

The Joy of Pop!

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Should contemporary pop music be at the core of what we teach in early years music?

Choosing Pop Music for the Classroom:

When choosing pop music for the classroom, apply the same scrutiny that you would to any genre. Consider the following:

- Is the language and subject matter of the song appropriate for my students?
- Do I think this song will motivate my students, and will it motivate me?
- What musical concepts from the curriculum can I teach through this song?
- What connections to the world around us can be made through this song?
 - Does the song help represent diversity?
 - Does the song send an important message?
 - Does the song highlight Canadian, Manitoban, and/or Indigenous artists?
 - Does the song highlight artists from an area of the world where some of your students or their families are from?
- Does this song lend itself to opportunities for movement?
- Is the melody singable for the level of my students?

Preparation for Teaching a New Pop Song:

1. Listen to it a lot. Get it in your brain and body.
2. Determine the form.
3. Decide if the original key is appropriate for your students. Consider vocal range and difficulty level of chords (particularly if they will be playing ukulele, piano, guitar, etc.). Choose a new key if necessary.
4. Find the lyrics.
5. Find the chord sequence (use an AI app if you need help).
6. Create charts/slides for teaching lyrics and chords.

Process for Arranging a Pop Song with Students:

1. Listen to the song.
 - lots of times, in lots of different ways
2. Sing the song.
 - teach the lyrics and melody
 - teacher accompanies or use a karaoke track
3. Identify the form.
 - teach and apply form-related terms to the song (intro/outro, verse, chorus, pre-chorus, bridge, etc.)
4. Teach the chord sequence.
 - try using Boomwhackers, barred instruments, or ukuleles
 - sing along when you're ready
5. Develop your toolbelt.
 - try body percussion, rhythm percussion, background vocals, movement patterns, solo/soli singing, harmonic instruments, technology
 - experiment with style, tempo, and groove
6. Finalize your form.
 - Do you want or need to add, subtract or change any sections? (e.g., repeat the chorus at the end, extend the bridge for a dance break, create a new intro, etc.)
7. Create your arrangement.
 - decide which tools of your tool belt to apply to each section of the song
 - make decisions about elements of expression

Further Resources:

Podcasts:

- *Switched on Pop* with Charlie Harding and Nate Sloan, all episodes, especially episode 100, "Look What You Made Me Do."
- *Revisionist History* with Malcolm Gladwell, "When Will Met Grace"

Article:

- *Informal Music Learning + Orff Schulwerk: Developing Lifelong Musicianship* by David Dockan

Notes: