



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1995 Volume II: Film and Literature

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## Teaching Academic Skills through the Exploration of Music

Guide for Curriculum Unit 95.02.11  
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Teaching music through an interdisciplinary approach affects students positively in the acquisition of academic skills. The way in which we experience music, language and learning has changed due to the advent of interactive technology (i.e. CD-ROMs, virtual reality generators currently being developed by cable networks, telephone companies, the Internet and other on-line networks) and the coming of age of interdisciplinary arts presentation. Rarely is music, dance, literature, film or most any academic subject presented in the classroom without the use of some form of media aid or presentation. As a result, how students perceive, experience and respond to learning subjects such as reading, writing, math, science and understanding art or music may have also changed over the past 15 to 20 years.

For teachers, this change might not be viewed as positive. It is the goal of this teaching unit to provide teachers with an effective way of organizing resources that build reading, writing and comprehension skills while providing students with exposure to art and music. In order to do this, I shall use the film genre, as it lends itself easily to the combination and study of three disciplines. Through film, we may have a better understanding of ourselves as people. Seeing a film about someone from a different culture, or viewing someone with special needs, might give students insight into how other types of people experience the world, thus giving them a fuller view of themselves in the context of this world. Film might also spark the imagination of students in ways that class discussion alone might not. While teachers may have these goals, they might run the risk of students not applying themselves; the analysis and critical work has been done for the students in the media presentation.

While students' imaginations might be sparked, and their worldview expanded, other skills such as the ability to read with comprehension, to think, analyze and process information critically and to express one's personal view and discoveries in writing might go undeveloped. These skills can develop only through consistent work. The quagmire for teachers might be that just working on English grammar and writing skills in a vacuum can be equally troublesome. Without motivation, students will not have the heart or the desire to put in the hard work necessary to develop and treasure strong traditional academic skills. Keep those media resources handy. Imagination or motivation boosters might not be so bad after all.

I have attempted to address the needs of different grade levels, since most music teachers work with a variety of levels within a particular school setting. For example, a music teacher assigned to an elementary school might work with kindergarten through fifth grade. There might also be a class or two of students with special needs. The interdisciplinary approach of this unit lends itself to adaptation for all grades and needs. I have

also outlined ways that material can be adapted to each grade level.

(Recommended for Music/Instrumental Music, all grade levels)

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