Lesson Four: Rhythm – Concrete vs. Abstract

Empire State Creates: Teaching Artist-Led Activities for Everyone

Project Title: Musical Storytelling  Age(s): 7-8 year-old (2nd-3rd grades)
Time: 40 - 45 minutes  Arts Discipline: Music

ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

Goal(s):
- An exploration into the world of Rhythm
- Understanding the difference between Concrete and abstract
- Watch Companion Video 4

Materials:
- The Annotated copy of our story
- Our notebook
- Pencil & eraser
- Percussion instruments

New Word(s)
- Beat: A steady pulse that repeats and represents the basic unit of time in music.
- Rhythm: A strong, regular, repeated pattern composed of a structured series of sounds and silences.
- Concrete: Thinking based on facts, based on things we can experience with our senses, and often are in our physical presence. Thinking based on literal view of things.
- Abstract: The ability to conceptualize things that are not usually present, and are somewhat tainted by our own personal experience. Thinking based on our own personal perception and interpretation

NYS Arts Learning Standards (select no more than 2 - student audiences only)
- Pr-Performing (standard 5): Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation
- Cr-Creating (standard 1): Generate and conceptualize ideas and work.

STEPS

Step #1  Playing a Beat:
- First as a class we will slowly count aloud 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 and repeat steadily for a few times (follow “second” hand of the classroom clock as a speed)
- Now using your hands or percussion instruments, while still counting aloud, clap or hit your instruments on the ① as follows: ① – 2 – 3 – 4 – ① – 2 – 3 – 4
• Finally on all numbers: ① – ② – ③ – ④ – ① – ② – ③ – ④ – ① – ② – ③ – ④ (make sure that you keep a steady pace and DO NOT speed up or slow down)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step #2</th>
<th>Creating a Rhythm:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To do so we must first create a pattern. Much like patterns of colors (blue-red-yellow, blue-red-yellow, etc.) or patterns of shapes (■ △ ○), in music we create patterns of sounds. So clap a simple short pattern of 5 sounds once. It can be as simple as: Ta – Ta – Tatata
| ● Then in a steady manner repeat this pattern 10 times. Congratulations, you have just created a rhythm (which is the steady repetition of a pattern)
| ● Another volunteer will play a new pattern (it does not have to have 5 sounds), then the entire class plays it 10 times. Try a few more to get comfortable playing rhythms. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step #3</th>
<th>Recording your patterns:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Now that you know how to create a rhythm, it is important to figure out a way to put them down in a more permanent manner as you will not be able to remember them in our story. There are 3 ways you can do that:
| ● You can literally record them using a voice recorder, cell phone or computer.
| ● You can come up with your own visual writing showing how the pattern sounds like:
| Ex 1: Ta - Ta - Tatata (visually you can see that the first two notes are apart from each other while the last 3 are played closer together)
| Ex 2: Using the same idea you can use vertical lines such as: I - I - I I I
| Ex 3: Finally if you have some musical knowledge you can write it as: ♩ ♩ ♩
| ● Whichever way you choose, practice to become good at it.
| ● Whether using the voice recorder or some writing language, always make sure to write the name of the word you are illustrating first with the pattern next. (ex: Rain: I I I I I I I I I I or Rain: Tatatatata Ta Tatatatatatata).
| With a little bit of practice, this will become second nature to you.
| ● Note: Make sure that between your playing and your writing of a pattern you get the same exact number of sounds in both. This will be very important later when we add notes to them. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step #4</th>
<th>Concrete thinking: definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Musicians are not sound-effects technicians or Foley artists who work on movies. So in playing a pattern we are not trying to reproduce the exact sound of a word. The idea is to create a pattern that reminds us of the real thing.
| 1- The class picks a word for example: Rain
| 2- Every student closes his/her eyes and mentally remembers the sound of rain, and silently plays it in their head. Do not share yet. It can be any kind of rain in your head (heavy, light, drizzle, droplets, etc.), but try to imitate as exactly as possible the real sound of rain in your mind.
| 3- After a few minutes of mental practice, on the count of 3 the entire class simultaneously (meaning at the same time) plays their version of rain using their voice or instruments.
| 4- Try two other words for example: a babbling brook, or a thunderstorm |
Step #5

- **Abstract thinking: definition and difference**
  
  Now that you know how to imitate the sound of a word, using the same word, in this case *Rain*, like in step #4.
  
  1- Close your eyes again but this time, create a **musical pattern** that best represents your idea of rain.
  
  2- After a few minutes of mental practice, on the count of 3 the entire class simultaneously plays their rhythmic version of rain using their voice or instruments.
  
  3- Try again with the two other words (in our example: a *babbling brook* or a *thunderstorm*).
  
  4- As we learned prior, try creating patterns for words that evoke sounds, words with no sounds but which evoke movements, and words with no sounds or movements, but with shapes, then finally emotions.

Step #6

- With your newly acquired knowledge of rhythms and abstract thinking, you will now go through the annotated text of the story once again and create patterns for each of the underlines words one at a time as follows:
  
  1- The class picks the first word.
  
  2- Using your instruments, play for 1 minute to create an original pattern for it.
  
  3- Once the class stops after the minute of practice, volunteers will present their patterns and the entire class will **vote** to decide the one they like the most.
  
  4- Once the best pattern has been chosen, record it in your notebook (one student may write it on the board for everyone to copy as it must be the same for the entire class.
  
  5- Continue for each and every word underlined in the story.

- When creating your rhythms feel free to find inspiration from your own cultural background (music, dances, etc.).

  **Note:** This activity may require more than one session depending on the length of the original story as well as the number of words underlined.

Activity Modifications (as needed):

- **Compound patterns**
  Much like a *Compound word* - a word made of two shorter words put together such as: baseball, classroom, afternoon, etc. Older students can practice creating compound patterns by combining two or more shorter patterns to create more elaborate and complex ones.

- **Polyrhythms**
  For the even more advanced students, still using basic patterns, they can practice creating Polyrhythms by combining two or more rhythms together but this time by playing them at the same time as opposed to one after the other in the case of a compound pattern. This requires multiple players, each one playing only one pattern simultaneously. The challenge here is being able to play something even simple, while someone next to you is playing something completely different and not be distracted. This is a great “focus” activity.