More Than Words
Starting with the Story Before the Score

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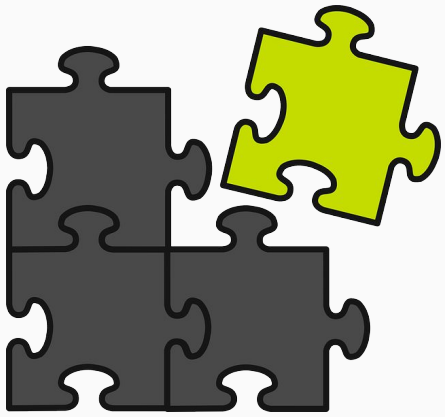
Presentation Overview

- Rationale: Why story before song?
- Text Exploration: The Three “C’s”
- Text Exploration Activities
- Guided Listening Activities

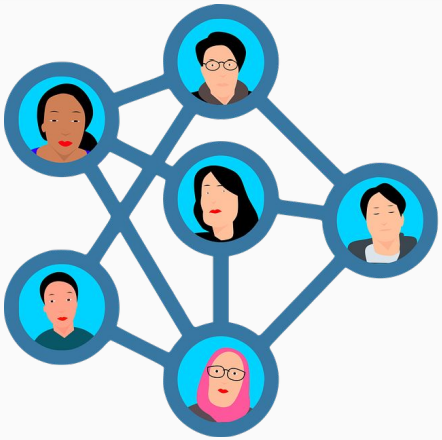
Why story before song?

Text Exploration: The Three “C’s”

Context



Connection



Curriculum

Context

Who?

When?

Where?

What?

WHY?

- Who is the composer? Who is the lyricist?
- When and where was this piece written?
- What is the text saying?
- Why was the piece written?
- Why do (or should) I care about learning this piece?

Connection

Score Study
With the Story
In Mind

- Describe the speaker(s) in the story as characters.
  - Draw a picture.
- Identify musical elements that relate to the speakers.
- Retell the narrative in your own words.
  - Six-word summaries.
- How does the musical form relate to the story?

Curriculum

Repertoire as Curriculum

With an informed understanding of the piece, approaching the “nuts and bolts” can be reframed as bringing the story to life through song rather than tackling a[n often unexpressive] part of the learning process.

- Phrasing decisions
- Diction & text painting
- Rhythmic integrity
- Tone color & intonation
- Other technical considerations

Text Exploration Activities
Expressivity & Emotional Investment

- Look at the text separately from the score
- Write word-by-word translation into the score
- Students come up with “in your own words” distillation of each phrase (could be group work)
- Circle important words - action verbs, nouns
- Identify important imagery (poetic texts)
- Speak text and mark points of natural pause in the score

Example
Il est bel et bon by Pierre Passereau

Il est bel et bon, commère, mon mari.
Il ètait deux femmes toutes du pays,
Disant l'une à l'autre:
Avez bon mari.

Il ne me courrouce, ne me bat aussi.
Il fait le mènage,
Il donne aux poulets,
Et je prends mon plaisir.

Commère, est-ce pour rire,
Quand la poulaille crie:
"Petite coquette!", qu'est-ce ci?

Find a word by word translation

Mark important words - action verbs, nouns

Come up with “in your own words” distillation of each stanza

Text Exploration Activities
Language & Diction

- Find an International Phonetic Alphabet transcription
- Mark central vowel sound above each syllable in the score
- Mark syllable stress
- Analyze poetic structure - rhyme / meter
- Intone on single pitch on central vowels only
- Analyze poetic structure
- Mark features particular to language

Example
Se tu m’ami by Paolo Antonio Rolli

Se tu **m'a**mi, se so**spi**ri
Sol per me, gen**til** Pa**stor**;
Ho do**lor** de' tu**o**i mar**ti**ri,
Ho di**lett**o del t**u**o am**or**.

Ma se **pen**si che so**lett**o
Io ti **deb**ba ria**mar**;
Pasto**rell**o, sei so**gget**to
Facil**men**te a t'ingan**nar**.

Stressed Syllables
Lengthened Vowels
Double Consonants

What is the rhyme scheme?

How many syllables per line?

Count to the last stressed syllable, then add one

Where are the line-level stresses?

Guided Listening:
Sparking Students' Aural Imagination

Listening to an Audio Recording With No Visual

Listen to & Watch a Video

Listen to Audio (only) While Following Along with JUST the Text/Translation

Listen to Audio (only) While Following Along in the Score

Listening to an Audio Recording With No Visual

(without video or a musical score)

- What does this song make you think about/feel? What do you think the performer/ensemble is trying to express?
- (if native language) Can you understand the words being sung?
- What seem to be the most important, meaningful, or special moments in the piece?
- How would you describe the tone the singer(s) uses?
  - breathy/sigh-like; pressed/grunt-like; clear/speech-like; bright/dark; forward/back
- Is the tone vibrant? How often and consistently does the tone have vibrato?
- Is there repeated material?

Listen to & Watch a Video

- (Many questions from previous activity apply)
- Do the singers' faces and bodies communicate the meaning of the text?
  - Give specific examples
- Are the singers making expressions or movements that don't seem to reflect the text?
- How open are the singers' mouths when high/medium/low in the range? On open/closed vowels?
- If you can see the whole body, how is the body aligned when the singer is singing?
- When are they inhaling prior to singing?

Listen to Audio (only) While Following Along with JUST the Text/Translation

- Where do the singers breathe? Why did they choose those places? How does it relate to the text?
- What words are most important in each phrase, based on what you're hearing?
- What phrases, ideas, and/or images are most important?

Listen to Audio (only) While Following Along in the Score

- What aspects of this score reflect earlier points:
  - What seem to be the most important, meaningful, or special moments in the piece?
  - How would you describe the tone the singer(s) uses?
    - breathy/sigh-like; pressed/grunt-like; clear/speech-like; bright/dark; forward/back
  - Repeated material?
- How does the tone change at the points where the music/text becomes more important?

Elaine Hagenberg

Song of Miriam

text by Rabbi Ruth Sohn

SSA choir and piano

(Combination of 3 & 4)

Listen to Audio (only) While Following Along in the Score with the Translation In It

Record & Listen to Yourselves!

Thank you!

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