

John Coltrane: Elementary General Classroom Lesson

Submitted by Christine Passarella, Founder of the Kids for Coltrane Project

Foundation: Build prior knowledge by explaining that some Americans were not free to reach their full potential. Ask your students generative questions. These questions should promote critical thinking along Bloom's taxonomy. Here are some sample questions..

Question: Will human beings find a way to express what is deep in their souls even if they are told they cannot?

Answer: Listen to the blues and hear the feelings overflowing into the air.

Question: Will human beings find hope even when there doesn't appear to be any?

Answer: Listen to the joy that comes from the blues.

Question: Can music tell a story throughout time?

Answer: Listen to the blues and follow up with a study of jazz in America.

You now have your foundation for interdisciplinary education with the arts.

Sample Lesson: Elementary level

Objective: Children will write a story about friendship. Children will understand that music can tell a story.

(Introduce some of the work of Pablo Picasso and John Coltrane before this lesson.) Build prior knowledge by having children listen to interviews of John Coltrane and his friends McCoy Tyner, Sonny Rollins, Jimmy Cobb and Elvin Jones. All of this material is available via the internet.

Vocabulary: team work, friendship, respect, imagination, improvisation, solo, tempo, rhythm, melody, collaboration, jazz, blues

Material: Picasso Painting of The Three Musicians, Music of John Coltrane, Writing Paper

Connection:

Review with children the importance of friendship. Friendships are built on respect. Friends listen and share.

Teaching: Have children listen to *Like Sonny* while viewing Pablo Picasso's *Three Musicians*. (Idea: Gather the children together in a sharing area.)

Tell the children that John Coltrane wrote the song they are listening to for his friend Sonny Rollins.

Ask the children possible titles for the song. Tell the children John called it *Like Sonny*. Elicit from the children the feelings they feel while listening to *Like Sonny*. Write their ideas on chart paper. Remember to praise the children for their ideas and remind them that with "artful and music thinking" you can't be wrong while you explore.

Connect the music to Picasso's *Three Musicians*.

Remind the children that the painting was done by the unique Pablo Picasso.

Generate questions which will promote critical thinking.

Suggestions: Ask the about the setting. Where are they?

Ask them who the main characters are. Who are they?

What are they doing? How are they feeling?

What instruments do you see? What sounds do you hear?

How do the characters feel?

How do you feel when you view the painting? Do the colors in the painting affect what you think about the story?

Is there anything else in the picture that you find interesting? (dog on the floor)

During the discussion allow for their personal connections to the music and to the painting.

Focus again on *Like Sonny*

Remind the children that the song was written by John Coltrane for his friend.

Ask the children if they could imagine John and Sonny playing together.

How did they get along? Did they improvise? Does the tempo affect what they feel about the friendship of the John and Sonny? Do they think there were times when Sonny and John listened to each other play solos? Does that take discipline? Do you think John and Sonny respected each other? Do you think you can learn from a friend? How do you learn from a friend? Tell children that jazz musicians often improvise and collaborate. Creating friendships requires listening and sharing.

Jazz music is based on respect. John wrote this song to honor his friend Sonny Rollins He listened to Sonny's ideas and shared his ideas and created music. Sonny listened and shared with John too. Sonny and John were good friends.

Active Engagement: Ask the children to think about a friend who they respect. Listen to a part of *Like Sonny* again. Have the children imagine playing with their friend. Then have the children turn and talk to a partner and share what they are "seeing" in their minds.

Share: After about ten minutes select two of the partnerships to talk about their ideas with the class.

Link: Send students off to work independently writing about a friendship. (This friendship can be real or imagined.) . Remind them to include the setting, characters, actions, feelings. Tell students their writing is like painting a picture or writing a song. Encourage the students to describe the details they see in their minds so readers can see it too. Conference with the children while they are writing.

While children are writing play music from a jazz CD like *The Best of John Coltrane*. This will inspire more feelings as they write.

Follow up: Allow more time to finish the writing in another lesson and publish the writing by sharing with the school community.