



## **Music, Anticipatory Sets, and Learning: How to Make Your Students Sit Up and Listen before the Lesson even Begins**

### **The Set**

The anticipatory set is but one component of Madeline Hunter’s “Effective Elements of Instruction.” Hunter, regarded by the Sierra Research Institute and the National Women’s Hall of Fame as among the hundred most influential women of the 20th century and one of the ten most influential in education, was a pioneer in reshaping educational pedagogy in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century. The anticipatory set is a vital component to a lesson plan, but when combined with the unique powers of music, teachers of all levels of education can benefit. It may be helpful for educators of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century to revisit Hunter’s work and re- envision lesson plans using music as an anticipatory set.

According to Hunter, one of the fundamental strengths of the anticipatory set is as the “hook” that snags the learner into a lesson. Moreover, the anticipatory set can also allow the following activities to happen:

- Establish a mood for the class.
- Indicate the path of the day’s lesson.
- Help settle the students into a “new” educational environment.
- Indicate the topic or theme for the class.
- Allow the instructor to take care of general “housekeeping” duties such as attendance or speaking with students who are in need of reinforcement of some kind (e.g., tardiness, absence, homework, etc.).
- Allow the instructor to “mingle” with students to obtain a sense of the overall emotional/mental “temperature” of the class.

The anticipatory set is not only practical but might also be conceptually integral to the inception of any lesson. While the content of the set can include a variety of media and linguistic cues, music can be a vital, pivotal tool that provides a number of educational possibilities.

### **Music as an Anticipatory Set**

Mingling music with the anticipatory set has interesting benefits. Music as a precursor to a lesson can adduce the following:

- Relax and dissipate anxiety among the students.
- Promote community.
- Segue students from “outside” world to classroom community.
- Prepare students for the advent of a new learning experience.
- Entice student interest in a unique classroom adventure.
- Allow the potent meditational qualities of music to occur .

Music, according to Dr. Thomas Moore, is a “transitional experience” for a learner. By transitional experience an event can harken or yield to an emotional/mental state of greater expansion of brain activity or emotional connectedness. Dr. Robert Gupta goes so far as to say that music in any educational forum can function as not only an aid to new learning and understanding but also as a form of therapy that can reach a deep, communal connection. Gupta says that with music we “remember our shared common humanity, the deeply communal connected to consciousness, the empathic consciousness that is hardwired into our brain’s right hemisphere.” The suggestion here is that music can function as a classroom community-building activity as well as an educationally significant experience.

Music also builds community? Music can ease anxiety? Music can promote learning? On surface these seem rather grand if not prohibitively large statements to make. Yet the research that I have done suggests this statement has *gravitas*. Students in my course enjoy coming to and returning to class with music emanating from the classroom. It provides a conduit for interpersonal communication. It suggests wonder at the lesson of the day. It assists in preparing students for a new learning experience.

Students’ responses generally support these concepts.

*What can I say? Music sets the tone for the upcoming events and puts you in a mood to follow the day’s lecture. I have really enjoyed coming into a classroom that is lively, entertaining, and upbeat. You like the same kinds of music that I do, and I never know what old song is going to play. From rock and roll to the jazz to the old ballads that take you back to a kinder time.... The music is comforting and so different from any class I have taken in the past. I heartily approve of the chance to expand our experiences through the power of music, and we didn’t even need peyote (per Jim Morrison) to do it. Some of the people in class have probably never heard of most of the people who belt out their heartaches and triumphs for the whole world to sing along and/or disparage. Listening to music reminds us that we are not the only people to feel rejected, joyous, alone, or frustrated. You allow us that reminder.*

--Jennifer B.

*I enjoy the music greeting me every day of class. It helps to relax me and gets whatever creative juices I might have, flowing. Some of the songs I know and enjoy hearing; others I may not know but still enjoy. I consider your style of*

*teaching with music a good tool; it forms the scope of the lesson that is to follow it and takes the sterile form of teaching to the next level for me.*

--Angelique F.

*I love listening to the music in class! It makes me feel relaxed and puts me in a good mood. I feel ready to work and learn, even if I don't know or like the music. I try to figure out how the songs will play in to your lesson for the day.*

--Mimi G.

*I can't speak for everyone, but for me the music just gives that "it's gonna be okay" vibe, just like a sign that there's no need to be so serious and tensed up. I think it's a really good approach to loosening up the crowd and the themes that often come with the songs.*

--Lauren S.

### **A Typical Lesson Outline**

A typical lesson for me follows this general itinerary:

- Music prior to the beginning of class
- Music at the precise moment class begins
- A discussion of the musical theme
- A short activity based upon the musical theme
- A discussion of the activity
- An announcement of the lesson's learning standards
- The lesson
- An activity to measure the lesson's effectiveness
- A recap of the learning standards

While the intent and purpose of the lesson is paramount, a number of other teachable moments may occur.

### **Teachable Moments**

There are many teachable moments available when using music as an anticipatory set. While my personal purview is language and literature, reciprocity could be found for almost any discipline in an average liberal arts curriculum. When selecting musical forms to introduce my lessons, I am careful to consider other educational moments.

Culture, for example, is one such consideration. I intentionally choose music that students normally would not seek out nor have any casual contact. Opera, jazz, and folk music are among some of those categories. I might further widen the categories to include the off-beat, Indie music, traditional folk music endemic to unique cultures, etc. These new forms offer an opportunity to teach mini-lessons in culture.

Language also gets a nod. With new cultural forms, students might be exposed to new vocabulary such as "aria," "dragline [jazz]," or "refrain" [as found in popular music]. "Mélange," "surreal,"

“impressionist,” etc.—these and other terms can be a source of a mini-lesson in linguistics. Lessons of these mini-teachable sizes need not consume a large amount of time but may be ancillary inclusions to the forward direction of the main lesson.

### **Example Lessons**

Essentially, most lessons that I teach can be enhanced with a musical introduction. If I were teaching a lesson on the definition essay, I might begin with Aretha Franklin’s, “R-E-S-P-E-C-T.” A lesson on peer editing might begin with music that expresses the concept of friendship, such as Carol King’s, “You’ve Got a Friend.” A lesson on anaphora might begin with The Byrd’s, “Turn, Turn, Turn.” When established as part of the daily lesson, students will not only tune into the music just because it is music but also be actively considering the content of the next lesson. This music component is the “hook” that Hunter talks about: students actively readying for the lesson even before class starts. When a student’s attention is captured and intrigued, the lesson that follows can be more profoundly delivered.

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