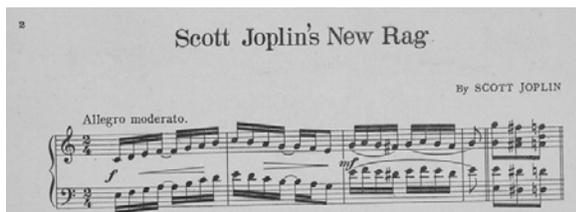


Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly Learning Activity – Elementary Level

Communicating Through Music: "Scott Joplin's New Rag"



[Detail] Joplin, Scott. *Scott Joplin's New Rag* [Sheet music]. 1912. From the Library of Congress, Performing Arts Encyclopedia. <http://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200033273>

OVERVIEW

Overview

In this activity, students investigate “How do musicians communicate?” using the ragtime music of African American composer Scott Joplin as an example. They look closely at sheet music for "Scott Joplin's New Rag," and consider what this song would sound like if played. After listening to a historic sound recording of Joplin playing this song, students compare their understandings from observing sheet music and a sound recording.

Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- Observe details of a primary source
- Express an idea based on observation of a primary source
- Compare reading music to listening to music

Time Required

One 45-minute class period

Recommended Grade Range

K-2

Topic/s

Arts & Culture; African American History

Subject

Arts and Communication

Standards

McREL 4th Edition Standards & Benchmarks

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

Arts and Communication

Standard 4. (Role of Culture) Understands ways in which the human experience is transmitted and reflected in the arts and communication

Standard 5. (Role of Culture) Knows a range of arts and communication works from various historical and cultural periods

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PREPARATION

Materials

Have these materials ready before the activity.

Joplin, Scott. "New Rag." 1912. Sheet music.

- Prepare to display or print one copy per student of page two only (see attached document)
<http://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200033273>

Joplin, Scott. "New Rag." 1912. Sound recording.

- Prepare to play the sound recording of this song for the class
<http://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.100010753>

Resources

Before guiding students through the activity, teachers can familiarize themselves with Scott Joplin's biography by reviewing the following Library of Congress Web site resource:

Scott Joplin, 1868-1917 [biography]

<http://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200035815>

PROCEDURE

1. Ask the class to describe different ways they show or communicate what they think, feel or know with others (talking, facial expressions, body movement, drawing, etc.).
2. Explain to students that musicians are people who say what they think, feel or know through music. But how do musicians do this?
3. Display or pass out copies of page two of "**Scott Joplin's New Rag.**" Model how to observe a detail before guiding students in observing other details. Possible prompts include:
 - What do you see on this page? (e.g., words or letters, black dots or notes, black lines)
 - Point to anything that looks familiar. Point to anything that looks strange.
 - What patterns—dots, lines or anything else that repeats—can you find?
 - Look closely: what else do you see?
4. Explain to the class that an African American musician named Scott Joplin wrote or composed this piece of music many years ago in 1912. He was famous for composing and playing a style of music called "ragtime."

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PROCEDURE (CONT'D)

5. Ask students, “What do you think this ragtime song might sound like when played?” using details they observed in the sheet music as evidence.
 - Model a response, such as:
“*I think this song would sound loud because the page has no empty spaces.*”
 - Ask students to think about different musical characteristics. Possible prompts include:
 - o What instrument might play this song?
 - o At what tempo—slow or fast?
 - o How loud or soft?
 - o How might this song make you feel?
 - o How might you dance to this song?
6. Record students’ responses on the board before telling them you will now play a very old recording of Scott Joplin himself playing “Scott Joplin’s New Rag.” Instruct the class to listen carefully to the entire song with their eyes closed.
7. Encourage students to share what they heard. Repeat the song as needed.
 - What did you hear that surprised you?
 - What did you hear that you expected?
8. Return students’ attention to their recorded responses:
 - How well did the class “read” what Scott Joplin communicated in his written music?
 - How well did the class “read” what Scott Joplin communicate when he performed?
 - Which was easier for you to understand? Why?
 - What do students still want to know about this song?

ACTIVITY EXTENSIONS

--Guide small groups in writing lyrics, choreographing dance steps or drawing a sheet music cover for "Scott Joplin's New Rag" that express what students think Joplin is communicating through the song's music.

--Invite students to perform or present their creative works for classmates. Afterwards, discuss any common themes or patterns that the class may have observed among projects.

--Challenge students to learn more about Scott Joplin's life, times and music. What information can they discover by visiting a school or local library?

EVALUATION

- Active, thoughtful participation in class discussions
- Active engagement in observing two different types of primary sources
- Satisfactory completion of the writing assignment, assessed on their use of specific details from the sheet music to justify their predictions.

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Scott Joplin's New Rag

By SCOTT JOPLIN

Allegro moderato.

The musical score is written for piano and bass. It begins with a tempo marking of 'Allegro moderato.' The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The score consists of five systems of music. The first system starts with a piano (p) dynamic in the bass and a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic in the treble. The second system continues with mf in both parts. The third system has mf in the bass and a forte (f) dynamic in the treble. The fourth system has mf in the bass and f in the treble. The fifth system concludes with a first ending (marked '1') and a second ending (marked '2').

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