

American Celebration: Activity 5 **An American in Paris**

Teaching Objective

Students will become familiar with Gershwin's *An American in Paris*.

Resources

- A display of a photograph or painting depicting a hustle-bustle street scene containing pedestrians and cars. A computer image search using the words 'traffic and pedestrians' will give you ample choices. If possible, use a picture that depicts movement.
- Accompanying Youth Concert CD
- Paper and something with which to write for each student (optional)

Pre-Assessment

Ask students if they have ever been in the downtown area of a city. Ask them to describe what it was like and how they felt.

Teaching Sequence

1. Display your street scene and ask students to look at it and tell you (or write down) what they see in the picture.
2. Now ask them to think about the area outside the frame of the picture and speculate what else might be there. Ask them what they think they would hear in this scene. What might they smell? Would it be loud? Calm? Fast paced? Make inferences about where the people in the picture are going. Are they in a hurry? Is this their routine? Do they live there or are they visiting?

Culminating Activity

Tell the students that the American composer George Gershwin found himself in a similar scene in Paris in 1928. His experience inspired him to write a piece of music he called *An American in Paris*. Have students listen for some of the city sounds they suggested from the picture. Have them amend their list to include what they hear as they listen. Some sounds will be literal and some may be implied by the music.

Additional information: Gershwin wrote that his intent was to portray the impression of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city and listens to various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere. At one point in the music Gershwin uses the blues to suggest that the American becomes homesick. But then the music becomes festive again as he is again caught up in Parisian life. In 1928 for the piece's first performance, taxi horns were used that Gershwin had brought back from his visit to Paris!

Evaluation

Did students become familiar with Gershwin's *An American in Paris*?

TEKS Connections

Music 117.103(1A,1E,2A,2D,4C); 117.006(3A,3C,3E,4C); 117.009(3A,3C,3E,4C)

