Music Lesson

by Dr. Kirk Kassner

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**Lesson Name: Des pas sur la neige Time to complete: 60 minutes for basic**

**For Grades: 4 to adult lesson, 60-90 minutes for extensions**

**National Standard Goals:**

6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.

b. Demonstrate perceptual skills by moving, by answering questions about, and by describing aural examples of music of various styles representing diverse cultures.

c. Use appropriate terminology in explaining music, music notation, music instruments and voices, and music performances.

d. Identify the sounds of a variety of instruments,

e. Respond through purposeful movement to selected prominent music characteristics or to specific music events while listening to music.

8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.

a. Identify similarities and differences in the meanings of common terms used in the various arts.

b. Identify ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with those of music.

**Materials Needed:** Sound system,recordings of Debussy’s *des pas sur la neige* (1910) [Prludes pour Piano, vi] and Joplin’s *New Rag* (1912) http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.ihas.200033273/default.html, texture cards, two contrasting impressionistic paintings (one vivid, colorful, rhythmic such as Renoir’s *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1881); the other calm, cool, quiet such as Sisley’s *Snow at Louveciennes*) (1875); charts showing design elements of music and visual arts and design principles of music and visual arts; visuals of “Debussy” and “des pas sur la niege;” [see visuals in another file], [for younger students’ extension] a scarf for each student;

Web resources [for older students’ and exceptionally talented students’ lesson extension]:

Impressionistic paintings: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impressionism

Debussy - Deux Arabesque on piano: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0fap6JZaow

Debussy – Girl with the flaxen hair: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEVu4AIMVE0

Debussy – First Arabesque: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQaJw5pa0-M

Debussy – Clair de lune: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gg1267A\_ZQ4

Federico Mompou - Prelude No. 3: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5Anli4fKxw

Debussy - Engulfed Cathedral (arranged electronically**):** http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frei0ysaC7c

Debussy – Ondine from Gaspard de la Nuit: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6Q8VYK-CDw

Debussy - L'après-midi d'un faune: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5A4CkUAazI

Faure' – Pavane: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpgyTl8yqbw

Ravel - Pavane for a Dead Princess: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKkeDqJBlK8

Ravel - Miroirs III. Une Barque sur L'Ocean**:**

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTYUyDjVCRU&list=AL94UKMTqg-9AKdpBakIXBd8MSOQa9Ceuc&index=8&feature=plcp

Ravel - Ma mere l'oye: La belle et la bête:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eyk-jrEIPSA&list=AL94UKMTqg-9AKdpBakIXBd8MSOQa9Ceuc&index=6&feature=plcp

Satie - Gymnopédie No.1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-Xm7s9eGxU

Satie - Gymnopédie No.2 (orchestral): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJ6kwAGFGLQ

Satie - Gymnopédie No.3 (orchestrated by Debussy): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUlZylqILKI

Technology resources for exceptionally talented students’ lesson extension:

Sibelius or other music sequencing/printing program, drawing/painting programs such as those described at http://mashable.com/2007/10/27/graphics-toolbox/

**Procedure:**

**Quadrant 1: Why?**

1. Begin playing *des pas sur la neige* as the students enter the room with lights low and texture cards scattered on a table.

2. Explain that each group will get a turn to touch the textures of each card while listening silently to the music. You will need to decide which texture best matches the music and tell us why you think it matches.

**Quadrant 2: What?**

3. After everyone has touched the cards, stop the music and ask students to talk within their groups about their texture-music matches and be ready to say what quality in the music made them feel that way. Play 30 seconds of the music while they discuss.

4. The teacher sets the ground rules then asks a representative from each group tell what card they chose and why. Ground rules:

A. There is no correct or incorrect answer as long as students state a plausible reason for their connection. Music and the other arts are ideally suited to express thoughts and feelings that may not be as precise as a math equation, but are nonetheless deeply felt and have powerful effects on human beings.

B. We are not looking for simple answers here; some things in life – many of the most important in fact – don’t have simple single answers.

C. No criticizing. People can sense the same stimuli, yet come up with different conclusions for different reasons, and that is OK.

D. It’s not important for everyone to believe exactly the same thing to get along and remain in community. In fact, differing opinions can add to the richness and understanding of life. Try to understand other people’s ideas.

5. After students have shared their ideas, tell them this music was written by Claude Debussy [show visual with his name] and invite them to say his name. He called this music “*des pas sur le niege*” [show visual] and invite them to say it. It was composed in France about 100 years ago in 1910.

**Quadrant 3: How?**

6. Ask groups to decide what the meter of the music is. Play the music again while students listen and discuss. When students have difficulty, teacher draws out from them the principle that to have meter, the music must have a regular, more-or-less steady beat and this piece begins with a purposefully vague beat pattern. While the meter is actually written as 4/4, Debussy sets up the beginning with a very slow metronome marking (44 beats per minute) and long note values and silent spaces, which make it difficult to feel a steady beat. This rhythmic treatment gives an ambiguous, sad feeling [for older students add: to heighten the performance instructions Debussy wrote at the beginning: *triste et lent*, *expressif et douloureux* (sad and slow, expressive and painful). Near the end, he wrote: *comme un tendre et triste regret* (like a tender and sad regret).]

7. Teacher explain that most music has an identifiable meter, but not always.

**Quadrant 2: What?**

8. Teacher asks students to listen carefully to Joplin’s *New Rag* and discern the meter (2 meter: one heavy beat and one light beat in each pattern). It was composed in New York City in 1912. Do you feel the same or different when listening to this music? How would you describe your feelings?

**Quadrant 3: How?**

9. Ask students to contrast the two compositions. Expect or bring out the following. Play bits of both pieces to elicit answers and to help students focus on particular musical elements after they have been brought up.

A. Both the Debussy and Joplin are played on which instrument? (Piano.)

B. What is different about the rhythm? (The Debussy seems to have no meter and random rhythm, Joplin has a strong 2-meter with lively, dance-able rhythms.)

C. How do the melodies contrast? (The Debussy has no singable tune, Joplin’s makes you want to whistle or hum along.)

D. What is different about the sound texture? (Debussy’s is sparse, slow, with lots of silent spaces, Joplin’s has a lively, vigorous melody with lots of notes and it has harmony.)

E. How are the dynamics different? (Debussy’s is very quiet, *piano*; Joplin’s is medium loud, *mezzoforte*.)

**Quadrant 2: What?**

10. Introduce the two paintings from France with the painter’s names and year they were painted. Ask students to look carefully at both of them while listening first to *Neige* and then *New Rag*. While observing, think about which painting is more like Debussy’s music and why; which painting is more like Joplin’s and why. Teacher plays about 15-30 seconds of each composition.

11. Students share their opinions and justifications. Most students will match Debussy with Sisley and Joplin with Renoir, but encourage deeper thinking by challenging students to imagine how the Debussy might compare with the Renoir (some people in the luncheon party may be having problems and feeling lonely or sad, even though they put on the appearance of being happy) and how the Joplin might compare with the Sisley (the lone old lady making the footsteps may be humming a happy tune as she goes on her way to a party or to visit her new grandchild). The teacher leads students to understand that music and art can have one meaning for one person and something quite different for another, depending on what elements of the art are focused on and what the observer is thinking at the time.

**Quadrant 3: How?**

12. Allow time for discussion of students’ answers. Accept and validate any reasonable, justified answer.

13. What is similar in each painting? What is different? How do students feel inside when they think about each painting? Can they describe why the paintings make them feel different emotions. [Teacher explicitly sums up the major principle of the lesson]: These paintings and music were made over 100 years ago, yet they still stir up different feelings in us today. This is the power of the arts and why they are so important: they help us express our own feelings and understand feelings of people we will never see or know. Music and visual arts go beyond this time and place, and help us understand other people from ancient times to the present, and from all over the world.

14. For older students and exceptionally talented students, display the charts, ‘Design Elements’ and ‘Design Principles,’ and ask students to discuss the music and paintings in those terms. (Teacher recalls which of these ideas have already been mentioned, and by whom, to reinforce and give students ownership.)

15. In English, the name of Debussy’s music is “footsteps in the snow.” Debussy was trying to paint a picture with sound. Does everyone feel lonely, or quiet, or even sad when they experience this music?

**Quadrant 4: What if?**

16. [for younger students] Imagine you have been hired to design movement for dancers with scarves that fit the movement and mood of *des pas sur la neige*. Take a scarf, stand up and experiment with some movements that you would have the dancer do. Hint: the music is slow and uneven, so movements would be slow as if underwater. The mood would be sad and lonely, so how would the dance communicate the mood? Give students time to experiment while teacher observes students and chooses a few exceptional dancers to ‘perform’ for the class, then have class follow their leads. Repeat the dance creation process with *New Rag*. Video record the ‘performances’ to share with the class, parents, other students, and have available for students’ portfolios (if such is used in your school).

16. [for older students] Assign a homework project: go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impressionism and choose one or more paintings to pair with impressionistic music, then go to some of the YouTube links listed and listen to impressionistic music. Choose one piece of music to pair with one or more paintings, write your reasons why you think they go together well, using some of the ideas presented in the ‘Design Elements’ and ‘Design Principles’ charts. Students may work alone or with one partner on this project. Students present their project to the class and the presentation is video recorded.

16. [for exceptionally talented students] Compose a short piece in impressionistic style (after listening to some of the YouTube links) on an instrument of your choice or computer sequencing program, record it, and pair it with an impressionistic painting, or (for extra credit) create an original visual art work in the medium of your choice or using a software drawing/painting program, which you think expresses the same feeling as your composition. Be prepared to explain why you think your composition pairs well with the visual art. Students may work alone or with one partner on this project. Students present their project to the class and the presentation is video recorded.

**Method of Evaluation:**

Teacher observes students’ responses to a) analyzing and describing music, b) comparing the music to qualities of the texture cards and paintings using standard terminology, c) [for younger students] quality of movements improvised to the music, d) [for older students] quality of pairing choices and written discussion of why they go together, e) [for exceptionally talented students] quality of the composition and pairing with visual art. Students are successful who respond intelligently to the colors, rhythms, patterns, representations, techniques, and/or abstract feelings evoked by the aural, visual, and/or tactile/kinesthetic stimuli. Teacher may wish to set up and discuss rubrics for the lesson extension projects before students begin work on them.