



Drawing Rhythms

This exercise gives your students an opportunity to hear and appreciate different types of music, and then draw their impressions of the rhythms that they hear. This exercise can be adapted for the very young, or for the more sophisticated students, depending on age, grade level, or level of musical understanding.

Choose two selections from our discography, or from your own musical collection. I recommend that the two selections be distinct and rhythmically varied, for instance one slow and one fast, one in 4/4 and one in 6/8 time signatures, or one with a distinct rhythmic pulse, and one with a more flowing rhythm. Play these selections for your class, one at a time. You may repeat each one as needed for the children to complete their work.

While each selection of music is playing, have the students draw their impressions of each piece of music, focusing on the rhythmic element. Follow this process for the two selections, and then have the children show their drawings, explaining the way their drawings relate to the selections of music they heard.

Younger children may work more abstractly, using the exercise to express how the music makes them feel.

Those older or with more experience with music may choose to design their own form of notation, or a visual interpretation of (rather than response to) the music. Encourage them to be creative, for example using different colors for the different instruments they hear, using the space between their marks as the silence between main beats, or drawing repeated phrases in a circular format.

They should not, for this exercise, interpret the rhythms in traditional western notation even if they are capable of it, but rather use this as an opportunity to express their interpretation of or reaction to the music visually, without resorting to previously learned codes.

As a related or supplemental exercise, children may make up a rhythm in small groups or individually, document it in their own way, and then perform it for and/or teach it to the class. In order to document it, they should come up with their own style of notation, again utilizing visual rather than linguistic codes of expression.

