

Blue Man Learning Lab

Sound

A Walk About Sound

Elementary School

Applying the Blue Man Creative Impulses

The Breakfast Symphony. Shake Your Booty. Pipe Medley. The Blue Man engages the world through sound. The Blue Man makes music from sound. The music of Blue Man Group is the music of the everyday. It is the rhythm of a crunch. It is the pulse of a pipe drum. It is the invitation of clapping hands. The Blue Man audience is gifted a new kind of music within a Blue experience. Sound becomes music. Music connects people. This lesson will provide learners the opportunity to find music in the day-to-day.

Lesson Summary

Begin the lesson by inviting learners to participate in a sound walk. A sound walk will involve walking around their environment observing and recording sounds they hear in sound notebooks. The sound walk will take 15 minutes. Learners will be participating in the sound walk as a large group. Sound notebook notations will be brief and as descriptive and detailed as possible. Sound book notations might address who, what, where, when, and how of the sounds they are hearing. Begin the sound walk in the room in which the learners are gathered. Continue the walk by visiting a variety of places: indoor and outdoor, secluded and busy, and loud and quiet. Wherever the sound walk is occurring, make sure the sound walk respects the behavioral expectations of the context.

Once the sound walk has been concluded, and learners have written their observations in their sound notebooks, ask learners the following questions as a group: What sounds did you hear on the sound walk? What natural sounds did you hear? What other sounds were present? Describe the sounds using music vocabulary such as long/short (duration), high/low (pitch), and fast/slow (tempo).

Continue the lesson by dividing the class into groups of 3-5 learners. Ask learners to appoint the following roles: a Leader who is responsible for making sure all group members participate, a Timekeeper who makes sure the group is aware of how much time the group has to complete the task at hand, and a Scribe responsible for writing down the work of the group. All learners will be Musicians sharing their work with the large group.

Explain to learners that each group will need to choose 10 sounds from the sounds that were heard on their respective sound walks. They will need to write a narrative soundscape describing the 10 sounds using music vocabulary. Once each learner group has written a narrative soundscape for all 10 sounds, they will need to develop a soundscape symphony in which they recreate the 10 sounds they chose from their respective sound walks.

Soundscape symphonies will require a title, be 5-7 minutes in length, and incorporate 10 sounds selected by the learner group. Soundscape symphonies are not limited to 10 sounds, but need to incorporate the 10 selected sounds into a larger piece of music that the learner groups develop. Importantly, soundscape symphonies need to be created from basic things found in the learner environment. Encourage learners to be creative when considering what sounds objects produce. Have a table of basic things like pots, pans, cooking utensils, pens, and newspaper prepared for learners to use to create their soundscape symphonies. It might be helpful to have a variety of instruments available for learners to use as well. Also, have learners think about sounds they can make with their bodies such as clapping, whistling, stomping, snapping, and lip smacking, for example. Give learners 20 minutes to rehearse and create their soundscape symphonies.

Once soundscape symphonies have been created and rehearsed, ask learner groups to perform their soundscape symphonies for the entire group. Soundscape symphonies will be evaluated on creativity, completeness, and attention to detail.

Following group performances of soundscape symphonies, ask learners to discuss the following concluding questions: In what ways were the soundscape symphonies similar? In what ways were the soundscape symphonies different? Did soundscape symphonies incorporate a variety of sounds? Did the soundscape tell a story? If so, what was it about? Did the soundscape evoke a certain place or time? If so, where and when?

Connecting to Standards

- Reading Standards for Literature K-5 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Writing Standards K-5 Texts Types and Purposes
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards K-5 for Speaking and Listening K-5 Comprehension and Collaboration, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards K-5 for Language Knowledge of Language, Presentation of Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Language Standards K-5 Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use, Conventions of Standard English

Sound Scavenger Hunt

Middle School

Applying the Blue Man Creative Impulses

Sound is playful for the Blue Man. Creating music from unusual sounds is like solving a puzzle. The Blue Man asks audiences to consider several questions. What is the relationship between sound and music? Where is music in my world? What can we use to make music? How can we use music to express emotion? How can we use music to connect with one another? This lesson will provide learners the opportunity to play with sound by finding sounds in the world and using sound to tell a story.

Lesson Summary

Begin the lesson by brainstorming a list of unusual sounds. Ask learners to consider a wide variety of sounds. Think about sounds produced by objects, animals, machines, and nature. Sounds can include: a dog barking, a vacuum cleaner, a phone ringing, a phone busy signal, waves crashing, popcorn popping, a baby crying, a grocery store scanner, a match striking, and a siren. Write the sounds on large notecards and tape them the board as they are mentioned. Make sure learners have listed a large number of unusual sounds.

After learners have created a list of unusual sounds, ask learners to describe the sounds using music vocabulary such as long/short (duration), high/low (pitch), and fast/slow (tempo). Choose several examples from the list of sounds to describe in greater detail.

Continue the lesson by dividing the class into groups of 3-5 learners. Ask learners to appoint the following roles: a Leader who is responsible for making sure all group members participate, a Timekeeper who makes sure the group is aware of how much time the group has to complete the task at hand, and a Sound Technician responsible for making sure all sounds are recorded. All learners will be Performers sharing their work with the large group.

Once groups have been formed, let learners know they will be conducting sound scavenger hunts in which they will find and record sounds. Each group will be asked to select 5 sound cards from the unusual sounds described in the brainstorming activity. The 5 sounds will necessarily be random, and will most likely have no relationship to one another.

Each group selects 5 cards and is tasked with recording sound clips of each sound. Sound clips can be recorded on any available device. Recording devices can include smartphones and audio recorders. Each group will need to be given time to find and record all sounds into short sound clips.

After sound clips have been recorded, explain to learners they will be writing sound stories relating each of the sounds to one another. The sound stories will need to include each sound. The structure of the sound story is simple, much like Mad Lib stories in which specific words are inserted by readers at specific points in the story, each sound clip will be inserted into the narrative when instructed by the story author. Groups will write a narrative connecting each sound. When the time for the sound to be heard occurs, a space explaining what sound to insert will appear in the text. Because sounds will have previously been chosen, and sound clips will already be recorded, provide each group 20 minutes to write their sound stories.

Once sound stories have been written, ask learners to perform their sound stories for the large group. Each group member will need to participate in the performing of the story as either a reader or a sound technician. Sound story performances will be evaluated on creativity, completeness, and attention to detail.

Following group performances of their sound stories, ask learners to discuss the following concluding questions: In what ways were the sound stories similar? In what ways were the sound stories different? Did sound stories incorporate a variety of sounds?

Connecting to Standards

- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Reading Standards for Literature K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Writing Standards 6-12 Text Types and Purposes, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Range of Writing
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Language Standards 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

A Sound Walkabout

High School

Applying The Blue Man Creative Impulses

The Blue Man experience is built on the ritual of music. The Blue Man shares the human experience with the audience through music. The Blue Man is a guide on this journey toward connection. In the Blue world, the human experience is one of curiosity, humor, and life force. In this lesson, learners will explore the rite of passage ritual of the walkabout in an effort to use sound to connect with one another and the world.

Lesson Summary

Introduce learners to the concept of a walkabout by providing the basic definition of a walkabout as an Australian rite of passage ritual. Explain that in the traditional sense, a walkabout refers to traveling a great distance in order to mature or come to greater understanding of oneself. A walkabout can also mean a departure from the everyday, in the spirit of introspection and reflection.

Continue the lesson by constructing a list of major life events. Let learners brainstorm for a considerable length of time, making sure to touch on a variety of topics and perspectives. Once a list of life events has been developed, ask learners to think about the sounds that might be part of each event. Try to find at least three sounds to correspond to each event.

After a list of events and sounds has been developed as a large group, ask learners to think about the following questions individually in a journal: If you had to choose five events that have formed who you are today, what would they be? How would you generally describe each event? (Who, What, When, Where, Why?) What have been the major things you have learned from each event? In what ways have those events connected/disconnected you to/from family, culture, and the environment? Ask learners to take 15 minutes to answer these questions?

Once learners have been given 15 minutes individually to answer questions in their journals, divide into groups of 3-5. Ask learners to appoint the following roles: a Leader who is responsible for making sure all group members participate, a Timekeeper who makes sure the group is aware of how much time the group has to complete the task at hand, and a Scribe responsible for writing down the work of the group. All learners will be Musicians sharing their work with the large group.

Provide learners the task of writing a walkabout song –an artistic rendering of a life event through sound in order communicate a rite of passage. In order to write a walkabout song, learners will need to choose one life event that has been highlighted within the individual journals. Group members will then compose a 3-5 minute song based on that event.

Before composing the song, each group will need to write a song description that answers, in a general sense, the following questions: How could that event generally be described? (Who, What, When, Where, Why?) What were major things that could have been learned as a result of the event? In what ways could that event have connected or disconnected someone from family, culture, and the environment? Provide groups 10 minutes to write their song description.

Following choosing an event and writing a song description, ask learners to consider the sounds of that event and write sound descriptions. Sound descriptions can address the following questions: Would there be noise? Would there be crying, or laughter, or even silence? Would there be natural sounds such as a storm, wind in the trees, or night sounds, for example? Would people be talking? What might they be saying?

The basic structure of the walkabout song is simple. Each song will be 3-5 minutes in length. Each song will use a combination of sounds and be performed using all available resources. Songs must tell a story, and the story must have a beginning, middle, and an end. It is not necessary for the song to have words, though it can if the group so chooses. Whether as a vocalist (speaking or singing) or instrumentalist,

each group member needs to participate in the creation and performance of the song. Walkabout songs may be a series of sounds that tell a story, spoken word poems being performed over instruments playing a basic rhythm, or songs with lyrics being performed over traditional melodies, for example. Provide groups 25 minutes to create their song. Walkabout songs will be evaluated on creativity, completeness, and attention to detail.

Ask learner group to perform their walkabout songs for the entire group.

Once all walkabout songs have been performed, a concluding discussion can include the following questions: In what ways were the walkabout songs similar? In what ways were walkabout songs different? What things were learned in the walkabout songs? What role did family, culture, and environment play in the walkabout songs?

Connecting to Standards

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