

**The Sweet Music of the Spoken Word: Making the Natural Connection Between Music and Literature Come to Life**

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The Goal– The creation of original student works that combine music and literature in the form of poetry/spoken word, with performances of these works as the ultimate outcome.

The Objective– An exploration of the history of poetry and poetry styles across cultures and time periods; an exploration of music composition in the service of extra-musical ideas, and an exploration of musical techniques that will aid in the creation of these ideas.

Curricular areas that can be included in this unit–

- \* Music      \*Literature      \*Language Arts      \*World History
- \* American History      \*Theater Arts      \*Visual Arts

Grade Level for this Project– Secondary (grades 7-12)

Ideal Collaborative Team– At least one music educator, one language arts/literature teacher, and one history teacher. If a large, public performance is a part of the plan (which is recommended), involving a visual arts and/or a theater arts educator could enhance the experience.

Classroom Preparation Needed for Success in this Unit– A basic survey of poetry, short prose, and short stories (length of the survey to be determined by the language arts/literature educators); a basic theory/composition class which will prepare students for original composition (covering major and minor tonality, triads and dominant seventh chords, and basic song structures); a survey of important and/or interesting spoken word and music recordings spanning different styles/genres, as well as DVD/video recordings of spoken word/music performances.

Questions to Ponder Regarding This Unit–

- \*How closely does the basic sentiment expressed in the poem/short prose and the style of the music composed have to adhere to each other?
- \*What are the boundaries regarding the content of the spoken word pieces? Is profanity an excepted part of the palette of self-expression? Are certain subjects off-limits? Are certain topics off-limits?
- \*What is considered a successful collaboration/performance, and what will be considered unsuccessful?
- \*Does all of the music have to be original, or can some of the music be pre-existing?
- \*Which comes first, the spoken word piece or the music?

\*Does it have to be live music, or can some be recordings? This is a question that will be posed by many students because of the preponderance of musicians who sing and/or rap over pre-recorded tracks. My strong suggestion is that the answer to this question is a resounding no! One of the important aspects of this integration exercise is to get students to think in terms of collaboration with live musicians, as well as getting musicians to think terms of creating new, original music to be performed in a live setting.

Amount of Time Needed for Success with this Project– Ideally, this would be at least a semester-long project. There are so many different educational concepts that could be covered (poetry, music, history, self-expression, language, public performance, etc.), and anything less than a semester could potentially impact the overall effectiveness of the project. Quite a bit depends on the amount of classroom time that can be utilized in the creation of these works, as well as the amount of time outside the classroom. The amount of time needed, as well as the success of the unit in general, will depend on the investment of all of the educators involved.

#### Educational Outcomes–

- Students will create original poems/short prose to be performed in collaboration with music created for the specific purpose of accompanying those works.
- Students will utilize music skills learned to create original music within a prescribed context (in this case, to accompany original poetry/short prose creations).
- Students will learn the history of poetry and short prose in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century America, as well as the history of poetry in other historical periods and other cultures.
- Students will learn of the history of music and poetry collaborations through the ages, and students will be exposed to historical recordings of some of these collaborations.
- Students will gain an appreciation for the differences between rap and poetry, the different kinds of poetry created around the world, the different kinds of music that have used in collaboration with poetry/spoken word performances, and the different functions of various types of poetry and short prose.
- Adhering to grammatical concepts and specific style concepts while creating original poetry and short prose will enhance language arts skills.
- In gaining an understanding of the historical significance of poetry and short prose in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century America, students will gain a better understanding of some of the most important historical events and concepts (civil rights, HUAC and McCarthy trials, Feminist movement, etc.).

## Resources Used in Today's Presentation-

### Recordings-

- Langston Hughes– *The Weary Blues* (Verve CD #841-660-2)
- Ken Nordine– *The Best of Word Jazz, Vol.1* (One World Beat CD #R2 70773)
- Allen Ginsberg, with the Kronos Quartet– *Howl, U.S.A.* (Nonesuch CD #79372-2)
- Gil Scott-Heron– *The Best of Gil Scott-Heron* (Arista CD #07822-18306-2)
- The Last Poets– *Black Power: Music of a Revolution* (Shout! Factory CD #DK 38038)
- Charles Mingus– *Let My Children Hear Music* (Columbia CD #CK 48910)
- The Doors (Jim Morrison)– *An American Prayer* (Electra CD #B00002HJP)
- The Sugarhill Gang– *The Best of The Sugarhill Gang* (Rhino CD)
- Laurie Anderson– *United States Live* (Warner Bros. CD #9 25192-2)
- Bruce Cockburn *Big Circumstance* (Gold Castle CD #D2-71320)
- Maggie Estep– *No More Mister Nice Girl* (Imago CD #72782-21044-2)
- Don Byron– *Music for Six Musicians* (Electra CD #79354-2)
- Dana Bryant– *Wishing From The Top* (Warner Bros. CD #9 45642-2)
- Lupe Fiasco– *Lupe Fiasco's Food and Liquor* (Atlantic CD)

### DVDs-

- *Sunday Night Poets* (David Rorie, director)
- *The United States of Poetry* (PBS Video)
- *The People Speak* (Howard Zinn, director)
- *Cecil Taylor- The Jazz Master Class* (Artist House DVD)
- *The Life and Times of Allen Ginsberg* (New Yorker Video DVD)

### Other Resources-

[www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org) - Poets.org [www.nuyorican.org](http://www.nuyorican.org) - Nuyorican Poets Café  
<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/connection-between-poetry-music-808.html> - Connection between music and poetry lesson plan on readwritethink.org <http://rockhall.com/education/resources/lesson-plans/sti-lesson-40/> - Rock and poetry lesson plan from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame website <http://www.teachersfirst.com/winners/music-poetry.cfm> - lesson plan called "Music is Poetry" from TeachersFirst.com

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