LESSON 3
Do labels matter? Why or why not?

musicurious
2019/20 EDUCATION PROGRAMS OF THE COLORADO SYMPHONY
Bringing the youth concert experience and the story of Beethoven’s life through real-world topics
LESSON 3: Do labels matter? Why or why not?

SUMMARY
In this lesson, students will scrutinize the potential benefits and drawbacks of labeling genres in the music industry, in addition to examining both how and why this practice has changed over the past several decades. Taking a transdisciplinary approach, students will extend their thinking around labeling to investigate how this practice can be both helpful and harmful to individuals and communities.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE
• Students will conduct research online to inform their argument, either in defense of or in opposition to categorizing music into genres.
• Students will critically analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the information gathered from their online research in preparation for the debate.
• Students will methodically follow the outlined steps to prepare for the debate.

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**COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

**GRADE 3**

**Colorado Academic Standards in Music: Grade Level Expectation**

Standard 4. Aesthetic Valuation of Music  
Grade Level Expectation:  
1. Select and use specific criteria in making judgments about the quality of a musical performance.  

**2020 Colorado Academic Standards // Grade Level Expectation: Reading, Writing, and Communicating**

**Oral Expression and Listening**  
1. Participate cooperatively in group activities.  
2. Communicate using appropriate language in informal and formal situations.  

**Writing and Composition**  
1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.  

**Research Inquiry and Design**  
1. Gather, interpret, and communicate information during short research projects.  

**GRADE 4**

**Colorado Academic Standards in Music: Grade Level Expectation**

Standard 4. Aesthetic Valuation of Music  
Grade Level Expectation:  
1. Discriminate between musical and nonmusical factors in creating criteria for evaluating music.  

**2020 Colorado Academic Standards // Grade Level Expectation: Reading, Writing, and Communicating**

**Oral Expression and Listening**  
1. Pose thoughtful questions after carefully listening to others.  
2. Create a plan to effectively present information both informally and formally.  

**Writing and Composition**  
1. Apply strategies to comprehend and interpret informational texts.  

**Research Inquiry and Design**  
1. Write an opinion pieces on topics or texts supporting a point of view with reasons and information.  
2. Write informative/explanatory texts using text structures appropriate for the purpose and developed through facts, definitions, concrete details, precise language, and domain-specific vocabulary.
Do labels matter? Why or why not?

**COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

**GRADE 5**

Colorado Academic Standards in Music: Grade Level Expectation

Standard 4. Aesthetic Valuation of Music

Grade Level Expectation:
1. Create and use specific criteria in making judgments about the quality of a musical performance.

2020 Colorado Academic Standards // Grade Level Expectation: Reading, Writing, and Communicating

Oral Expression and Listening
1. Collaborate in discussions that serve various purposes and address various situations.
2. Present to express an opinion, persuade, or explain/provide information.

Writing and Composition
1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information, for a variety of purposes and audiences.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts that provide a clear focus and the use of text features to group related information on a well-developed topic, using precise language and domain-specific vocabulary.
3. Apply understanding of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics to make meaning clear and to strengthen style.

Research Inquiry and Design
1. Research to locate, summarize, synthesize, and document information from print and digital sources, and communicate findings appropriately.

**LESSON CONNECTIONS**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**
- Students will conduct research online to inform their argument, either in defense of or in opposition to categorizing music into genres.
- Students will critically analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the information gathered from their online research in preparation for the debate.
- Students will methodically follow the outlined steps to prepare for the debate.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**
- How can labeling genres make it easier to communicate with one another about music?
- How can labeling be a form of musical segregation?
- How can labels encourage stereotypes and biases?

**ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS**
- Genre labels can unintentionally segregate music by misrepresenting artists’ work.
- Although it is an imperfect system, categorizing music by labeling genres can make it easier to communicate with others about music.
- Labels can promote stereotypes and biases.
LESSON CONNECTIONS

VOCABULARY
- Adjectives • Assumption • Bias
- Clickbait • Exclusion • Fake news
- Label • Nomenclature • Objective
- Stigma • Subjective • Taxonomy
- Categorization • Cataloguing • Characteristics
- Classify • Identity • Inclusivity
- Prejudice • Segregate • Self-esteem
- Stereotype • Trait

MATERIALS & RESOURCES
■ Devices with Internet access
■ Essential Tips for Conducting a Class Debate
  m.busyteacher.org/7245-conducting-class-debate-essential-tips.html
■ How to Evaluate Information Sources: Critical Questions for Evaluating Your Sources
  libguides.usask.ca/c.php?g=16390&p=90457
■ Labels limit learning: James Nottingham at TEDxNorrköpingED
  youtube.com/watch?v=viHaslVc9cc

GUIDING & EXTENSION QUESTIONS
■ Does categorizing music into genres help people find music they love or prevent them from experiencing something new?
■ Do genre labels always accurately classify music? (Consider how cultural diffusion results in the cross-pollination of genres to create mixed or hybrid genres.
■ Are their stigmas associated with certain genres? Give an example.
■ What are your first thoughts that come to mind when someone says “Classical music”? Why do you think that is your initial reaction?
■ What challenges may occur when computer algorithms assign music to specific genres?
■ Does labeling music according to genre increase or decrease the number of people who listen to particular songs? (Consider discussing how labels limit or expand people’s exposure to different types of music.)
■ How does a song’s inclusion on a popular playlist improve its exposure to more listeners on a global scale?

EXTENSION QUESTION FOR 5TH GRADE
■ Are genres still important (or even relevant) as streaming services gain more and more users? Why or why not? (Consider how the music industry has historically relied on cataloguing music according to genre for marketing purposes.)
I. CONNECTION

With more than 60 million songs available to choose from on high-speed online streaming services, we are empowered to instantly find and listen to new music. Although there is an overwhelming number of choices — coupled with some user experience frustrations — for the most part, streaming services enable us to find exactly what we are looking for without too much aggravation, time, or money. We have the option to create our own playlists, or choose from a seemingly endless selection of curated playlists.

By selecting a playlist, we expose ourselves to new artists and songs, many of which may be outside our genre-specific ‘comfort zone.’ But this is the point. Although they may not always be successful in doing so, streaming services report that they want listeners to discover that there is a lot more music they like than they may realize. They want listeners to become more open-minded and develop an increased willingness to expand their musical palate.

Times have changed. It has become less and less popular to listen to genre-specific radio stations that play the same rotation of songs.

II. TEACH

Open a class discussion about the potential benefits and drawbacks of labeling music.

Explain how the number of common traits among artists or songs defines their assigned genre. Computer algorithms often make this categorization.

Next, introduce students to the structure of a debate and the requisite preparatory steps.

Refer to the Web site below for an outline of one approach to structuring a class debate:

- Essential Tips for Conducting a Class Debate
  [m.busteacher.org/7245-conducting-class-debate-essential-tips.html]

Review the analytic rubric that will be used to score the debate. You may use the sample below, or create an analytic rubric with student input.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>4 = Compelling Debater</th>
<th>3 = Skillful Debater</th>
<th>2 = Novice Debater</th>
<th>1 = Debater-in-Training</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect for other Team</td>
<td>All statements, body language, and responses were respectful and used appropriate language</td>
<td>Most statements, body language, and responses were respectful and used appropriate language</td>
<td>Some statements, body language, and responses were respectful and used appropriate language</td>
<td>Statements, body language, and/or responses were consistently disrespectful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factual Information</td>
<td>All information presented was clear, accurate, and thorough</td>
<td>Most information presented was clear, accurate, and thorough</td>
<td>Some information presented was clear and accurate, but it was not thorough</td>
<td>There were major informational inaccuracies and/or lack of clarity and thoroughness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Demonstrated thorough understanding of information</td>
<td>Demonstrated understanding of most information</td>
<td>Demonstrated limited understanding of information</td>
<td>Demonstrated misunderstanding of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasiveness</td>
<td>All arguments were logical and convincing</td>
<td>Most arguments were logical and convincing</td>
<td>Some arguments were logical and convincing</td>
<td>None of the arguments were logical and/or convincing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>Communicated with clarity and confidence, maintained eye contact, excellent projection and inflection of voice, well-timed delivery</td>
<td>Communicated clearly, frequent eye contact, good projection and inflection of voice, acceptable timed delivery</td>
<td>Seldom communicated clearly, minimal eye contact, poor projection and inflection of voice, inconsistent delivery rate</td>
<td>Did not communicate clearly, no eye contact, monotone delivery, inconsistent delivery rate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuttal</td>
<td>Addressed all opponent arguments with counter-evidence</td>
<td>Addressed the majority of opponent’s arguments with counter-evidence</td>
<td>Addressed some of opponent’s arguments with counter-evidence</td>
<td>Did not address opponent’s arguments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: [https://www.educationworld.com/tools_templates/Final_templates_set2_debate.doc](https://www.educationworld.com/tools_templates/Final_templates_set2_debate.doc)
**III. DEMONSTRATION**

Select and share a contentious debate (or an excerpt from a debate) from YouTube. It may be one in which students are engaged in a debate, or a presidential debate to give students a clearer understanding of what a debate looks and sounds like. Consider choosing a sample debate that connects to a unit of study in social studies, or to a current event (e.g. climate change, social justice, immigration, refugee crisis, gun control). Point out specific examples from the sample debate to highlight what makes a compelling argument.

**IV. ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT**

Have students work with a partner to discuss specific aspects of the debate that they found most powerful or persuasive. Memorialize effective debater strategies on chart paper for students to refer to later in the lesson. Possible items to include: word choice, body language, composure, confidence, clearly articulated position, logical presentation of argument, and respect for the opponent.

Provide an example of what being respectful and fair might look and sound like in a formal debate. Provide an example of what is disrespectful during a debate, such as insulting or interrupting the opponent. A strong debater attacks the arguments and ideas of their opponent – not the person he or she debates.

**V. INDEPENDENT OR SMALL GROUP WORK**

Ideally, the class is divided into four groups with a minimum of three students per group. Two of the groups will represent the conservative perspective while the other two groups will defend the progressives’ position. During the first round of the debate, one of the two groups representing the conservatives and one of the two groups representing the progressives will present their argument. The other two groups will serve as judges and determine which side presented a stronger case at the conclusion of the debate. Then the presenting teams serve as the judges, and the judges become the presenters for the second round of debate.

Provide students with Internet access to research their assigned position. The link below provides students with critical questions to guide them through the process of judiciously evaluating information sources:

-libguides.usask.ca/c.php?g=16390&p=90457

**OPTIONAL EXTENSION**

Consider introducing students to the concepts of clickbait (on the Internet) and fake news during a discussion addressing how to determine which sources are more likely to be reliable than others and why.

Have students unpack Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s statement, “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts.”

**VI. SHARE**

This is when the debate will take place.

**VII. LINK**

Few things can accurately be described using a single label. Although labels can help provide clarity and understanding, they are often subjective, or based on opinion, rather than fact. Labels can oversimplify complex information, which can result in the segregation of music and people. It can create detrimental assumptions, biases, prejudices, and stigmas.

There is a need for greater balance and flexibility in labels, so music and people are not limited by rigid boundaries.
OPTIONAL 5TH GRADE EXTENSION #1

Display the following Yo-Yo Ma quote: “Culture resists reduction.”
Challenge students to interpret its meaning. Facilitate a Fishbowl discussion to explore the connection between cultural reduction and labeling in both the music industry and in society. The link below provides step-by-step instructions for leading a Fishbowl discussion.

(source: facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/fishbowl)

The discussion questions below may serve to extend and deepen the conversation:
- When might labels be helpful? (Labels can help us organize information and make informed decisions. For example, although muscles in the human body do not have clearly defined boundaries, they are illustrated in textbook diagrams as if they do to help students make sense of and remember an enormous amount of anatomical information; nutritional labels; animal taxonomy)
- When might labels cause harm?
- Are labels objective or subjective? Explain.
- In what ways can labels limit individuals?
- What is a stigma?
- How can labeling result in unfounded assumptions, stigmas, and/or prejudices?
- In general, how aware do you think people are of the impact labels have on themselves and others?
- How can we become more mindful when labeling others and ourselves?
- What words have people used to describe or label you that have hurt?
- What words have people used to describe or label you that have made you feel good about yourself?
- How can labels create an “us” versus “them” mentality?

OPTIONAL 5TH GRADE EXTENSION #2

Watch the following 18-minute TEDx talk, Labels limit learning: James Nottingham at TEDxNorrköpingED, with your students:
youtube.com/watch?v=viHaslVc9cc

Address the following questions to deepen students’ understanding of the TEDx talk:
- Translate the following equation presented by the speaker:
  Application = Value X Expectation
- How does practice make progress? Do assigned labels take personal progress into account?
- Why is it better to label a person’s actions rather than the person?
- Provide an example of labeling a person’s action. Take that example and reword it as a statement that labels the person, rather than the person’s behavior.
Do labels matter? Why or why not?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER TIPS

- Class debates can help ELLs improve their listening, speaking, and critical thinking skills, while learning content about an important issue.
- Offer preview charts, pre-lesson readings, and/or vocabulary lists for upcoming lessons to provide extra support and to improve learning readiness.
- Create progress charts for students to shift the focus away from scores to individual progress measured over time. This approach helps students evaluate and reflect on their personal growth so they can continue to improve.
- Provide students with graphic organizers, such as KWHL charts to organize their thinking. A KWHL requires students to codify:
  - What I Know
  - What I Wonder/Want to Know
  - How I Can Learn More
  - What I Have Learned
- Developing Questioning Skills is an excellent resource for teachers to sharpen their questioning techniques, including the ability to strike a balance between factual and thought-provoking questions:
  1.udel.edu/chem/white/U460/Devel-question-skills-UTx.pdf

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- The Importance of Music Genres
  ironskullet.com/2018/02/28/the-importance-of-music-genres/
- Spotify Wants Listeners to Break Down Musical Barriers
  nytimes.com/2015/06/04/technology/personaltech/spotify-sees-a-future-where-music-genres-dont-really-matter.html
- The Danger of Labeling Others (or Yourself)
  psychologytoday.com/us/blog/ulterior-motives/201406/the-danger-labeling-others-or-yourself
- What genres have benefited the most from the streaming era of music?
  washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/what-genres-have-benefited-the-most-from-the-streaming-era-of-music/2018/04/03/950e99a9-3695-11e8-9c0a-856477db9a22_story.html?noredirect=on
- Playlist Potluck from Sonos & Spotify
  youtube.com/watch?time_continue=50&v=KuDkWtwvVCo
- Fishbowl
  facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/fishbowl

HOME PRACTICE

Have students respond in writing to the following questions:

- How can labels encourage inclusivity of others? Provide an example.
- How can labels result in the exclusion of others? Provide an example.
- In your opinion, do labels tend to promote inclusivity or exclusivity? Justify your opinion.