



Milwaukee Symphony Uses CRISS

We were excited to get a letter this month from Mary Kleist, a teacher at Mukwonago High School in Wisconsin. Mary wrote, “I am an English teacher who took the CRISS class a few years ago. I have since incorporated some of the strategies and found them to be very helpful and successful.... In my spare time, I work with the Milwaukee Symphony to help develop curriculum for teachers to use in preparing students for concerts for high school students which correlate with the study of American history and American literature.” Mary enclosed a sample teacher’s guide for a symphony performance called “The Pursuit of Happiness, Struggling to achieve the American Dream in urban America”. In the guide were two CRISS activities, a RAFT and a modification of KWL.

Since we sometimes leave the musical arts out of our training, I would like to share with you this wonderful program! The Milwaukee Symphony provides two concerts for high school students during the school year--each lasting approximately 50 minutes. Guides and a tape of the music to be performed are provided for the teachers in advance of each concert. “The Pursuit of Happiness” concert consisted of five selections: excerpts from Gershwin’s *American in Paris*; a traditional spiritual, *Ride On, King Jesus*; *Malcolm’s Prison Aria*, from the opera *X* by Davis; Ives’ *Central Park In The Dark*; and Bernstein’s *Symphonic Dances* from *West Side Story*.

The guide starts with the overall themes to be covered: Linking past to present, seeking opportunities in American cities, and expressing big city life through the arts. Next, the guide gives background information about the concert (e.g., musicians coming onto the stage, tuning instruments, the conductor’s job) and about each selection (e.g., the composer, the opera/musical from which the selection is taken, the specific piece). Mary says she spends time finding out what her students already know, before sharing information from the guide.

For each selection there is a “Listen Perceptively” section which sets a purpose for listening. For example, with *An American in Paris*, the guide directs, “Identify the walking theme at the beginning of *An American in Paris*. How would you describe the walk? Listen for the

humor of the ‘taxi’ theme (played by four taxi horns). What do you think is happening to the tourist when you hear the scampering effect of the xylophone?” For the *Symphonic Dances* of *West Side Story*, “How would you describe the moods of the dances? - tense, loving, threatening?”

To keep students actively involved in the symphony experience, the guide provides some writing and organizing opportunities. Preparing for *Malcolm’s Prison Aria*, students do some research about Malcolm X and write a RAFT paper:

R--Role	Malcolm at age 18, a prison guard, other?
A--Audience	Classmates, theater patrons, other?
F--Format	A letter, an essay, a commercial, a play, other?
T--Topic	Malcolm’s prison experience, a mainstream reporter interviewing Malcolm, Malcolm’s militancy, Malcolm’s call for cooperation between blacks and whites, other?

The following modified KWL was used for the whole activity as it relates to American cities:

	BEFORE THE CONCERT		AFTER THE CONCERT
	What do you know about America's cities?	What do you expect to learn about America's cities?	What did you learn about America's cities?
Who settled in cities?			
What were their reasons for making cities their homes?			
How did city life affect specific people or groups? When? Where?			
How did city life affect the music created in America?			

Teacher volunteers, like Mary, have worked hard with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra's Education and Outreach Office to develop these wonderful curriculum materials. The curriculum materials are available to any teacher, and there is a possibility that teachers could also get tapes of the selections. For information, you may contact the Education Concert Manager.

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We plan to share the information with our local orchestra!

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