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## **Listening to Music**

Although there are times when silence is more appropriate in the classroom, music can be used to set a mood, calm a class down, enhance an activity, or stimulate the brain. Instrumental music is particularly effective for enhancing concentration.

*"Music is the electrical soil in which the spirit lives, thinks and invents." --Ludwig van Beethoven*

Listening to music can:

Provide a positive learning atmosphere

Create excitement and anticipation

Influence brain wave states

Focus concentration and increase attention

Be used as a memory aid for rote learning

Add to a multisensory learning experience

Add some fun!

Be themed to study units to provide extra stimulus

## **Why should we listen to music?**

**Music can help with putting students into an active learning state.** It can evoke an atmosphere appropriate to the topic.

Examples of this might be using Respighi's *Pines of Rome* when teaching children about the Roman army in history, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* sea music when learning about Viking voyages, or Sibelius' *Finlandia* for the Viking homeland. Studies of areas in Geography can be accompanied by music indigenous to the area

studied, so a topic on South America can be accompanied by Andean flute music, or recordings of rainforest sounds. The mathematically precise music of J. S. Bach can be used to provide a background for maths work or observational drawing. Theming music to topic or subject enhances the classroom atmosphere and adds a multi-sensory layer to learning.

**Music aids focus and Alpha state brain activity.** It can make the learning brain more receptive, and improve concentration.

Scientific studies prove that certain themes, tempi and intervals can improve concentration. (Conversely, Chinese Confucianism held that there were certain keys and types of music that were actively harmful, promoting aggression and destabilising the State!). Up-beat Baroque music, such as that written by Handel, Bach and Telemann, which has a 50 – 80 beat per minute tempo (speed), can regulate brain activity and produce an Alpha wave state which is highly effective for learning. Mozart's music too has long been known to produce an energised mood, ideal for picking up the post-lunch slump.

**Music can aid with rote learning tasks,** and provide effective memorisation.

Chants, songs, poems and rap, whether bought, or created by the class, the teacher or individual children, can help children who do not find visual learning easy to focus and retain. Elements of kinaesthetic learning can also be incorporated into this, so, for example, standing up and rhythmically passing a tennis ball from hand to hand while chanting 'seven twos are four- teen' can help with retention of times tables.

**When can we listen to music?**

**Music can punctuate the day.**

Welcoming music, for when children enter the class in the morning, can signal what activity is likely to take place. It can send a message, for example, the calm tones of Pachelbel's *Canon in D*, or the Albinoni *Adagio* could be a 'stop talking when you

enter the classroom, and sit quietly in your places' message. The violin theme from Beethoven's *Symphony No 1 in C major*, used in the five-minute animated short films 'Ludwig', <http://www.thechestnut.com/ludwig.htm> and <http://iludwig.co.uk/> can be used to signal a more playful atmosphere. Restful flute music, such as the Fauré *Pavane* or *Sicilienne*, can calm children after one of those windy playtimes that leaves everyone wound up! A 'Goodbye' song or music track can be used as classroom tidying happens, and another for when the class comes together for a moment of quiet at the end of the day. Different types of music can signal the appropriate noise level in the class, and children can also be encouraged to listen to the silence.

It's not just necessary to use classical music, although pure instrumental music allows the focus to remain on the music, rather than the lyrics. Children can be encouraged to bring in music they like for classroom trials, and there can be some (sensitively managed) discussion about what particular aspects of learning it's good for. Each class could have its own music collection.

### **Music can accompany lessons and community building activities.**

Music is a universal language, and each culture has cultural variants. Using music can be a way in to understanding different cultures in the classroom, so during RE or PHSE discussions of different faiths, appropriate music can be part of the lesson. Examples of this would be the use of *Hava Nagila*, *Adon Olam*, or the *Shema Yisrael* to accompany learning about Judaism, or using a recording of *Ya Nabi Salam Aleika* when learning about Islam. Children can also learn about how music can be used as protest or political statement, for example the coding of songs such as 'Go Down Moses', 'Follow The Drinking Gourd', or 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' as signal songs for slaves seeking freedom in the southern states of America.

In community building activities, children from cultures other than White British can be encouraged to bring in their own music and share it with the class. A class could build its own personal library of music for all children of different cultures on the class, and this could be used during e.g. class assemblies. A class teacher can also incorporate 'Listen to music from e.g. China / Spain / Poland' into a day's work, perhaps during an 'Uninterrupted Sustained Reading' period after lunch.