

Purple Haze in Action

BY JAMIE HOWE

Below are some activities that have been successful in our school workshops (listed as **activity name** ⇨ *educational outcome for students* and following with details). Depending on the amount of time, number of students, level of students, etc, we modified this list. For each activity, we split up the duties of introducing and leading, so that most of the members of the group have a special role during the workshop.

Perform ⇨ LISTENING

- We always open and close with a performed number, and also intersperse performed songs in between our workshop activities.

Warm-ups with audience participation ⇨ *seeing that older kids can still be goofy, learning that singing is a physical “sport,” practicing intentional movement, rhythm, diction, and vocalizing*

- One member gives an introduction explaining why it is important to warm up both physically and vocally.
- We choose kids from the crowd and then each member pairs up with a few kids and learns their names and encourages them during the activities. Even though there are kids on stage we also have the rest of the audience join in from their seats. It is always great when the teachers join in too!
- Physical warm-up ideas: reaching up and down and shaking out your body, hip alphabet (making the letters of the alphabet with your hips—oh, how the kids laugh so hard at this!), tongue twisters.
- Vocal warm-up: we take a few of our favorite vocalizes and tell the students to feel free to join in if they are comfortable.

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Explain how we arrange our music ⇨ *learn that “composers” aren’t just white haired old men from hundreds of years ago, that creating music is fun and possible and still done today*

- We vote on and choose a song that we all want to sing.
- We listen to the song over and over and over and try to pick out different instrumental lines.
- We use a special computer program to notate (writing notes and rhythms) the music (usually notating the bass line first).
- Finally we add strings of syllables that are appropriate to the instrument or sound we want to have (Dum for basses, oohs for background, zow, jeng, shoh, etc. they can be anything you want—we are continually creating new syllables).

The real song vs. our version ⇨ LISTENING/ANALYZING

- We bring in a CD player and let the kids hear the original version of a song we arranged and perform. Beforehand we encourage the students to listen carefully to the different instruments and things going on so that when we perform it right afterwards, they can hear how we adapted it.

People as instruments ⇨ LISTENING/ANALYZING

- Ask the students to name some instruments they usually hear in songs.
- Each voice part steps out and sings an excerpt of their individual line of music (while miming playing the instrument they are imitating with their voice).
- We ask them to listen carefully for each line when we put it all together.

Song-in-progress ⇨ LISTENING/ANALYZING, *gives them a chance to play “music director,” do critical thinking, give advice, make decisions, see the many sides of what makes an excellent performance.*

- We tell them we are going to let them in on our rehearsal process and we are going to need their help.
- We then sing the same excerpt of a song over and over, each time doing a specific thing wrong (looking different directions, looking bored, singing too quietly, singing too loud, not blending, etc.) These issues can be as sophisticated or basic according to your audience.



Jamie Howe learned the value of fostering multiple arts learning connections in her internship activities. In this class, young students invent a “penguin move” and other animal gestures to elaborate on the choreography adapted to children’s songs.

- Each time, after it is just too much to bear (and before we all break down in laughter), the music director comes out and asks the kids what they think we could work on to make it better.
- We then take those suggestions but do something else wrong.
- Finally, we summarize what we’ve learned and perform the entire song well.

Circle Song with a small group of students ⇨ CREATING/PERFORMING, *cooperation, improvisation, music can be spontaneous, YOU can create music*

- The basses begin with a fun ostinato bass line, and then people just start jumping in and creating parts on whatever syllables and notes they feel. Suddenly there is this awesome texture and song that has been newly created! People can work together and bounce off of each other.
- Within the song we may have just the boys sing, just the girls sing, or sing in a particular style (opera, pop, jazz, country, etc.)
- Then we build it to a crescendo and end.

Teach one of our songs to a small group of students ⇨ PERFORMING, *gives them a chance to see what our music looks like, read words and music, cooperation, aural skills to learn the part by ear*

- We divide the kids up so that each voice part (including vocal percussion) has a group of students and then we give them copies of our music (that they get to keep) and we teach our part to them as best as we can.
- We bring all of the groups back and sing the song together for the students’ teachers—the Purple Haze members and the students side by side.

Turn the audience into a drumset ⇨ PERFORMING, *use their body in new ways, keeping a steady rhythm*

- We divide the audience into sections (usually three) and give each section a particular drum beat to make (bass drum, high hat, and kick/snare).
- The Purple Haze members spread out around the audience, help kids and get them to practice their particular beat.
- Our vocal percussionist then stands up front and directs us in a simple drum beat by having each group go at a particular time (usually bass, high hat, kick, high hat and variations of this).

Q & A session ⇨ *gives them a chance to understand how an ensemble works, who we are individually, the discipline of rehearsing for hours ¶*