Unit 05: Music as an Interdisciplinary Study of Philosophy, History, and Culture

Content Area: **Music**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Marking Period 4**
Length: **ongoing**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

Music exists as a reflection of human experience, shaped by the history, culture, beliefs, and values of the people and societies that create it. In this unit, students will be introduced to the philosophical and aesthetic ideas that surround music-making, exploring questions about the purpose of art, the nature of musical expression, and the ways in which people make and find meaning through music and art. Through reflection, discussion, and exploration, students will engage with the enduring questions that surround music and art, recognizing that the search for understanding and meaning is an essential part of becoming a thoughtful musician and artist.

Revised: July 2026

Standards

Information Literacy

This unit challenges students to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. Information literacy includes, but is not limited to, digital, visual, media, textual, and technological literacy. Lessons may include the research process and how information is created and produced; critical thinking and using information resources; research methods, including the difference between primary and secondary sources; the difference between facts, points of view, and opinions, accessing peer-reviewed print and digital library resources; the economic, legal, social, and ethical issues surrounding the use of information.

New Jersey Diversity and Inclusion Law

In accordance with New Jersey's Chapter 32 Diversity and Inclusion Law, this unit includes instructional materials that highlight and promote diversity, including:

economic diversity, equity, inclusion, tolerance, and belonging in connection with gender and sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, disabilities, and religious tolerance.

Amistad Commission

This unit also reflects the goals of the Department of Education and the Amistad Commission including the infusion of the history of Africans and African-Americans into the curriculum in order to provide an accurate, complete, and inclusive history regarding the importance of of African-Americans to the growth and development of American society in a global context.

ELD standards:https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wdmsiGOdCHlrjU-WPvAtENnEgi0EStZXo0uiFYv1Nu4/edit

DI	Diversity
7	Students will develop language and knowledge to accurately and respectfully describe how people (including themselves) are both similar to and different from each other and others in their identity groups.
8	Students will respectfully express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others and will exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way.
9	Students will respond to diversity by building empathy, respect, understanding and connection.
1.3C.12adv.Pr4	Selecting, analyzing and interpreting work.
LA.RI.11-12.1	Accurately cite strong and thorough textual evidence, (e.g., via discussion, written response, etc.), to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
LA.RI.11-12.2	Determine two or more central ideas of a text, and analyze their development and how they interact to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
10	Students will examine diversity in social, cultural, political and historical contexts rather than in ways that are superficial or oversimplified.
LA.RI.11-12.3	Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.
1.3C.12adv.Pr4a	Develop and apply criteria to select varied programs to study and perform based on an understanding of theoretical and structural characteristics and expressive challenges in the music, the technical skill of the individual or ensemble, and the purpose and context of the performance.
1.3C.12adv.Pr4b	Examine, evaluate, and critique, using music reading skills (where appropriate), how the structure and context impact and inform prepared and improvised performances.
11	Students will recognize stereotypes and relate to people as individuals rather than representatives of groups.
1.3C.12adv.Pr4c	Demonstrate how understanding the style, genre and context of a varied repertoire of music informs prepared and improvised performances as well as performers' technical skills to connect with the audience.
12	Students will recognize unfairness on the individual level (e.g., biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g., discrimination).
LA.RI.11-12.7	Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

13	Students will analyze the harmful impact of bias and injustice on the world, historically and today.
LA.RI.11-12.8	Describe and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. and global texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning (e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court majority opinions and dissents) and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy (e.g., The Federalist, presidential addresses).
LA.RI.11-12.9	Analyze and reflect on (e.g., practical knowledge, historical/cultural context, and background knowledge) documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes and rhetorical features, including primary source documents relevant to U.S. and/or global history.
1.3C.12adv.Pr5a	Develop, apply, and refine appropriate rehearsal strategies to address individual and ensemble challenges in a varied repertoire of music.
14	Students will recognize that power and privilege influence relationships on interpersonal, intergroup and institutional levels and consider how they have been affected by those dynamics.
1.3C.12adv.Pr6	Conveying meaning through art.
15	Students will identify figures, groups, events and a variety of strategies and philosophies relevant to the history of social justice around the world.
AC	Action
16	Students will express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when they themselves experience bias.
1.3C.12adv.Pr6a	Demonstrate an understanding and mastery of the technical demands and expressive qualities of the music through prepared and improvised performances of a varied repertoire representing diverse cultures, styles, genres, and historical periods in multiple types of ensembles.
1.3C.12acc.Pr6b	Demonstrate an understanding of intent as a means for connecting with an audience through prepared and improvised performances.
1.3C.12adv.Pr6b	Demonstrate an ability to connect, engage and respond to audiences through prepared and improvised performances.
1.3C.12adv.Re	Responding
1.3C.12acc.Re	Responding
17	Students will recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice.
1.3C.12adv.Re7	Perceiving and analyzing products.
1.3C.12adv.Re7a	Use research and personally developed criteria to justify choices made when selecting music, citing knowledge of the music and individual and ensemble purpose and context.
1.3C.12adv.Re7b	Demonstrate and justify how the analysis of structures, contexts and performance decisions inform the response to music.
20	Students will plan and carry out collective action against bias and injustice in the world and will evaluate what strategies are most effective.
1.3C.12adv.Re8	Interpreting intent and meaning.
1.3C.12adv.Re8a	Justify interpretations of the expressive intent and meaning of musical works by comparing and synthesizing varied researched sources, including reference to other art forms.
1.3C.12adv.Re9	Applying criteria to evaluate products.
1.3C.12adv.Re9a	Develop and justify evaluations of music, programs of music, and performances based on criteria, personal decision-making, research, and understanding of contexts.

1.3B.12adv.Cn	Connecting
1.3B.12adv.Cn10	Synthesizing and relating knowledge and personal experiences to create products.
1.3B.12adv.Cn10a	Demonstrate how interests, knowledge and skills related to personal choices and intent when creating, performing and responding to music.
1.3B.12adv.Cn11	Relating artistic ideas and works within societal, cultural, and historical contexts to deepen understanding.
1.3B.12adv.Cn11a	Demonstrate how interests, knowledge and skills related to personal choices and intent when creating, performing and responding to music.
LA.SL.11-12.1.A	Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well reasoned exchange of ideas.
LA.SL.11-12.1.B	Collaborate with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and assessments (e.g., student developed rubrics), and establish individual roles as needed.
LA.SL.11-12.1.C	Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.
LA.SL.11-12.1.D	Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.
CRP.K-12.CRP1	Act as a responsible and contributing citizen and employee.
CRP.K-12.CRP1.1	Career-ready individuals understand the obligations and responsibilities of being a member of a community, and they demonstrate this understanding every day through their interactions with others. They are conscientious of the impacts of their decisions on others and the environment around them. They think about the near-term and long-term consequences of their actions and seek to act in ways that contribute to the betterment of their teams, families, community and workplace. They are reliable and consistent in going beyond the minimum expectation and in participating in activities that serve the greater good.
CRP.K-12.CRP2	Apply appropriate academic and technical skills.
CRP.K-12.CRP2.1	Career-ready individuals readily access and use the knowledge and skills acquired through experience and education to be more productive. They make connections between abstract concepts with real-world applications, and they make correct insights about when it is appropriate to apply the use of an academic skill in a workplace situation.
CRP.K-12.CRP4	Communicate clearly and effectively and with reason.
CRP.K-12.CRP4.1	Career-ready individuals communicate thoughts, ideas, and action plans with clarity, whether using written, verbal, and/or visual methods. They communicate in the workplace with clarity and purpose to make maximum use of their own and others' time. They are excellent writers; they master conventions, word choice, and organization, and use effective tone and presentation skills to articulate ideas. They are skilled at interacting with others; they are active listeners and speak clearly and with purpose. Career-ready individuals think about the audience for their communication and prepare accordingly to ensure the desired outcome.
CRP.K-12.CRP5	Consider the environmental, social and economic impacts of decisions.
CRP.K-12.CRP5.1	Career-ready individuals understand the interrelated nature of their actions and regularly make decisions that positively impact and/or mitigate negative impact on other people, organization, and the environment. They are aware of and utilize new technologies, understandings, procedures, materials, and regulations affecting the nature of their work as it relates to the impact on the social condition, the environment and the profitability of

	the organization.
CRP.K-12.CRP6	Demonstrate creativity and innovation.
CRP.K-12.CRP6.1	Career-ready individuals regularly think of ideas that solve problems in new and different ways, and they contribute those ideas in a useful and productive manner to improve their organization. They can consider unconventional ideas and suggestions as solutions to issues, tasks or problems, and they discern which ideas and suggestions will add greatest value. They seek new methods, practices, and ideas from a variety of sources and seek to apply those ideas to their own workplace. They take action on their ideas and understand how to bring innovation to an organization.
CRP.K-12.CRP8	Utilize critical thinking to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
CRP.K-12.CRP8.1	Career-ready individuals readily recognize problems in the workplace, understand the nature of the problem, and devise effective plans to solve the problem. They are aware of problems when they occur and take action quickly to address the problem; they thoughtfully investigate the root cause of the problem prior to introducing solutions. They carefully consider the options to solve the problem. Once a solution is agreed upon, they follow through to ensure the problem is solved, whether through their own actions or the actions of others.
CRP.K-12.CRP9	Model integrity, ethical leadership and effective management.
CRP.K-12.CRP9.1	Career-ready individuals consistently act in ways that align personal and community-held ideals and principles while employing strategies to positively influence others in the workplace. They have a clear understanding of integrity and act on this understanding in every decision. They use a variety of means to positively impact the directions and actions of a team or organization, and they apply insights into human behavior to change others' action, attitudes and/or beliefs. They recognize the near-term and long-term effects that management's actions and attitudes can have on productivity, morals and organizational culture.
CRP.K-12.CRP12	Work productively in teams while using cultural global competence.
CRP.K-12.CRP12.1	Career-ready individuals positively contribute to every team, whether formal or informal. They apply an awareness of cultural difference to avoid barriers to productive and positive interaction. They find ways to increase the engagement and contribution of all team members. They plan and facilitate effective team meetings.

Essential Questions

- How and why do historical and cultural influences affect musical performance?
- How do other disciplines, such as literature and poetry, inform and transform our understanding of musical interpretation?
- How do personal values and social mores affect music and our reactions to music?
- In what ways can music act as a tool for social justice, and how can musicians challenge systemic injustices through their art?
- What is music and what is art?

Enduring Understandings

- Discovering and identifying the influences and motives of a composer or creator leads to a higher level of understanding and performance.
- It is the responsibility of the performers to convey an interpretation to the audience based upon informed musical decisions, as well as the conductor's wishes.

- Making music is a ritual act that builds cultural and social identity.
- Many consider choral music and Western art music unjust to marginalized and underrepresented communities and people.
- Music and the arts try to create meaning and sense out of a confusing, complex world.
- Music is always situated within a societal, cultural, and historical context.
- Music plays an essential role in the ceremonies and traditions of our lives and culture.
- Philosophical thought and inquiry is valuable in constructing one's understanding of the world.

Students Will Know/Students Will Be Skilled At

- Basic philosophical ideas about the arts, aesthetics, and their connection to the world.
- Historical and cultural barriers have shaped whose voices have been represented in classical music and the arts, while many diverse perspectives and historically marginalized communities have remained underrepresented.
- How music, the arts, and various disciplines outside the arts are interrelated.
- How to adapt preparation and performance techniques to reflect and correct the historical and cultural context of the music being performed.
- How to analyze a piece for the elements that situate it in a cultural and historical space, including information about the time period, style, composer, and their influences.
- How to engage in philosophical writing and discussion about music-making, its purpose, and its meaning to us and our culture.
- How to engage with texts discussing music and art philosophy.
- How to explore the meaning of a choral work and how that meaning can vary between listeners, including performer, audience, composer, community, society, etc.
- How to speak about music and art using language common across disciplines.
- Key terms and vocabulary, including art, culture, societal values and mores, philosophy, aesthetics and aesthetic elements of art works, humanities, artistic discipline, informed interpretation, ritual, context.
- The context, background, and authors of the texts sung, and their connection to culture, history, religion, poetry, and/or literature.
- The historical and cultural origins of choruses, choirs, and madrigals.
- The objective and observable elements and principles of art and music.
- Translations of music sung in foreign languages.

Learning Plan

- After introducing students to philosophical ideas regarding the Arts, students read excerpts from Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening by Christopher Small. Students and teacher make their way through the dissection of the traditional performance experience and the concert hall. Students reflect in discussion and journal writing, both via teacher-generated prompt and student-selected.
- Preview the essential questions and connect to learning throughout the course.
- Students and teacher apply their philosophical discussions to their preparation and performance of repertoire. How does the exploration of art and music philosophy change or inform one's rehearsing and performing? Does it matter? What does music-making mean?
- Students and teacher prepare and perform music from different genres, world cultures, and time

periods, selecting pieces written by diverse composers in varied styles.

- Students and teacher turn their attention to actual works of art and begin to explore their aesthetic value. Through guided observation of both visual art and music, students examine the objective and aesthetic qualities present within an art object. Students then explore how these observable elements influence their perception and judgment of an art object, and how they contribute to the meaning and experience created through engagement with it.

- Students finally look at themselves and their own life goals in terms of philosophical reflection. They discuss and write on the questions, who am I, who might I become, how does music play a role in my life, how might my work affect the world?

- Students lead the class in identifying the origin of a piece of music, locating and discussing relevant historical and cultural information, as well as societal and global issues that will enhance the understanding and performing of the music.

- Teacher engages students in an examination of any non-Western and/or non-traditional repertoire, studying the global and cultural influences and implications of the repertoire. Students reflect upon the issues raised and the connection and application to their own lives. Students also reflect upon the explicit and implicit social justice issues raised in given repertoire and look for ways to address these concerns in their work.

- Teacher engages students with introductory philosophical texts, looking at the meaning and purpose of music and art. First, using excerpts from The Cartoon Introduction to Philosophy by Michael F. Patton and Aesthetics: A Beginners' Guide by Charles Taliaferro, the teacher discusses the basics of philosophical thought and inquiry, as well as the more art-specific study of aesthetics.

Evidence/Performance Tasks

Performing Arts students demonstrate differentiated proficiency according to their ability to answer the essential questions through formative and summative assessments. Evidence of progression may be demonstrated in divergent ways through the Artistic Processes of Creating, Performing/Presenting/Producing, Connecting, and Responding.

- Accurately observe the objective elements and principles of art objects and music.
- Deconstruct a musical situation to critically analyze its many possible meanings.
- Dialogue about music using knowledge of historical, cultural, and current social mores.
- Evaluate performances (individual, corporate, and those of other performing groups) for accuracy and effectiveness of style and interpretation.
- Explore and reflect on the essential questions through discussions and journaling.
- Perform music from all over the world with cultural, historical, stylistic, and situational awareness and integrity.
- Read, digest, and discuss basic philosophical texts in relation to art, music, and culture.
- Reflect on the social issues of class, gender, race, sexuality, morality, socio-economic background raised by Western art music, as well as current popular music.
- Write and reflect on music based upon knowledge, opinion, research, and personal beliefs.
- Write and respond to philosophy, connecting it to practice.

Materials

The materials used in this course allow for integration of a variety of instructional, supplemental, and intervention materials that support student learners at all levels in the school and home environments.

Associated web content and media sources are infused into the unit as applicable and available.

- A variety of advanced high school choral repertoire, including but not limited to recommendation lists from the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), and the NYSSMA Manual
- A variety of articles and essays on social issues, discrimination, and exclusion in the classical arts, including "Classical Music is Finally Reckoning with Racism" (7.16.20 The Washington Post), "Black Scholars Confront White Supremacy in Classical Music" (9.21.20 The New Yorker), and "Julliard Must Modernize or it Will Disappear" (3.8.21 Rolling Stone).
- Aesthetics: A Beginners' Guide by Charles Taliaferro
- excerpts from The Republic by Plato
- Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening by Christopher Small
- The Cartoon Introduction to Philosophy by Michael F. Patton
- The Philosophy Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained published by Dorling Kindersley

Suggested Strategies for Modifications

This link includes content specific accommodations and modifications for all populations: Performing Arts Accommodations & Modifications

Course-specific modifications include:

- Allow students to choose from several journal, essay, or discussion prompts and allow for multiple methods of response.
- Provide ample space for all students to participate and respond during class discussions.
- Provide opportunity for students to summarize what they read and put information into their own words for the class.