

Title: Soundtracks and Superheroes

Level: Junior

Connection to a Culminating Activity:

Students will examine how the elements of music can be used to determine identities of a variety of superheroes' main themes (e.g., instruments, tempo, dynamics, etc.).

Overall Expectation:

C2. Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing

Apply the critical analysis process to communicate their feelings, ideas, and understandings in response to a variety of music and musical experiences

Specific Expectation:

C2.2: Identify the elements used in the music they perform, listen to, and create, and describe how they are used (Ontario Arts Curriculum: Music)

Note that the above two headings are based on terminology in the Ontario Arts Curriculum 2010 (Revised), and educators from different areas should adapt or vary those descriptions as necessary.

Learning Objectives:

Although different composers have written music for the same superhero, the music is influenced by the mood of the movie. Using the elements of music, students will identify that superhero music tends to use common elements and can be very memorable for the viewer to identify.

Success Criteria:

- "I know I've got it when" I can identify the superhero in the music AND/OR justify my choice (it is not as important to get it correct as it is to show that they understand how the elements below influence their choice)
- "I know I've got it when" I can identify the correct elements of music (see worksheet)
- Students may be able to identify a preference for two choices of music for the same character

Prior Student Knowledge Required:

- Students should be familiar with the terms for different dynamics and tempos as well as how to identify common instruments by sound

Class Materials:

- handouts and pencils (for students; see example below)
- Shared listening stations with devices for students
- Whiteboard or chart paper (for teacher)
- Speaker system on computer to play the tracks for [Superheroes! Soundtrack Concert](#) (this links to a playlist of all the tracks)
 - Other potential pieces to search:
 - “Black Panther main theme”
 - “Batman Danny Elfman,” “Batman Adam West theme”
 - “Supergirl TV show main theme,” “Man of Steel Main theme”
 - “Wonder Woman TV show theme,” “Wonder Woman 2017 theme”
 - “Spiderman show theme,” “Spiderman Homecoming theme”

Differentiation

- Students with IEPs or ELL early stages may choose to draw instead of write
- Students can use terms like “medium”, etc, instead of the standard abbreviations
- Students may verbally give answers or have scribing when needed

Part One: Superhero Soundtracks

Instruction #1 → Superheroes and the Elements of Music (~10-15 Minutes)

- Ask the students to generate a list of common superheroes. Try to be diverse with gender, etc. and include DC and Marvel examples. Write these on the whiteboard/chart paper and save for the next lesson (5 minutes)
- Review the elements of music and terms on the handout. What would you expect these to be for a superhero? (5-10 minutes)

Things to point out:

- Dynamics/tempo: loud (forte) and fast (presto) are often used for action, like fight and chase scenes
- Instruments: Strings can be used for the 'main idea' and romance, brass indicates power, percussion is used for the personality of a character (e.g., someone who flies might use drums differently)

Instruction #2 → Superhero Themes and Listening Activity (~20-25 min)

- Pass out the handouts and remind them to not give away any answers. They will fill out the handouts with a prediction of the hero for each piece of music and the elements of music they hear. (5 minutes)
- Play selections from the soundtrack for a variety of heroes and composers 2-3 min each. Collect for assessment. (15-20 minutes).
 - Captain America March: the stylistic use of brass indicates Steve Rogers' ties to the military
 - Batman: use of heavy brass and percussion creates darkness and intensity, indicates Batman being an 'antihero'
 - Superman and Supergirl Main Themes: very subtle differences in instrumentation for their genders. Use of strings and brass in the theme for the main hero, and to suggest love interests
 - Black Panther: Wakanda: The use of talking drum and vocal calls by featured Senegalese artist Baaba Maal, based on his own concert openers, are mixed with an "anthemic" brass theme, establishing its uncolonized African setting in the context of the MCU's other soundtracks (see more [here](#) - it's very cool!)

Assessment Levels:

- Level 4: student identifies all aspects of the music correctly and gives advanced details for their selections
- Level 3: student identifies most aspects of the music and gives detail for their selections
- Level 2: student identifies some aspects of the music and gives little detail for their selections
- Level 1: student has missing/incorrect aspects of the music and gives little or not detail for their selections

STUDENT WORKSHEET example:

Piece Name:

Prediction: _____

because _____

Instruments: _____

Tempo: _____

Dynamics: _____

Piece Name:

Prediction: _____

because _____

Instruments: _____

Tempo: _____

Dynamics: _____

Part Two: Comparing Composers

Instruction #1 → Sharing and Review (~10 minutes)

Have students share what they noticed for instruments, dynamics, etc. Did they have answers? Did it match their predictions? Have students give the superhero predictions and see how they compare to the answers. See if they can identify the features used above and go over them.

Instruction #2 → Comparing Interpretations (~30 minutes)

Play a selection from a different versions of the superhero themes (5 min.)

- Batman TV show (60s, goofy) vs. Tim Burton films (80s, dark)

Guiding Question: How does the mood of the movie and take on the character affect the music that the composer writes?

To answer this, put students into groups and have them each listen to two different versions of superhero music (15 minutes)

- Wonder Woman 70s vs Wonder Woman 2017
- Supergirl TV show main theme vs 1980s movie
- Animated Spider-man TV show vs MCU (vs Sam Raimi movies vs Amazing Spider-man?)
- Man of Steel vs Superman (1978)

Things to think about: Which do they prefer? Are there modern instruments that affect how the music is written? (Listen to instrumental versions of theme songs so they won't lean towards those with lyrics)

To close, have students present their findings orally (10 minutes). By the end of the lesson, students should be able to show that music choice is objective but that they understand it makes a powerful intro and connection with the theatrical experience on the big or small screen.

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