

## **Listening to a Musical Arrangement written in Theme and Variations Form**

### **Teaching objectives**

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of arranging as the art of giving existing music variety
- Student will identify variations to a simple theme by manipulating the melody (pitch and rhythm) in various ways

### **Resources/Materials**

- A copy of the Shaker tune, "Simple Gifts" in a singable key for elementary students (found on page 19 of this guide)
- An orchestral performance of *Appalachian Spring* by Copland; many are available on YouTube

### **Pre-Assessment**

Students will need to have good knowledge of the Shaker tune, "Simple Gifts"

### **Teaching Sequence**

1. The teacher should be sure students can successfully sing "Simple Gifts" before listening to Copland's orchestral arrangement so they can easily identify the melody played by the instruments. There are several places that can be extracted from the melody to reinforce reading of common turns in solfege. (s,-d; r-d-r; m-f-s) Having students sing these tunes and then identifying them in the melody with lyrics will help with ear training.
2. Inform the students that they will listen to "Simple Gifts" performed on instruments. The composer has created variety in the music by writing five variations on the theme. Define theme and variations as a way of taking a song and making it sound different.
3. Create a chart on the board labeled with these 7 titles:
  - ◆ Introduction
  - ◆ Theme
  - ◆ Variation 1
  - ◆ Variation 2
  - ◆ Variation 3
  - ◆ Variation 4
  - ◆ Variation 5
4. Tell the students that the composer will introduce the piece before they hear the theme. The introduction gives the listener a clue to what the music will be like. Play the beginning of "Appalachian Spring" and ask students to raise their hand when they hear the beginning of the tune, "Simple Gifts." Stop the music when most hands have been raised successfully. Ask the students:
  - ◆ Did the introduction set the mood?
  - ◆ What instruments did you hear in the introduction to establish the mood?
  - ◆ What did the tempo of the introduction tell you about the music?
  - ◆ Was the introduction loud or quiet?
5. Tell students you are going to play just the theme of "Appalachian Spring" Ask the students to listen for which instrument 'sings' the theme.
6. After students have identified the clarinet as the instrument which presents the theme, ask them to count how many times they hear the tune played in its entirety by the orchestra. Play "Appalachian Spring" again starting at Variation 1 and running through the 5<sup>th</sup> variation. Tell them singing the song inside their head (audiation) will help them count.
7. Lead students to discover in Variations #1-3 the melody is played in its entirety. Variation #4 contains only the second half of the tune ("When true simplicity is gained...") and Variation #5 contains only the first half of the tune. Inform the students that composers will often manipulate a small part of a melody as a composition technique.
8. Play the five variations again, stopping after each variation and ask students to list instruments, tempo, dynamics, articulation, etc. on the chart on the board for each variation.
  - ◆ Variation 1- oboe and bassoon duet
  - ◆ Variation 2- very legato; begins with low strings, high strings enter later Discuss the fugal treatment as similar to a canon (round) in which one voice starts the tune and a second voice begins later.
  - ◆ Variation 3- contrasts the second variation by featuring staccato brass
  - ◆ Variation 4- only the second half of the melody is played; there is another oboe and bassoon duet accompanied by the double bass
  - ◆ Variation 5- slow, majestic full orchestra

## Extensions for the Music Specialist

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#### Culminating Activity

The Shakers incorporated dance (movement) in their worship. Teachers can use this as an opportunity to incorporate the new movement TEKS. An idea was found on PBS website [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/dancin/resources/lesson\\_plan-m2.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/dancin/resources/lesson_plan-m2.html).

- Divide the class into 4 groups. Each group creates a simple movement for 1 of the musical phrases of the song. Their movement can be reflective of the time period or teachers can allow a more modern (yet appropriate) version since Shakers were known to be very energetic in their dance.
- Each group takes turn teaching their movement to the class.
- Combine all four movements and the whole class performs to *Appalachian Spring*. Students need to be mindful of the partial representation of the melody in Variations 4 and 5.

#### Evaluation

Reflective writing helps students integrate new knowledge with previous knowledge and develop their own understanding. Ask students to write a short paragraph describing their favorite variation on "Simple Gifts." They need to use music vocabulary to support their personal preference (timbre, tempo, dynamics, articulation).

#### TEKS Connections

Music: 117.12b(1,3,5); 117.15b(1,3,5); 117.18b(1,3,5); 117.33b(1,3,5)

# Simple Gifts

An Appalachian Shaker Song

Joseph Bracket

'Tis the gift to be sim-ple, 'tis the gift to be free. 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be. And when we find our-selves in the place just right, 'Twill be in the val - ley of love and de-light. When true sim-pli-ci-ty is gained. To bow and to bend we shan't be a sham'd. To turn, turn will be our de-light, Till by tur-ning, tur-ing we come round right.