

CRISS STRATEGIES IN THE BAND ROOM

By Ruth Lemley

As band directors, we may limit our class time to rehearsal only. In preparation for a concert or competition, we may find it most prudent to spend our entire class time practicing music.

Think about why you became interested in music. Was it because you could play all major and minor scales on your instrument? Was it because you could play a piece of music with correct rhythms, notes, dynamics, intonation, phrasing, and nuances? Or was it because music touched your soul? Music can mean much more to us if we know and understand why it was written, who wrote it, and the story behind it.

If your students are like mine, you may share my frustration -- I sometimes feel like I have to do a juggling act to grab their attention. I have found, however, that when students, on their own, find the history and story inside music, they take more interest in what they are doing. The CRISS strategies are designed for students to become independent, active participants of their own learning, rather than the passive listeners I sometimes created.

Music transcends notes on the page. It reflects the human condition. When students understand the “where, when, how, and why”, they can internalize the music and see how it is a reflection of humanity. It means more to them than just notes on a page. Students have ownership of the music and of what they are learning.

How do we convey this deeper meaning to our students? Some directors just stand on their podiums and lecture to the kids. But, wouldn't it be better if we had the students actively involved? Why not let the kids do the teaching? That's what CRISS is all about, and that's why I love using the strategies in my band room.

I decided to write this article after listening to many band directors say they had no idea how to use CRISS. At Meadowlawn Middle School in St. Petersburg, Florida, where I teach, all teachers (including the band director) are expected to use CRISS strategies in their classrooms and note the applications in their lesson plans.

In this article, I hope to help band directors (and others), who have had the CRISS training, successfully implement the strategies. Below, I have listed some of my favorite strategies, along with a short description of how I have used them. Since I teach at a middle school, most of the strategy applications relate to that level. Use your creativity to adapt them to your situation. I hope this information helps!

PATTERN PUZZLES Phrasing

Using a simple, non-copyrighted melody that is 16 measures long:

1. Make several copies of the music (enough so that each group in #2 below can have a copy), cut each copy into four 4-measure segments, mix up the order of the four segments, then either clip the four pieces together or put them in an envelope -- this is the pattern puzzle.
2. Divide the class into groups of three to five students and give each group one pattern puzzle.
3. Allow each group to decide the arrangement of the melody
4. Have each group share (or play) their arrangement and explain why they arranged the measures as they did.
5. An alternative to this can be to use more than one melody.

THINK-PAIR-SHARE & KWL

I use this technique in preparation for our Spring Concert.

1. Begin by mentioning a piece of music or a composer that you will be studying for your next performance. For example, *Star Spangled Banner* or John Philip Sousa. We study the *Star Spangled Banner* and John Philip Sousa in Beginning Band, so this works well with my advanced groups.
2. Students write down what they already know (**K**) or remember about the topic. (*Think*)
3. Divide the class in to pairs or small groups for discussions on what they remember or know. (*Pair*)
4. Conclude with a class discussion, (*Share*) during which the students generate questions about the topic (**W**)
5. Follow up with a trip to the media center to find the answers to their questions.
6. For the performance, have a student give oral “program notes” to the audience before each selection the band plays (**L**).

COOPERATIVE TEAMS

Older students teach younger students music—the school fight song, Alma Mater, cadence, National Anthem, etc. You probably already do this!

AUTHENTIC QUESTIONS

1. Students look at a piece of music.
2. Each student develops one question about an aspect of the music that he/she does not understand.
3. The teacher provides the students with resources for finding the answers.

Example: One of my students asks, “What does *maestoso* mean?” I provide that student with a music book or method book which I know contains the answer.

4. All students share their questions and answers.

K-W-L

This strategy is great for sight-reading a piece of music. (*See Diagram 1.*)

1. Write K-W-L on the board or overhead projector, then ask the students what they know about the piece of music. Write their responses verbatim on the board under “K”.
2. Ask students what they want to know (or, what they don’t know). Write their responses verbatim under “W”. Give students a method to find their answers—dictionary, music book, etc. I have found that this method of sight-reading engages the students so much that they are very interested in knowing the answers to what is under “W”. I once modeled sight-reading a piece of music for Beginning Band, and they listened to me for almost 20 minutes as I talked about what I wanted to know, researched questions, and transferred the answers to the “L” column.

Any day I have a student without an instrument, I have him/her transfer our KWL to poster paper and hang it on the wall. The next day we review the poster as a preliminary exercise to playing the piece again. (Plus, the poster looks great when an administrator walks into your room!)

Used when sight-reading “Anasazi” by John Edmondson--

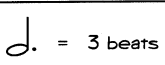
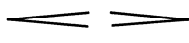
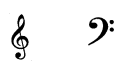

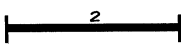

KWL		
What do you <i>KNOW</i> ?	What do you <i>WANT</i> to know?	What did you <i>LEARN</i> ?
 <p>= 3 beats</p> <p>musical notes</p>  <p>#</p> <p><i>mf, f, p</i></p> <p>$\frac{4}{4}$ = 4 beats per measure, quarter note equals one beat</p>  <p>composed in 1987</p> <p>56 minutes long</p>	 <p>Anasazi</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: 20px; margin: 0 auto;">3</div>   <p>Queenwood</p> <p>John Edmondson</p>	<p>Slur - do not articulate</p> <p>American Indian tribe in New Mexico</p> <p>Third measure</p> <p>Rest for 2 measures</p> <p>Fermata - play until the director stops you</p> <p>Publisher - they printed the music</p> <p>He wrote the music. No, he's not dead.</p>

Diagram 1

FREE-RESPONSE ENTRIES

Provide students with notebook paper in their music folders. At the end of a rehearsal (or during, when not playing), have the students freely respond on their paper about the rehearsal. They can write about the music, behavior, pace, anything they choose that would be considered constructive criticism. You should write with them.

I have found that my students work better when they hear constructive criticism from each other instead of just from me. They have ownership of the rehearsal, instead of being passive recipients of instruction. I ask students if I may read their entries to the class. I read them verbatim, including grammatical errors and jargon. A lot of students like this because it's like writing a note to the entire class.

One note: Make sure the maturity level of the class is high enough for this to work. For middle school, this may only work with an advanced class.

CONCEPT OF DEFINITION MAP

This is an easy one. Just insert a musical term.

SEMANTIC FEATURE ANALYSIS

I use the SFA to teach students appropriate behavior at performances.

Topic: Appropriate Behavior

FEATURES WORDS	Clapping	Shouting	Mosh Pit	Quiet Listening	Talking	Eating								
Football Game	+	+	-	-	+	+								
Rock Concert	+	+	+	-	+	+								
Yearbook Assembly	+	+	-	+	+	-								
Band Concert	+	-	-	+	-	-								
Florida Orchestra	+	-	-	+	-	-								

Diagram 3

Concept of Definition Map

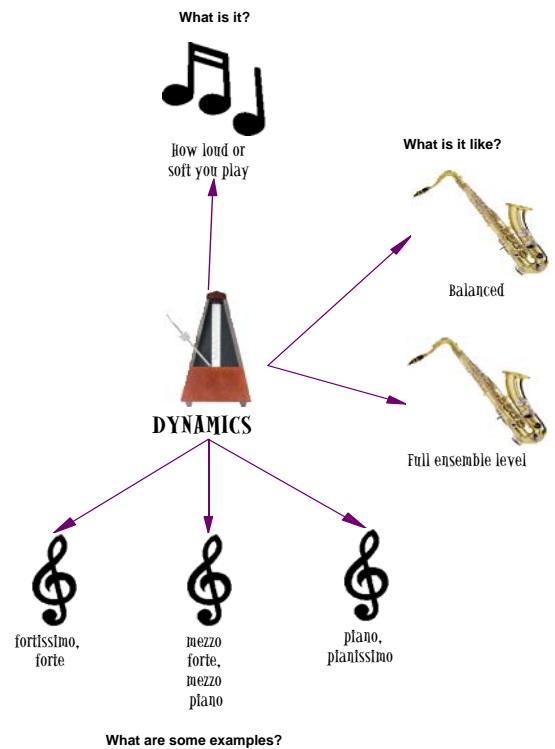


Diagram 2

(Note: This map was created using Inspiration® Software.)

DRAWINGS

Have students write the concept or music term so that it illustrates the meaning.

DECRESCENDO

VENN DIAGRAMS

Use the Venn to compare/contrast lives of composers, styles of music, performances of bands, students in class at the beginning of the year (as an introduction to each other), etc.

QUESTION ANSWER RELATIONSHIPS (QARs)

Since “Reading” appears twice in Meadowlawn’s School Improvement Plan, all teachers (including band directors) are expected to use reading in the classroom and to indicate in their lesson plans how it is used. I use reading assignments for Beginning Band lessons, for emergency lesson plans, and for make-up work (How else is a student going to make up a rehearsal?).

For Black History Month, my students read some selections from the book *Great African Americans in Music* by Pat Rediger. After I modeled some QAR questions from one selection, I had the students work in pairs to come up with their own questions about Ray Charles. Here are some sample questions developed by my students.

Right There: “What happened to George (Ray’s brother)?” The answer is found in one sentence.

Think and Search: “How did Ray’s mother treat him when he went blind?” The answer to this question is found in several sentences.

Author and You: “Why was music so important to Ray?” The author gives clues to this question, but the reader has to draw his or her own conclusions from the author’s information.

On My Own: “How would your life be different if you were blind?” “How would you learn music?” The answers are not in the reading and the students would have to use prior knowledge to respond.

I have my students develop QARs from video lessons, after listening to a performance, or from other reading assignments. I recommend the following books:

Great African Americans in Music by Pat Rediger, Crabtree Publishing company, 1996. ISBN 0-86505-800-8.

Duke Ellington: Composer and Band Leader by Kent Smith, Melrose Square Publishing Company, 1992. ISBN 0-87067-586-9.

Marsalis on Music by Wynton Marsalis, W. W. Norton, 1995. ISBN 0-393-03881-5.

The History of Rock and Roll by David Shirley, Franklin Watts, 1997. ISBN 0-531-11332-9.

A Young Person’s Guide to Music by Neil Ardley with music by Poul Ruders, DK Publishing, 1995. ISBN 0-7894-0313-7.

I hope I have inspired you to try a few CRISS strategies with your students. I guarantee you will have success and that your students will reach a new level of understanding. Good Luck!!!

About the Author: When Ruth Lemley wrote this article, she was teaching music at Meadowlawn Middle School in St. Petersburg, Florida. She taught at Meadowlawn for six years. Currently, she is teaching private music lessons, and she shares with us that she continues to use the CRISS strategies with her music students.

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