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EDUCATOR ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

SistaStrings

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Educator Engagement Guide

SistaStrings

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Musician Information

Musician Name: SistaStrings

Song: [“Goodbye”](#)

Cultural Identity: Black American

Biography:

Monique and Chauntee Ross—two sisters who perform and compose together under the name SistaStrings—come from a musical family of five. The sisters took lessons in classical string performance as children, and got their start performing as a group in their church.

They blend their classical training with gospel, R&B, folk and other influences, and bring their own life experiences and messages to the music they compose. The sisters are based in the Milwaukee area, where they write, teach and perform.

For musician photos please see the resources section later in this guide.

Learning Goals

By using project resources learners will:

1. Explore connections between music, identities, cultures and emotions.
 2. Recognize shared and unique elements of distinct pieces of music.
 3. Relate content to personal experiences choosing, playing and sharing music.
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Elements of Music

Melody - Vocal melody consists of a repetitive descending melody for “Goodbye” followed by a mix of steps and skips for the verse.

Rhythm - Syncopation and complicated rhythms

Harmony - Cello carries an ostinato, violin harmonies soar with improvisation, and vocal harmonies throughout

Texture/Timbre - Cello ostinato creates the bass, and voices and violin layer on top of each other, use of tapping on cello as percussive instrument

Form - A, A1, Interlude, B, A, A2

Expression - Use of pizzicato vs arco, gradual crescendo with layering, final goodbye without instrumental accompaniment and abrupt ending

Instruments

1. Violin
 2. Cello
 3. Voice
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Lyrics

“Goodbye”

Goodbye, Goodbye, Goodbye (repeats)

We're a piece of the puzzle
They tried put us under
But when that ain't work
Better believe it was the muzzle
Yeah, I can't be solved
I'm just tryna evolve
They ain't gonna stop my flow
Just gonna let em blow

Goodbye, Goodbye, Goodbye (repeats)

Outcomes, Strategies and Assessments

Main Theme: The expression and texture of layering short musical ideas and the techniques used to play them reflect the emotional complexities that our lives contain that may hinder or help our ability to grow.

Skill Outcome, Strategies and Assessments

Outcome: Students will recognize, create and perform ostinati.

Strategies:

1. Have students investigate popular songs that include an ostinato in the texture. Students can listen to music they might have heard on the radio or played in class before.
2. Show students a video such as “Around the World” (available in the *Re/Sound: Songs of Wisconsin* resource page under ‘Movement Ostinato Example’) that demonstrates a movement ostinato. Extend to a movement game where students had to create a short movement pattern for others to copy. Give some examples first then break them into small groups to work on this. Play the music from “Around the World” as background music and use an instrument as the verbal signal that kids should switch to a new leader.

3. Use web sound-mixing programs such as Incredibox (for link and resource information reference the Re/sound: Songs of Wisconsin resource page under 'Song Mixing Example') to demonstrate both vocal and rhythmic ostinati. Have students create a piece on their own or as a class.
4. Introduce students to a hand clapping game, pointing out that the hand clapping is an ostinato. Then students could make up their own hand clapping game to a simple song.
5. Create a 3-part classroom accompaniment using vocal ostinati: (ie: "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star")
 - 1st part/group: melody singers
 - 2nd part/part: sings only the last word of the line
 - 3rd part/group: sings twinkle twinkle over & over again to the same rhythm as melody

Assessments:

1. Have students use technology to create their own piece by layering ostinati (ie: GarageBand, Soundtrap, Groove Pizza, Chrome Music Lab).
2. Students work alone or in pairs to create an ostinato on classroom instruments to accompany a simple melody. Have students perform their pattern while you sing the melody.

Knowledge Outcome, Strategies and Assessments

Outcome: Students will compare and contrast different types of articulations (legato/staccato).

Strategies:

1. Provide examples of the same song using different articulations. Have students compare and contrast the differences. Which is most appropriate for the song? Why? Examples could include the great variety of "Hush Little Baby" performances from soloists, to instrumental to vocal jazz artists and classical performers.
2. Have students create movements that are short, choppy (staccato) and smooth, flowy (legato). Choose a piece to play with clear articulation differences (like pizzicato/arco). Split the class in half, one half dancing pizzicato movements students created when they hear pizzicato, and the other half dance the legato movements that students created when they hear the bowed accompaniment.
3. For younger students or those with special needs introduce students to articulations by attaching an animal to each (for example: smooth swimming shark, staccato bouncy kangaroo and something in between like an alligator that is on land and water). Play an instrument to each articulation and have students identify which animal the articulation corresponds to. Extend to playing three different articulations in a row and have students put the animals in the correct order.
4. Instruct students on how strings instruments can create different articulations (pizzicato/arco/percussive sounds by hitting the body of the instrument). If students have their own instruments, have them explore the techniques they can use to create different articulations too. Share with their classmates.

5. Have students play a scale on recorders or keyboards. As they get higher, they should play connecting all the notes in one long breath on the recorder or connected finger articulation on keyboards. On the way down, they should separate the notes to make them by using air to stop each note in between the recorder or short finger articulation on the keyboard.
6. Have students look at the score of a piece of music (or two contrasting pieces) that have staccato and legato markings. Have them identify the markings. Listen to the music if a recording is available. Discuss why did the composer choose these expressive elements and why did the composer put those markings in those particular places?
7. Group composing - One group of students create a staccato (pizzicato) ostinato on a xylophone, percussion instrument or ukelele. Another group of students create a smooth legato (arco) melody on a recorder or keyboard. Have students notate their patterns and add staccato and legato markings. Play them together in the same manner as SistaStrings did in Goodbye. Discuss why they choose their expressive markings.

Assessments:

1. Have students play or sing a simple melody using two different articulations. Have students describe how they are different and what technique they used to make them sound different.
2. Have students listen to selected pieces of music (ie: The Carnival of the Animals: The Swan/The Aquarium, The Kangaroo, Fossils, Hens and Roosters, etc.) and identify each as either legato or staccato. They could do this on paper or through movement.
3. Compose a legato or staccato piece by drawing something to show legato (say, a smooth curving line) and something to show staccato (say, a couple of sporadic dots) in a pattern maybe 10 or twelve "beats" long, then switch papers with a partner and play their partner's composition on an unpitched percussion instrument. With older students, you could have them use the actual legato and staccato markings on rhythmic notation.

Affective Outcome, Strategies and Assessments

Outcome: Students will relate and/or explore their own experiences with letting go of something in their lives so that they can make decisions on how to make change in their lives.

Strategies:

1. A class discussion about a time when a hypothetical student had to let go of something that they loved in order to attain something else. Some examples are included below.
 - a. When they had to let go of friendships when they moved to a new school and had to make new friends.
 - b. They had to let go of a favorite shirt because the shirt was too small.
 - c. They had to let go of feelings of hurt after a friend apologizes in order to keep that friendship.
 - d. They have to let go of not being able to do something in order to excel at something else.Let students share their own experiences with the group if they wish or they can choose to write it down and not share it.

2. Students will create a piece of visual art that expresses the thought of letting go of the past and moving into the future.
3. Students will write a melody or song with lyrics that expresses their struggle to let go of something and then expresses their feelings of accomplishment.
4. Review the lyrics of “Goodbye” with students. Using the background video, have students speculate why the performers might have included these thoughts in their lyrics.
5. Students compare themselves or someone they know who has struggled to be heard. Students share what they have done, what further options could be done, what possible associations or support groups exist for help in meeting that struggle and identifying who you are amongst the challenges.
6. The educator will share information about Marian Anderson. (Possible resource books include: *When Marian Sang: The True Recital of Marian Anderson* by Pam Muoz Ryan and Brian Selznick and *The Voice that Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights* by Russell Freedman.) Share how Marian Anderson’s music was muzzled in the United States and lack of permission to sing at Constitution Hall. Share how she said goodbye to that experience and moved forward with bringing her music to America in a different way. For additional resources see *Re/sound: Songs of Wisconsin* resource page. Search for ‘curriculum.’ Have students research other Black Americans who had to deal with similar situations and how they succeeded beyond these challenges.

Assessments:

1. Students will write a journal entry about a time when they had to say goodbye to something in order to attain a goal or improve something in their lives.
 2. Students will write a journal entry about an event that caused them to have to adapt to something new. Describe how it happened, how it affected your life and what changes you had to make to survive - health, school closings, family or cultural events. Did you keep these changes long term? How did this event and loss change who you are and how you view the world now?
 3. Students will write a journal of when their message was ignored and how they succeeded beyond these challenges.
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Extensions

1. Share and discuss these questions with your students after watching the interview video:
 - Monique says that music can help heal and connect. What kind of impact has music had on you and your life?
 - Chauntee describes an especially memorable music experience from her childhood where she went to hear the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra perform. What is a memorable experience you’ve had with music? How did that music make you feel?

- Chauntee and Monique reflect on how their lives are much different than those of their ancestors, and the progress that is being made, especially for women and women of color. What do you think is needed to keep making progress? How do you think music can be a part of that progress?
 - 2. Students research Black American composers, conductors, performers in various styles of music and settings. For a starter list of websites, people, performers from more recent years, reference the *Re/sound: Songs of Wisconsin* resource page.
 - 3. Both sisters talk in their interview about the mix of musical experiences from which they draw to create their own sound. (Their list included classical, jazz, blues, folk, and gospel music.) Have students research characteristics of these styles and find a portion of a SistaStrings song or performances that demonstrate these characteristics.
 - 4. SistaStrings describe their challenge as music students to see themselves in the performer role as there were few women of color in their bands. Have students share information of artists or performers of a variety of cultures that are setting the stage for students in the future.
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Standards Addressed

WMEA Music Standards

MU:Cr1.1.4b, MU:Cr2.1.4a, MU:Cr2.1.5b, MU:Cr3.1.7a, MU:Cr3.2.5a, MU:Pr6.1.4a, MU:Pr2.2.4c, MU:Pr4.2.7b, MU:Pr4.3.6a, MU:Pr4.2.7c, MU:Re8.1.6a, MU:Cn10.1.8a-WI, MU:Cn10.1.8b, MU:Cn11.1.8c-WI

DPI Standards

MG.1.Cr.7.i, MG1.Cr.8.i, MG.1.Cr.10.m, MG.1.Cr.11.m, MG.2.P.8.i, MG.2.P.9.i, MG.2.P.10.i, MG.3.R.5.i, MG.3.R.6.i, MG.3.R.7.i, MG.3.r.9.m, MG.3.R.10.m, MG.4.CN.7.i, MG.4.Cn.12.m

Resources

1. Resources to help reach the outcomes and strategies are provided at: <https://wsmamusic.org/re-sound/resources/>. For Black American cultural background and historical information search 'culture.' For PBS music, history, literature and art resources, search 'culture, instrument, curriculum, or performer.' For Black American cultural centers in Wisconsin and the surrounding area search 'culture.' For instruments featured search 'instrument.' And for additional Black American performers and SistaStrings websites and links search 'performer.'
2. [Interview transcript](#)
3. Musician photos (see next page)



Chauntee Ross, violinist in SistaStrings works on new music. Photo credit: PBS Wisconsin Education.



Monique Ross performing “Goodbye” at the Mead Witter Foundation Concert Hall on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus on February 28, 2020. Photo credit: PBS Wisconsin Education.



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Re/sound: Songs of Wisconsin is a collaboration between PBS Wisconsin Education and Wisconsin School Music Association.

