



Music Curriculum

Music Overview

Music is integral to the culture of TPS. The music program aims to enable all students to develop a positive connection to their innate musical ability. It balances creativity with discipline, ensemble with solo activities, and music making with active listening. Students learn the elements of music through song, instrument playing, movement, and listening to music. The performance repertory and work in music theory are largely based on classroom themes.

Students engage in singing, dancing, and listening activities to experience music from a variety of world cultures. Students become familiar with music literature from different periods of history with works by European composers from the Baroque period to the 20th century; and with pieces by American composers, including classical, jazz, and blues.

Students have many opportunities to be members of an audience – at student recitals, at concerts by guest performers, and during trips to the Kimmel Center or Academy of Music to hear The Philadelphia Orchestra or Opera Philadelphia. Musicians in residence have included the Jasper Quartet, string players from the Philadelphia Orchestra, and drumming ensembles. Whenever possible, the musical talents and interests of our children are incorporated into classroom projects and productions.

Early Childhood

The Early Childhood music program is designed to help preschoolers and kindergarteners develop their singing voices, develop their ability to respond to a steady beat through movement, and enhance their listening skills. Music activities help bring awareness of the student's immediate surroundings and also the world at large. Classes include experience with rhythm and orchestral instruments, musical games, creative movement, group dances, singing and performing, creating rhythm compositions, and musical literature.

Primary Unit - Third Grade

In the Primary Unit and Third grade, students develop their awareness of the elements of music. They study rhythmic and melodic patterns in simple and compound meters through singing, playing instruments, moving, and listening to a wide variety of music. The students begin learning written music along with musical terms and symbols. Experiences include learning about musicians like Marian Anderson, Duke Ellington, J.S. Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart, engagement in activities around the music of different world cultures, exploring orchestral instruments, xylophones, keyboards, and recorders, and integration with their thematic study, such as when third graders learn a wide variety of spirituals, immigration, labor, suffrage, blues, and jazz music associated with struggles for social justice, then embed this learning into a third grade play on the theme of "How to Build a More Fair USA."

Junior Unit

Integrating with their year-long theme, Junior Unit students become familiar with the role of music in the cultures of ancient Greece and China. They strengthen their basic musicianship skills through singing, improvisation, movement, and participation in small instrumental ensembles. Students solidify their comprehension of treble and bass clef notes, basic music symbols, and solfeggio. They continue to expand their hands-on experiences with keyboards and soprano recorders. Students also have numerous opportunities to create original music in small ensemble settings. We support students as they build listening skills during individual and group performances. Line dancing, Appalachian dancing, other types of stepping and dancing give the students opportunities to experience creative movement as a group. Pentatonic compositions and modal improvisations are done in conjunction with classroom thematic studies.

Middle School

The sixth grade music curriculum focuses on the traditional music of Africa, emphasizing dance, drumming, singing, and the African value of the good of the collective. Students prepare ensemble pieces and practice public speaking for their end-of-year Rite of Passage Ceremony. They learn “Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika,” the national anthem of the anti-apartheid movement of South Africa, and recite the words of civil rights leaders; through these experiences students build empathy for the challenges of overcoming oppression. We support students as they learn basic hand-drumming techniques and rhythmic vocabulary, sing traditional songs in languages of Africa, including Ewe, Akan, Xhosa, and Swahili, learn traditional choreographed African dance, and become familiar with music inspired by the Shona marimba tradition

Seventh graders begin the year by studying Afro-Cuban music. Students strengthen their rhythmic integrity and musicianship skills by learning a variety of complex polyrhythms used in Afro-Cuban drumming styles. They also gain a historical understanding of the origins and evolution of Afro-Cuban rhythm and its impact on world music. Seventh grade students learn to play the twelve-bar blues harmonic progression on ukulele, bass guitar, and keyboard as a prelude to the class rock band project. Students also become familiar with such iconic blues musicians as Bessie Smith, Leadbelly, Robert Johnson, and Muddy Waters. Seventh grade students spend several months preparing and rehearsing for the rock band project. This is a great opportunity for students to play instruments with which they've had no prior experience. In the Spring, students perform both the original version of the rock song they have chosen, plus a version of the song that uses student generated lyrics inspired by their study of a science related theme. In the Spring, students create multi-track compositions with the GarageBand or Soundtrap sequencing software.

Eighth grade music students begin the year by carefully defining their own musical histories and identities through writing assignments, playlists, and a collage. Throughout the year, students explore new instruments, learn basic harmonic progressions, collaborate on selecting songs, and hone their musicianship skills through their participation in small bands and large instrumental ensembles. Students produce at least one ensemble performance and participate in activities that prepare them for songwriting. Later in the year, students create soundscapes for the Play Festival, and invest significant time with choosing and preparing songs for graduation.



String Ensembles

TPS has enjoyed a rich tradition of string playing thanks to an endowed program which supports the Sandra Dean String Ensemble. The Sandra Dean String Ensemble regularly performed for TPS audiences and in the local community. Because of COVID protocols, the ensemble was suspended in 2020. We are happy to announce that 10-12 scholarships for violin and cello lessons will be awarded to a group of kindergarten students this year. With time, practice, and parental support, these young musicians will form the core of the next Sandra Dean String Ensemble.