piece was based on and are to read the lyrics and try to interpret what it says
5. We will go through the lyrics as a class and help students interpret more challenging sections until we have decoded the whole piece
6. Students will do additional research (on Chromebooks) to learn more about the Nazi invasion of Moscow in 1941
7. Students will also receive a worksheet with each of the large measure numbers laid out that requires the students to write what parts of the event are represented by different sections of the music
8. Students will get in groups of 2-4 students based on shoe type and share their thoughts and this will allow them to create a cohesive idea
9. Each group shares thoughts for each large measure number and we create a group idea
10. We play through the piece and consider those different events as we play
11. Reflect on the playing experience on the back of the outline worksheet and turn it in, pack up, class is over

Linguistic Challenges:

The biggest challenge of this text is that it is poetry with metaphors and more “flowery” words used to describe basic and mundane things. This will require some assistance. At first, I want the students to try to discover on their own and make educated guesses on what some of the phrases mean, but then it is important to provide some scaffolding and help all students have a complete understanding. We can do this with looking up words in the dictionary, figuring out how “ev’ry” is a short version of “every” and explain that, and just allow students to ask questions. After interpreting this as a class, students can do their own research and discover information at their reading level to aid their understanding of the events that took place around the piece.

Reflection:

Students will show what they know in the worksheet they are filling out, but also by performing *Moscow, 1941* with intentionality and really engaging in the meaning of the piece and expressing that as they play it so that the audience really gets a grasp of the full weight this piece carries.

I felt like this lesson went really well. As always, I ran out of time to do everything, we will have to play through the piece on another day, but helping the students understand the meaning of this piece is so important. The lyrics to *Meadowlands* were challenging for some students and fairly understandable by others, but that is because I have very mixed ability levels in band. At our school this year, we are really focusing on student engagement and it really seemed like the students were engaged, partly because the lesson moved fairly quickly, but also because the students really love this piece and care to learn more about it. It also just so happens that the students are studying World War II in their social studies classes right now, so the timing was perfect and it was fun to see the students make connections between what we are talking about and playing in band with what they are learning in history.