



Irish  
Architecture  
Foundation

## Arts and the Curriculum

### Music

#### Lesson Plan Ideas

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Created by Michael Fleming, Arts Office, South Dublin County Council.

#### Overall Aims:

##### English

To demonstrate how music can be used to support an understanding of narrative and the delineation of characters in novels or plays.

##### CSPE/History

To show how using songs and songwriting in class can foster debate on socio-historical/political issues.

#### Approaches:

- Choosing pre-composed music to support a particular argument and presenting this in class.
- Analysing a pre-written song and writing a song around a particular subject matter.

#### Activity A (English)

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**Objective:** To understand music as a language in supporting the delineation of characters in a novel

**Example Task:** *Character Leitmotifs*

Choose pre-composed pieces of music to support your assessment of characters in a novel:

## ***To Kill a Mockingbird***

### **1. “Scout” Finch**

- Intelligent.
- A tomboy.
- Possesses a mischievous streak but a basic faith in the goodness of the people in her community.
- Through her experience of the trial she develops a more grown-up perspective that enables her to appreciate human goodness without ignoring human evil.

#### **Leitmotif and Instruments –**

*The Girl with the Flaxen Hair* - Debussy – piano/piano and violin

- Playful elegance
- Not rigid
- Loose expression but clear structurally

### **2. Atticus Finch**

- A widower with a dry sense of humor.
- Commanding presence and strong sense of justice.
- Strongly held convictions, wisdom, and empathy.
- He functions as the novel’s moral backbone.

#### **Leitmotif and Instruments**

*Cello Concerto* – Haydn

- Measured, solid
- Strength of expression mixed with delicate articulation.

### **3. Arthur “Boo” Radley**

- A mysterious recluse who never sets foot outside his house,
- Boo dominates the imaginations of Jem, Scout, and Dill.
- Powerful symbol of goodness despite initial shroud of creepiness.
- An intelligent but delicate child, emotionally damaged by his cruel father, he provides an example of the threat that evil poses to innocence and goodness. He is thus one of the novel’s “mockingbirds,” a good person injured by the evil of mankind.

#### **Leitmotif and Instruments**

*Fur Alina* - Arvo Part – piano

- Delicate and gentle
- Dark beauty particularly in the lower register.

As homework, ask students to do their own character summaries on three other characters in the novel i.e. Bob Ewell, Tom Robinson, Walter Cunningham and choose three pieces of music to support this.

**Outcome:** Students learn to translate their emotional responses to music into an analysis of literature.

Following on from that, use music/english language analysis parallels (see below) to encourage responses to other aspects of a novel.

| <b><i>Music</i></b> | <b><i>Literature</i></b> |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Leitmotifs/Motifs   | Characters               |
| Tone                | Tone                     |
| Texture             | Density of Language      |
| Movements           | Chapters                 |
| Themes              | Themes                   |
| Tempo               | Pace                     |

**Cross Curricular Links:**

Irish, French German etc: Same approach can be applied in other languages.

Music: Reinforces knowledge of formal music analysis

**Activity B (CSPE/History)**

**Objective:** To use songs and songwriting in class can foster debate on socio-historical/political issues

**Example Task:** Students are required to write a song on a particular socio-historical/political issue.

- Take a socio-historical/political issue from a particular time period that you are studying, in this case 'The Cold War' and the song 'Ivan Meets G.I. Joe' by The Clash

***Ivan Meets G.I. Joe – The Clash***

*So you're on the floor, at 54  
Think you can last - at the Palace*

*Does your body go to the to and fro?  
But tonight's the night - or didn't you know  
That Ivan meets G.I. Joe*

*He tried his tricks- that Ruskie bear  
The United Nations said it's all fair  
He did the radiation - the chemical plague  
But he could not win - with a cossack spin*

*The Vostok Bomb - the Stalin strike  
He tried every move - he tried to hitch hike  
He drilled a hole - like a Russian star  
He made every move in his repertoire*

*When Ivan meet G.I. Joe*

*Now it was G.I. Joe's turn to blow  
He turned it on - cool and slow  
He tried a payphone call to the Pentagon  
A radar scan - a leviathan*

*He wiped the Earth - clean as a plate  
What does it take to make a Ruskie break?  
But the crowd are bored and off they go  
Over the road to watch China blow!*

*When Ivan meets G.I. Joe*

- Along with the obvious discussion of the lyrical content, discuss the musical content and how it reflects the subject matter:
  - Does the song evoke any form of emotion that relates to the issue being explored? How does it do that? (Through rhythm, lyrics, tone, change in pace of the music etc...)
  - Music as the metaphor. Disco music... The metaphor is that they are two guys at studio 54 in 70s NYC, using every trick in the book to win the big dance-off as the crowd observes. The spectators, ultimately bored with all the devastation, leave to watch China develop.
  - Star Wars sound effects.
  - Does the song evoke any form of emotion that relates to the issue being explored? How does it do that? (Through rhythm, lyrics, tone, change in pace of the music etc...)

- Another less figurative and more in tonal-contrast example to the above is Russians by Sting

### ***The Russians - Sting***

*In Europe and America, there's a growing feeling of hysteria  
 Conditioned to respond to all the threats  
 In the rhetorical speeches of the Soviets  
 Mr. Krushchev said we will bury you  
 I don't subscribe to this point of view  
 It would be such an ignorant thing to do  
 If the Russians love their children too*

*How can I save my little boy from Oppenheimer's deadly toy  
 There is no monopoly in common sense  
 On either side of the political fence  
 We share the same biology  
 Regardless of ideology  
 Believe me when I say to you  
 I hope the Russians love their children too*

*There is no historical precedent  
 To put the words in the mouth of the President  
 There's no such thing as a winnable war  
 It's a lie that we don't believe anymore  
 Mr. Reagan says we will protect you  
 I don't subscribe to this point of view  
 Believe me when I say to you  
 I hope the Russians love their children too*

*We share the same biology  
 Regardless of ideology  
 What might save us, me, and you  
 Is that the Russians love their children too*

- Address the structural approach to the songwriting
  - a series of verses with one common phrase in each (e.g. 'Russians love their children too')
  - Musically – textural development around one main theme.
- From the discussed themes, construct a song in the class

### **Class/Homework Task**

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Ask students to write their own lyrics to a song about the same (or a different) subject with two different approaches (e.g. figurative/metaphorical and direct reference) and present it to the class. They must also choose a musical style and justify that choice based on the nature of those lyrics and how it links to the socio-historical/political issue. Students may do this individually or in groups.

**Outcome:** Students learn about the historical/political event in a novel way using songwriting

**Cross Curricular Links:**

English/Poetry: Looking at the structure of a song and it's meter/rhyme etc

Music: Analysis of musical content in the song

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