

**Title:** Aesthetics and Affect in Music from Around the World

**Grade Ranges:**

    K-4  
    5-8  
  X 9-12

**Subject Tag:**

Art and Music: Music

**Synopsis:**

In this lesson, students have the opportunity to explore the sound and aesthetic properties of several different kinds of music from around the world. They reflect on the musical and affective aspects of unfamiliar music, and they respond to them in brief writing exercises. Some or all responses may be shared with the class. The aim of the exercise is for students to explore their own aesthetic criteria, and to raise their awareness of alternative criteria that exist in other cultures.

**Keywords:**

ethnomusicology, aesthetics, affect, world music, culture, multicultural music

**Body:**

**Background:** Due to innovations in communication media (especially the Internet) and advances in transportation technology, cultural interaction is increasingly common. As a result, the world is becoming more and more culturally integrated. One of the best ways to approach multi-cultural teaching is through the arts. Because the arts are inherently experiential — because they appeal to the senses as much as the power to reason — students are generally responsive to arts lessons.

1. **Introduction:** Begin by briefly introducing the topic, stating that around the world there are many different musical traditions, and many different types of music. People all over make music and use music in different ways, but music is universally important to people. In fact, music of one type or another is found in every society. One of the most important features of music is its ability to emote feelings in those who perform it and those who hear it. Continue by saying that today's lesson focuses on the traditional music of different societies from around the world, and students will listen to a number of different musical recordings and share their responses.
2. **Listening to Familiar Music:** At this point, quickly play a few recordings of musical genres or compositions that are familiar to students, and elicit oral responses as to how the music makes them feel (reflective, excited, spiritual, patriotic for example). As students respond, get them to move away from judging the music (as in "this music good" or "this music is boring"), and to think instead about how the music makes them feel. If they feel that the music is boring, then ask why they feel that way. What about it is boring, or what about it makes them

- say it's good? Point out that individual responses to music are likely to be different, and that there really is no "correct" response. A church hymn, for example, might make some people feel religious, and it may not affect others in this way. Explain that our responses to music are often a product of our individual and cultural experience and identity. Lead into the next step by asking students how they might respond to music with which they have no cultural familiarity.
3. **Listening to Unfamiliar Music:** Explain that although much of our responses to music are a product of our cultural experiences, it is possible to respond to unfamiliar music. Ask students if they have ever had the experience of hearing a totally foreign music. Ask them to explain where they heard it, and what their response was. Tell students that some music is so different from what they are familiar with, that it might not even sound like music to them. And likewise, some American music might sound very strange to people who live in other places in the world. To all people, foreign music may sometimes seem strange, funny, or even irritating; but it can also be appealing, exciting, or interesting. The interesting thing is to try to figure out *what* about that music makes people respond in a certain ways.
  4. **Playing Examples:** Prepare, in advance, a number of musical selections of diverse geographic or cultural origin. (A note on locating recordings: Aside from the resources mentioned below, school and public libraries often have a surprising selection of folk and traditional music from Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, etc.) Depending on the extent of students' musical training, you may wish to prepare students for listening by suggesting aspects of the music to listen for – e.g., instrumentation, rhythm, melody. Most importantly however, suggest that they think about how the music makes them feel. Play the first musical example, requesting that students listen silently – allowing the music to enter into their ears and minds without *immediately* responding to it. Encourage students to *experience* the music, before they begin analyzing it. If your students quickly judge the music and find it hard to experience it first, have them listen to the music and freely associate it with images and words. A free association exercise should increase the likelihood that students experience the music rather than judge it. Free association will also help in the written responses in the next step.
  5. **Writing and Sharing a Response:** After a few minutes of listening, have students write (for three minutes perhaps) a short reflection. The reflection should express their responses to the music, as well as why the music affected them the way it did. Some or all responses may be shared with the class. Following the responses, ask students where they think the music comes from (see how specific they can be), and what its purpose is. Album liner notes often provide valuable information on a song or even an entire musical style. Plus, you may want to use the opportunity to discuss the cultural and musical practices that surround the music in its traditional context. If appropriate, pursue some of the discrepancies

between students' responses on a musical form's origins (where and why) and its real origins. A world map is a valuable tool during this process.

6. Additional Selections: Present additional musical selections to students and have them write and share responses as before.
7. Concluding: It is useful to conclude the lesson by asking students what they have learned through the activity. It is an opportunity to reinforce some of the essential elements of the lesson. Among these are the cultural and personal dimensions of an individual's response to music and the amazing diversity of aesthetic sensibilities for music across cultures.
8. For more information on this subject, the following resources are recommended; all include audio recordings:
  - a. Lornell, Kip and Anne K. Rasmussen. *Musics of Multicultural America: A Study of Twelve Musical Communities*. Schirmer Books: New York, 1997.
  - b. Nettl, Bruno. *Excursions in World Music*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, c2001.
  - c. Titon, Jeff Todd, ed., *Worlds of Music: An introduction to the Music of the World's People*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1992.

#### **Related Links:**

##### **Smithsonian Folkways Recordings**

<http://www.si.edu/folkways>

This site belongs to the Smithsonian Folkways recording project archive, which has an extensive catalogue of diverse music from around the U.S. and around the world.

##### **Rounder Records**

<http://www.rounder.com>

Another great site for locating recordings from around the U.S. and around the world. Under "Rounder Collections," select "The World Music Series" for compilations of music from many countries and regions.

#### **Features:**

- Contains special education tips
- Quick Activity (less than 30 minutes; story starter)
- Requires Internet access for students to complete

#### **Objectives:**

Students listen and respond to music from foreign musical cultures. Through composing short written responses to music, students explore their own aesthetic sensibilities and criteria. Students learn geographical, historical, and social-contextual information about people and music from distant places.

#### **Standards:**

**NY: 4.** Understanding The Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of The Arts: Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

**CT: 7.** Evaluation: Students will evaluate music and music performances. **8.** Connections: Students will make connections between music, other disciplines and daily life. **9.** History And Cultures: Students will understand music in relation to history and culture.

**NJ: 1.1:** All students will acquire knowledge and skills that increase aesthetic awareness in dance, music, theater, and visual arts. **1.5:** All students will identify the various historical, social, and cultural influences and traditions which have generated artistic accomplishments throughout the ages and which continue to shape contemporary arts.

**Prerequisite Skills:**

Ability to reflect through writing.

**Time Required:**

40 to 50 minutes

**Technology and Materials Needed:**

1. A few recordings of music which students are likely to be familiar with.
2. Several recordings of music from foreign countries or distant musical cultures.
3. Recordings of music from different socio-cultural or ethnic contexts within the United States can also be integrated.
4. A map showing where the music is from (optional)

**Procedures:**

**Assessment Criteria:**

Assessment may be accomplished by collecting the individual written responses. Due to the brief nature of the writing assignments, they should be evaluated for creativity and depth of reflection rather than as a representative sample of careful and revised writing. An indicator of progress is the students' ability to respond to the music with greater depth and self-awareness over time.

**Recommended Lesson Plan Review Date:**

**Review Comments:**

Check Web sites.