



Young
Audiences
Arts for
Learning

Northeast Ohio

Lesson Title: *The Rhythm of Proverbs* by Terry Boyarsky

Grade Level lesson designed for:

1st through 6th grades; standards addressed for grade 4.

Academic Subject Area(s) in this lesson: Language Arts

Art Form(s) in this lesson: Music

Brief description of lesson: This lesson provides some ways you can use proverbs and music in your classroom to teach language arts.

Academic Objectives: By the end of this unit, students will be able to....

Language Arts standards addressed for grade 4:

Phonemic Awareness, Word Recognition and Fluency

B. Demonstrate fluent oral reading using sight words and decoding skills, varying intonation and timing as appropriate for text. Acquisition of Vocabulary:

D. Know the meaning of specialized vocabulary by applying knowledge of word parts, relationships and meanings. Reading Applications : Literary Text

D. Identify figurative language in literary works, including idioms, similes and metaphors.

Artistic Objectives: By the end of this unit, students will be able to...

Musical Standards addressed for grade 4: Historical, Cultural and Social Contexts:

5. Recognize and describe ways that music serves as an expression in regional cultures

Creative Expression and Communication 5. Read, write and perform using sixteenth through whole note values including a syncopated rhythm of eight-quarter-eighth in 2/4, 3/4, 4/4 meter. Analyzing and Responding:

3. Identify and respond to music forms (call-response).

6. Discuss and evaluate individual and group music performance

Procedures:

“A wise man who knows proverbs reconciles difficulties.” I enjoy playing with proverbs in my classes - they are short, pithy, memorable, and rhythmic. Proverbs have meaning and are ripe for the imagination. They can be layered and contrasted, dissected and invented. I’ll give you a few suggestions for ways you can use proverbs in your classroom that integrate music with language arts based on 4th grade standards.

Each culture has its own proverbs that reflect lifestyle and cosmology. My examples are from Africa. Here is one to try out:

He who cannot dance will say: "The drum is bad." Go around the room and ask each in turn to speak the proverb accentuating a different word with their voice and gesture. Someone might say, *He who **cannot** dance will say: "The drum is bad."* Another might say, *He who cannot **dance** will say: "The drum is bad."* After each, the class echoes back, as in call/response music. Each interpretation will be different, reflecting how all versions are equally valid.

Perhaps there are some words that are unfamiliar, or the proverb itself is a tongue twister. Later you can ask the children to identify which parts of speech they chose to emphasize.

Now the students are ready for something more rhythmic. Often a proverb has its own cadence, as common usage in the culture has already set the rhythm. You can write a proverb on the board (or pass out index cards with a written proverb) and ask a group of students to come up with their own rhythm, paying particular attention to where the silences are. Ask that when they perform it, they repeat it four times. For example, this proverb could have three rests at the end (indicated by the asterisks):

“No one tests the depth of a river with both feet * * * .”

Ask each group to find a way to accompany their proverb with body percussion (stamps, claps, pats, snaps). This is excellent practice in teamwork. Have each group perform their proverb - they can include an introduction and a coda too (beginning-middle-end). This gives the class experience in audience/performer behavior.

Once the students have determined the rhythm and form of their proverb, they can find a steady beat and discover how many beats are in their version. They can see where the downbeat is and determine if the rhythm is anacrusic (starts before the downbeat). Then, have fun with pairing contrasting proverbs for a larger musical form. Try these:

4 / ♩ | ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ | ♪ ♪ ♪ . | ***There is no medicine to cure hatred.***

4 / ♩ | ♪ | ♪ . ♪ | ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ (♩) | ***The fool speaks, the wise man listens***

If this sounds complicated, then remember that music is like language - tiny units (letters or notes) combine to make discrete elements (words or rhythmic patterns) which in turn combine to make larger forms (sentences or phrases). Knowing these well leads to invention, composition and improvisation in speech, writing and music.

I like to extend these ideas by asking the students to think of a proverb or aphorism (new spelling word!) that they hear from a relative. Often they don't think they know any but as soon as someone comes up with "What goes around comes around" or "If it ain't broke don't fix it" more come gushing out. It's good to analyze proverbs for metaphor and analogy. As a final project, students can write their own, and describe how they invented it and how it can help them remember their aims in their own life.

ABOUT THE ARTIST: With over 35 years of experience as a teacher of Dalcroze Eurhythmics and performer of chamber music, Terry Boyarsky specializes in integrating music and movement into the curriculum. In her unique, multifaceted approach, Terry evokes deep listening and playful experimentation. Students work together to understand the components of rhythm and sound, to develop attention, improve coordination, and challenge the mind. In 1998, Terry earned a M.A. in Ethnomusicology from Kent State University. She has published articles and is a frequent presenter at national conferences. She currently performs with a string quartet, sings in the Cleveland Orchestra Blossom Festival Chorus and is on the rosters of Young Audiences of Northeast Ohio and the Ohio Arts Council.