



Lesson: Write Your Own Program Notes

OVERVIEW

Writing program notes is a way for students to integrate musical knowledge with inquiry and writing skills. This activity requires the students to analyze music, conduct research, and organize, synthesize, and edit information to create written text. Considering the musical components and the context in which the piece was created enhances students' understanding of the music.

Students use a template to find and organize information that is used to create program notes for pieces that will be presented in a public performance by the band.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Identify the various types of information presented in concert program notes.
- Use technology and print media to locate information to complete a template.
- Examine the historical/cultural context of music they are performing.
- Examine the formal properties of music they are performing.
- Describe music using appropriate technical terminology.
- Organize and edit information to create program notes.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- A word processing program
- Internet and books for research

Student copies of:

- [Program Notes Activity](#) reading
- [Odysseus and the Sirens Program Notes](#) and program notes from other pieces to use as examples
- [Program Notes Research Worksheet](#) (six pages)
- Optional: Student work from the *Listen and Respond Lesson #2* as a reference

PROCESS

Ask students to write program notes that describe the entire piece or just one section of a piece. Students who work on this activity will need guidance, especially analyzing the form and other distinctive characteristics of the music. They will also need to be directed towards appropriate resources to discover historical or cultural influences of the pieces they are studying. Some training in basic research techniques and use of the internet to access websites may be required.

Consider collaborating with English, Communications, Writing, or Media teachers in order to assign this activity as an interdisciplinary project that addresses the content and standards of multiple classes.

1. Distribute and read the document [*Program Note Activity*](#).
2. Read program notes for *Odysseus and the Sirens* and other pieces and identify the kinds of information contained within the examples. This can be done as a large group activity. Use the categories from the Program Note Activity reading to do so.
3. Select a piece that will be performed for an upcoming public performance. The pieces may also be assigned to ensure that equal numbers of students are creating program notes for each programmed piece. This will be especially important if you decide to extend the activity.
4. Used the template provided to research and categorize information about the selected piece.
5. Analyze the form of the selected piece. Students will probably need assistance with this. The form may be best analyzed as a large group activity with guidance from the teacher. To do this, consider referring to the lesson Listen & Respond to *Odysseus and the Sirens* in the Lesson Plans for Listening & Responding folder of this curriculum.
6. Use the information to write program notes for the selected piece.

EXTENTION

Have students create their own concert program for family and friends. See the following lesson plan [*Creating a Concert Program*](#).

Program Note Activity



Program notes help to prepare listeners to hear a live or recorded performance of a piece of music. The program notes may contain a variety of information, such as:

1. **A description of the structure** of the music – form, distinctive musical elements used in the piece (key signature, scales, rhythms, tempo markings, etc.) or instrumentation;
2. **Moods or emotions** that the composer intends the listeners to experience;
3. **Stories, pictures, or ideas** that are represented in the music;
4. **Ideas or events** that inspired the creation of the piece (a poem, war, space travel, dinosaurs, etc.);
5. **Information about the history or culture** from when or where the music comes;
6. **Style or genre** (type) of music (swing, rock, showtune); or
7. **Biographical** information about the composer.

The best program notes contain information from more than one of the categories listed above. You will have to do some research to do a thorough job on this activity. (Hint: Many composers now have websites that provide biographical information.) The Program Note Research Worksheet will help you to collect and organize the information that you will need to write your program notes. It is not important that you find something to fill in every blank, but you will want to find enough information to make your programs notes thorough, interesting, and informative for your audience.

PROGRAM NOTES

Premiered May 8, 2008 by the Boynton Middle School Concert Band in Ithaca, New York, under the direction of Michael Allen.

The *Odyssey* was created by Homer about 2700 years ago. It tells of the adventures of the Greek hero Odysseus (*Ulysses* in Roman mythology) during his harrowing return to Ithaca after being away for twenty years, ten of which he had spent fighting the Trojan Wars. In one part of the journey, Odysseus is aware that he is about to encounter the sirens, famous for luring sailors to their death with their beguiling wind-like song. Intensely curious to hear them, he has all his sailors plug their ears with wax and tie him to the mast, with instructions not to untie him, no matter what he says. As they approach, the sirens begin singing and Odysseus screams to be untied, but the sailors can't hear him and they are all saved.

According to some versions of the myth, the sirens are fated to die if sailors were to hear their song and escape. So after Odysseus' ship passes by, the sirens fling themselves into the sea and are drowned.

This piece suggests this dramatic encounter. If you listen carefully, you can hear the wind-song becoming ever more insistent, the rocking of the ship, Odysseus' screams, and finally the sirens plunging to their death.



The Boynton Middle School Band

It might also be mentioned that sirens are still found in our stories today. Perhaps most recently, the Marvel Comics superhero "Siryn" (associated with the X-Men) is an Irish mutant that possesses a "sonic scream." And the term "siren song" still refers to an appeal that is hard to resist but, if heeded, will lead to disaster.

Finally, as part of the American Composers Forum's BandQuest® commission that supported the creation of this piece, the composer worked with the Boynton Middle School Concert Band, which also happens to live in Ithaca (though this one is in New York).



Program Notes Research Worksheet

Name: _____

Composer and Publisher Information
Title of composition:
Name of composer:
Name of arranger (if applicable):
Year piece was composed:

Structure and Style Information
Form of piece (ABA, Rondo, Theme & <u>Variations</u> , etc.):
Genre (Folk Song, Symphony, Showtune, etc.):
Style (Swing, Rock, etc.):



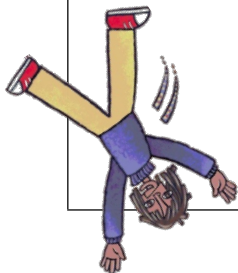
Musical Elements

What distinctive musical elements are used in the piece (melody, harmony, rhythm, expressive qualities, articulations, instrumentation) and where are they located in the music? (If you need more room to write, use the back side of this page or on a sheet of loose-leaf paper.)



Historic/Cultural/Social Information

During what historical period was the piece composed? Where and when might the music have been performed? Who performed the music – trained musicians or everyone in the community? How does the music reflect the culture, society, or time period? (If you need more room to write, use the back side of this page or on a sheet of loose-leaf paper.)



Feelings/Stories/Emotions/Events

What feelings, emotions, stories, or events are being conveyed in the music? (If you need more room to write, use the back side of this page or on a sheet of loose-leaf paper.)



Composer Biographical Information

You may want to do an internet search to see if the composer has a website. (If you need more room to write, use the back side of this page or on a sheet of loose-leaf paper.)



Resources —Info from the title page of the book, websites:

Authors	Copyright	Title	City: Name of Publish

Topic	Website Address





Extension Lesson: Creating a Concert Program

OVERVIEW

A project where students use the information they have researched to create a concert program for family and friends who will be attending the concert.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

1. Identify the components of a concert program.
2. Work collaboratively with peers.
3. Create a concert program that includes all appropriate components.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

1. Student-created program notes from the previous lesson
2. [Personal Concert Program Activity](#) reading for each student
3. Access to a shared text file of a roster of student performers
4. A word processing program
5. Access to clip art or pictures
6. [Concert Program Template](#) (a Word Document of the template is available in the folder “Lesson Plans with Interdisciplinary Connections” in this curriculum)

PROCESS

You will need to provide either access to a shared file that contains a roster of the student names in each performing group or a printed copy of the roster. It will also be easier for students to assemble their program notes into one concert program if they have saved their work on a shared file or a flash drive.

The Concert Program Template may be printed and provided to the students to use as a checklist to ensure that they have included all the components of the concert program.

1. Assign students to groups. Each group should be comprised of students who have all been assigned different pieces on the concert program so that all together the group represents all of the pieces on the program (at the end of the activity, you should have one full concert program per student group.)
2. As a class or small group, have students read the [Personal Concert Program Activity](#) reading.

cont.

3. Have students examine past concert programs to see what information is provided and how it is presented. To guide their work, students may consider the questions posed in the Personal Program Activity reading.
4. Using the program notes developed previously, have students enter their work into the Concert Program Template document found in the “Lesson Plans with Interdisciplinary Connections” folder of this curriculum.
5. Once each group has a completed concert program, photocopy each group’s concert programs.
6. Share concert programs with friends and family who attend the concert.

Personal Concert Program Activity

A concert program provides information to guide the listening of the audience. You have already examined program notes and created your own. Now you will share your work with other students who have created program notes for other pieces that will be performed in your upcoming concert. Together you will create your own personal concert program to be shared with your family and friends who will attend the concert.

As you look at past programs from both school and other concerts to see what information is included, make a list, thinking about the following questions:

1. Whose names appear on the program? Can you tell who composed the music? Who directed the group? Who are the performers? Were there any soloists or performers who were featured? Is anyone listed who somehow supported the performance in some way, even though he or she didn't perform during the concert?
2. What information is included about the performance that lets the audience know they are in the right place at the right time?
3. Are there any pictures or graphics on the program? If so, do they provide information or relate to a theme?

Use the model that is provided to make sure you include all the important information. See if you can find graphics or pictures to make the program look more artistic, highlight a theme, or provide an example of something mentioned in the program notes for one or more of the pieces on the program.



Concert Program Template: Be sure to include all of the following information:

Name of Event

Date and Time

Location of Event

Name of Performing Group

Name of Director

Title of Piece Name of
Composer/Arranger
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
..... Name of Composer/Arranger

Program Notes

Title of Piece Name of Composer/Arranger

Program Notes

Name of Performing Group

Name of Director

Title of Piece..... Name of Composer/Arranger

Program Notes

Title of Piece..... Name of Composer/Arranger

Program Notes

Roster of Performers

Acknowledgments

(Don't forget to include graphics, clipart, or pictures)