Fantasy on Japanese Woodprints by Alan Hovhaness

Japanese woodprints are intricate works of art painted with a water-based paint on wood. The prints were an early book for the Japanese, their stories were told through paintings done in many vibrant colors. The tradition of the woodprints dates back to the 16th century when artists were commissioned to create entire books on wood tablets.

In this activity guide, students have the opportunity to explore the history of Japanese Woodprints and the value of expressive elements in music. Students will be able to explore new content, expand musical analysis skills and share thoughts and ideas with others.

The Final Forte is the last round in the Bolz Young Musician Competition held annually in Madison and sponsored by the Madison Symphony Orchestra. High School students from around the state are invited to apply to compete in the competition. The 2016 winner was Robert Rockman, a marimba player from Sun Prairie. Robert performed an expressive piece by Alan Hovhaness entitled Fantasy on Japanese Woodprints.

OUTCOMES

After studying this material, students will be able to:

- Understand the use of expressive elements to tell a story
- Describe the process of creating Japanese woodprints
- Compose using elements of expression
- Compose using a piece of visual art as the guide
- Form and opinion of both visual art and its audio representation

WISCONSIN’S MODEL ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR MUSIC

This curriculum guide corresponds with the following Model Academic Standards for Music:

Music Performance:
- Singing – A.12.1-2
- Instrumental – B.12.1

Music Creativity:
- Improvisation – C.12.3
- Composition – D.12.1-3
Music Literacy:
Reading and Notating – E.12.1-3
Music Response:
Analysis – F.12.1-4
Evaluation – G.12.1-3
Music Connections:
The Arts – H.12.1-4
History and Culture – I.12.3

BACKGROUND
Woodblock prints were created in Japan as early as the 16th century as a way to record texts, especially Buddhist scriptures. As the art form advanced, printmakers were able to use a wider variety of colors. This art form was utilized in many ways, from scripture to art, history, and even functional items such as calendars. Due to the fine details of each print, there was a team of craftsmen who collaborated to create each work of art. The four experts were the designer, the engraver, the printer, and the publisher. The Metropolitan Museum of Art describes the process of creating a woodblock print:

“A woodblock print image is first designed by the artist on paper and then transferred to a thin, partly transparent paper. Following the lines on the paper, now pasted to a wooden block usually of cherry wood, the carver chisels and cuts to create the original in negative—with the lines and areas to be colored, raised in relief. Ink is applied to the surface of the woodblock. Rubbing a round pad over the back of a piece of paper laid over the top of the inked board makes a print.”

This description only covers black and white prints. To create polychrome (Latin roots poly=many and chrome=colors) prints, the team of artists had to carve a separate block for each color with up to twenty colors. The addition of colors added a lot of extra steps in the creation process but also a lot of detail and emotion to the final artwork.

Composer Alan Hovhaness (1911-2000) was intrigued by the fine details and complex storytelling of the woodprints. In 1960 he was invited to conduct the Tokyo Symphony and Japan Philharmonic. While visiting the Far East, Hovhaness did research with native musicians. This learning period led to a change in his compositional style. In the mid 1960s, Hovhaness composed the piece Fantasy on Japanese Woodprints.

GETTING STARTED
Just as the woodprint artists utilize layering and intricate details to create a masterpiece, Hovhaness used many elements of music to bring the artwork to life through his music. As musicians, we tell stories and paint pictures with our music by not only playing the notes but also playing them with expression and emotion.

Students should first watch the listed video and audio resources to assist in the following activities. By doing this first, students will gain a foundation of information on which to build.

I. What Picture is Being Painted?
A. Listen to the WPR audio recording of the Final Forte. Skip ahead to Robert Rockman’s performance of Fantasy on Japanese Woodprints (41:12). While listening to the performance, write a story of what you are hearing.
B. The story should have a main character and at least one problem and resolution.

C. While writing the story, include notes of what you hear musically that form your ideas.
   1. Rhythm
   2. Melody
   3. Harmony
   4. Timbre
   5. Texture
   6. Form
   7. Dynamics

D. Share stories with a partner or small group. Compare and contrast your tales and what musical elements influenced your decisions.

II. Exploring Japanese Woodprints in Music

A. As a class, in groups or individually research the history of Japanese Woodprints. One resource is presented by The Metropolitan Museum of Art at the link provided here: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ukiy/hd_ukiy.htm

B. Compose a piece of music based on a Japanese Woodprint.
   1. Look at examples of Japanese Woodprints. After browsing through the images, choose one on which to focus. Images are available on the Metropolitan Museum webpage above or other sources.
   2. Create a story that correlates with the chosen image. Include at least one main character and one conflict/resolution. Also, decide what mood or emotion is being shown in the artwork.

III. Creating Japanese Woodprints

A. Using art supplies, create your own woodblock prints. Consult with an art teacher on the best material to use.
   1. Sketch the design.
   2. Either using erasers or rubber cement squares that are about 3”x 3” and small carving tools, design your own eraser block.
   3. Think backwards when deciding which parts will have color and which won’t.
   4. Color the block either by dipping your eraser into paint or using a small roller to paint it.
   5. Make as many prints as you see fit.

B. Just as the original Japanese woodprints told stories, work with a partner or small group to create carvings that each tells a part of a larger story.

IV. Listening Exercise

A. Listen to the performance of Robert Rockman playing Fantasy on Japanese Woodprints. Consider the following:
   1. Elements of Music:
      a. Melody
      b. Harmony
      c. Rhythm
d. Tone Color/Timbre

e. Form

f. Expression

2. Identify and write down the expressive elements being used in Fantasy on Japanese Woodprints. Be sure to include tempo, dynamics, phrasing, interpretation and style.

3. Compare and contrast choices made by the performer that could have been different. Consider how these changes would impact the overall performance.

MAKING CONNECTIONS – CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Music is often a reflection of the times and the region of origin. The following activities are intended to make connections with other curricular areas and broaden the understanding for the student.

V. History:

A. Discuss what students already know about Japan and where the information was learned. Allow students to explore these ideas.

B. Explore the history of Japan in the 16th Century. Consider the following:
   1. Government
   2. Religion
   3. Music
   4. Art
   5. Events

C. Compare and contrast 16th Century Japan. Consider elements that caused these changes.

VI. Geography:

A. Locate the following on a map or globe:

   1. Japan
   2. Capitol of Japan
   3. United States of America
   4. Capitol of the United States
   5. China
   6. Capitol of China

B. Calculate the distance between the countries and the capitols. Create a chart that reflects this information and consider similarities and differences between these places.

VII. Art

A. Compare and contrast the Japanese Woodprints to art from other countries in the 16th Century.

B. Create art in another medium while listening to an expressive piece of music. Reflect the song in your artwork.

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

VIII. Exams and Questioning

A. Utilize traditional exams and quizzes.

B. Engage in knowledge based games.

C. Engage in teacher/student discussions.

D. Engage in student directed discussions.

IX. Writing Exercises

A. Write a descriptive essay.

B. Complete answer based essays.

C. Write a narrative based on activities.

D. Create a portfolio on Japanese Woodprints.

E. Write a biography about a Japanese woodprints artist.

X. Projects

A. Create a woodprint.

B. Compose using stylistic elements of music based on a piece of art.
C. Create a poster about Japanese Woodprints

XI. IV. Retelling the Story/Discussion
A. Engaging in role-playing activities.
B. Share observations with people outside of the class.
C. Connect with other students studying the same material.
D. Prepare and give a presentation to a group or class.

ADDITIONAL LINKS
• Audio of the Final Forte
  http://www.wpr.org/listen/879881
• The Metropolitan Museum of Art - Japanese Woodprints
  http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/uki/y/hd_uki/y.htm