Overture to Candide

This activity introduces students to Leonard Bernstein’s Overture to Candide. By providing a framework for a story, students learn to listen for musical cues that suggest mood, character, themes and even plots points.

Assessment Strategies

In this lessons, students should be able to successfully do the following: use musical and non-musical vocabulary to articulate how music is able to convey mood, character, theme, and plot. Learn more about assessment strategies on page 4.

Learning Standards

This lesson uses Common Core and National Core Arts Anchor Standards. You can find more information about the standards featured in this lesson on page 4.

Integrated subject areas:
- Music
- English/Language Arts

Grade(s): 4-8

Lesson length: 40 minutes

Instructional objectives:
Students will be able to:
- Use musical and non-musical vocabulary to describe and analyze musical excerpts
- Create a story inspired by musical excerpts, using the three parts of speech (nouns, adjectives, and verbs)

Materials:
- Musical Recordings of the featured repertoire listed above
- Sound system for musical excerpts of concert repertoire (e.g. laptop and speakers, iPhone® dock, Spotify®, etc)
- Post-it Notes (three colors)
- Markers

Featured Repertoire*:
- Bernstein Overture to Candide

*Click on the link above to listen to these examples on Spotify. A free account is required to listen.
Leonard Bernstein was born in Lawrence Massachusetts in 1918 and grew up in the Boston area. His father sold wigs and wanted his son to help with the business, but when Bernstein wrote the class song for his high school graduation, it soon became clear that he would not be a wig salesman. Bernstein went on to attend Harvard University and majored in music.

When Bernstein was only twenty-five years old, he got his big break as the assistant conductor for the New York Philharmonic. One evening, Bernstein was asked to step in and conduct a concert in Carnegie Hall. This concert was broadcast live over the radio and the audience in the hall loved him. The next day the headlines in the newspapers all over America were celebrating him and his outstanding debut!

Bernstein went on to be named the music director of the New York Philharmonic and became the first American to hold that title at a major American orchestra. Bernstein used television, which was a new way to be entertained at home, to bring the orchestra to a wide audience through his “Young People’s Concerts.”

In addition to conducting, Bernstein loved to compose for musical theater.

**TEACHING STEPS**

1. Without telling students what they will be listening to, **play** the first section of the Candide Overture, the “A” section (0:00–0:41). **Ask** students to think of one or two words each to describe what they have heard.

2. Have students **share** their ideas with the class. **Write** student responses on individual post-it notes or use colored markers to write them on the board, labeling them as **adjectives**. **Ask** students what specifically in the music made them think of these words. (Was it fast or slow, busy or simple? What instruments did you hear? Why might this make you feel this way/use these words?)
3. **Repeat** the process for the “B” section (1:18–2:09) and the “C” section (3:15-end). Use different colored post-it notes or different colored markers for each section.

4. **Ask** students to imagine what people, places, or things might be represented by the music they heard. Write the responses and label this list **nouns**.

5. **Listen** to the three sections of music again, this time having students focus on action words. What actions or activities are suggested by the music? Walking? Dancing? Singing? Crying? What in the music made them think of these words? Write the responses and label this list **verbs**.

6. **Tell** the students that the piece repeats certain themes and ideas. **Play** the second “A” section (2:09–2:47) and the second “B” section (2:47–3:15) for students, and **ask** them which list of words is more fitting for each.

7. Randomly **ask** students to select nouns, verbs, and adjectives, and plug them into **Candide Word Worksheet** located on page 6 of this document. **Read** each section of the story with the corresponding portion of music.

8. **Ask** the students what they think of the result. Does it make sense with the music? Why or why not? What can be changed to make it more consistent? To make it the opposite of what was heard?
LEARNING STANDARDS

Common Core Anchor Standards

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2**
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4**
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5**
Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

National Core Arts Anchor Standards

**Anchor Standard 7** Perceive and analyze artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 9** Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

ASSESSMENT

- Observe students’ understanding of the three parts of speech—nouns, adjectives, verbs—based on student responses.
- Through a guided discussion, observe students’ ability to articulate how musical elements can tell a story.
- Observe students’ ability to analyze their own work through discussion in teaching step 8.
“A” Section (0:00–0:41)

One day a ________________ went ________________ in

noun (person or animal) verb ending in -ing

_______________ . Everything was _________________ , when suddenly, a

noun (place) adjective

_______________ appeared _________________ down the street. Again and

noun verb ending in -ing

again, it _________________ !

verb ending in -ed

“B” Section (1:18–2:09)

As it _________________ and faded away,

verb ending in -ed

a _________________ saw a _________________ appear just behind

noun noun

the_______________ . Like the _________________ before it, it was

noun noun
________________________, but this time, it looked more like a ______________________.

verb ending in -ing  
noun

The ___________________________ ___________________________.

noun  
verb ending in -ed

“A” Section revisited (2:09-2:47)

Just when the ___________________________ thought it was finished, the

noun

_________________________ returned, ___________________________ all the way!

noun  
verb ending in -ing

This time, it seemed to get ___________________________ and ___________________________;

adjective  
adjective

again and again it ___________________________.

verb ending in -ed

“B” Section revisited (2:47–3:15)

Caught up in the ___________________________, the ___________________________ returned, and began

noun  
noun

to ___________________________, and, before he knew it, he, too was

verb

_________________________!

verb ending in -ing
“C” Section (3:15–end)

Crowds of ___________________________ were

plural noun

__________________________, all of them ______________________ and _______________________

verb ending in -ing adjective verb ending in -ing

the __________________________.

noun

It was a(n) ____________________________ ____________________________.

adjective noun

Finally, as suddenly as it began, the __________________________ was over.

noun