

EASY AS 1-2-3

PROGRAMMING GRADE .5-3 MUSIC FOR THE YOUNG BAND



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GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Are you offering a variety of styles/composers throughout each concert cycle and school year?
2. Are you varying the difficulty of music so that students can experience both musical AND technical growth and success?
3. What concepts reinforce your curriculum? Are there any cross-curricular concepts you can address while selecting high quality literature?

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A simple analysis can help you be successful in choosing music. Make sure to consider the following aspects of each piece when programming:

Grade Level	Instrumentation	Dynamics & Articulations
Range	Rhythm	Form
Scoring	Key & Meter	

Grade Level – Publisher grade levels provide a guideline but are inconsistent and should not be the sole factor on which you select literature. The J.W. Pepper grading system is pretty consistent. You still need to analyze each piece to make sure that it is appropriate for your specific group.

Range – Make sure that parts are within a reasonable range for each instrument. For example, if you don't have a trumpet player who can **comfortably** hit a high G, then make sure you don't program a piece with a high G! Same considerations should be taken for all instruments, but special consideration should be given to brass and clarinets.

Scoring– How many parts are going on at a time? Are parts independent or is it blocked so that leaders can lead? If I have a group that struggles to play independently, then I look for tunes that are block scored.

Instrumentation – Are there any solos? Is the scoring thicker than your band? How many trumpet/clarinet/violin parts are there? Consider the instrumentation of your ensemble when selecting your piece. If there is a critical oboe or viola part and you don't have any students playing those instruments, are you compromising the integrity of the piece just because you want to play it? Is it cued **appropriately**?

Rhythm – What note and rest values are used? Rhythms need to be addressed in different contexts so that students are empowered to actually read rhythms in the context of the music. Difficult rhythms within a piece can be made into an exercise for the entire ensemble.

Key & Meter – Is it in a key that you have studied in class or plan to study? Duple meter time signatures (4/4 and 2/4) are best for younger groups. 3/4 is technically more challenging. The concept of triple time is simple to understand, but execution is challenging. First-year groups should be exposed to at least one triple time piece during the course of the year. Advanced level groups should include cut time and 6/8. Use exercises from method books and rhythm exercises in preparation for new meters. Singing and clapping & counting are important!

Dynamics & Articulations – What is the dynamic range of the piece? What articulations are used? Dynamics and articulations can be practiced outside the context of the music with rhythms and scales.

Form – Students are fascinated by form! Finding patterns in music is not always apparent to students, so you need to point it out and help them to start listening for it. Ternary form, sonata form, and theme & variations are all very accessible to middle school students. Also, forms with repetitive sections mean you don't have as much new material to teach.

PROGRAMMING FOR THE YEAR

I typically program 3-4 pieces for each group per concert. Here are some guidelines to aid in programming a variety of music for the year, both in style and difficulty. I like to use JW Pepper's grading scale.

	QUARTER 1	QUARTER 2	QUARTER 3	QUARTER 4
Beginning Groups	<i>I work on technique and creating a sense of routine with these classes without the pressure of a performance. I focus on tone and rhythm.</i>	Choose selections from method book.	(1) B level piece (1) VE level piece	(1) B level piece (1-2) VE level piece
2 nd Year Groups		(2) VE level pieces (1) B or E level piece dependent upon the group's need for a challenge or remediation	(2) VE level pieces (1) E level piece	(1-2) VE level pieces (1-2) E level piece
3 rd Year Groups	(2) VE level (2) E level	(1) VE level (2) E level (1) ME level	(3) E level pieces Or (2) E levels + (1) ME	(2) E level pieces (2) ME level pieces
Notes	<i>Only my advanced group performs this quarter. It is an opportunity to get a performance under their belt.</i>	<i>I try to program one American folk tune for my 8th grade group to align with history curriculum and one medieval for 7th grade.</i>	<i>I usually program a lyrical piece for each group in this cycle.</i>	<i>I program a march for any group that has not performed a march this year.</i>

FAVORITE COMPOSERS

Some composers are one hit wonders, some are great but every piece sounds the same, and then some are just gifted at writing real music for young ensembles. Here are a few of my tried and true favorites for grades .5-3 music:

FAVORITE BAND COMPOSERS/ARRANGERS		
Brian Balmages	Samuel Hazo	Todd Stalter
Timothy Broege	William Himes	Randall Standridge
Carol Brittin Chambers	Pierre LaPlante	Mike Story
John Edmondson	Anne McGinty	Mark Williams
Frank Erickson	Richard Saucedo	
Clare Grundman	Robert W. Smith	

If you have limited instrumentation in your bands, I highly recommend the *Queenwood Beginning Band* and *Accent on Performance Concert Collection* book series. These books are full of individual pieces that are specifically scored for smaller bands. The books also serve well as sight reading books for your more advanced groups.

COMMON PITFALLS IN SELECTING LITERATURE FOR YOUNG BAND

The technical demands are too high for where my students are

Yay! It is important to recognize when this happens. Congratulations! To prevent this, check the rhythms and ranges before you program the piece. If it seems like it works, read the piece. If students can get through it on the first read, you can probably prepare it successfully for a concert. If it is a rough reading, think about the challenges and if they can be overcome by performance time. Maybe other pieces on the program need to be simpler to allow more prep time for your challenge piece.

I loved it when I heard it on JW Pepper

Just because you love listening to it (and maybe your students do too) doesn't mean you can play it successfully. This is when literature analysis comes in handy... asking your trumpet player who struggles to hit a 3rd space C to play G on top of the staff is not realistic or pedagogically sound.

It all sounds the same

While it is difficult to find quality literature that sounds different – you must take the time to find contrasting styles for the students, the audience, and your own sanity. Don't just pick every great modal tune with a percussion section!

I played it in middle school and loved it!

Just because you played it in middle school doesn't mean it was appropriate. Did it sound good? Is the current program you teach the same caliber RIGHT NOW?

The first 16 bars sound AMAZING!!!

We can teach a few bars by rote and repetition – but you need to pace yourself to make certain all sections sound just a great.

I did it 3 years ago and it worked

One of the exciting things about our job is every group of students is different and a beginning band one year may not be the same as the next. You have to style the music for that year's particular band.

My flutes can totally play it

If only everyone else could...

My students thought it was too easy

Sometimes the most technically simple pieces offer loads of ensemble teaching opportunities. Music selection should be about ensemble. We have method books and scales for individual technique.

All my kids played this year was Randall Standridge

We get attached to composers - and that is okay, but it is best for our students if we expose them to a variety of composers and styles. Composers like Randall Standridge, Robert Sheldon, Richard Saucedo, and Robert W. Smith write from an educator's perspective and their music usually "works", but our students need a varied musical diet.

It said it was a grade 1

Even if a publisher, composer, or distributor gives a piece a technical grade - not all grade 1's are equal. Let your literature analysis help you decide technical appropriateness. I usually select a grade level lower on lyrical works because sustaining long notes with a good tone is difficult for young bands to do.

It's easier if I just use the same music every other year

It gets stale for you and consequently the students. Challenge yourself to try new music - but keep your favorites in the back of your mind. For example, if I have a good euphonium player I always keep *Three American Sketches* in mind, or *Nordic Sketches* if I have a great oboe player. Each band is unique and their programming should be too!

FAVORITE SHOPPING REFERENCES

Shopping for music requires multiple resources. The best way to discover new music is by going to concerts and festivals. Listening to an actual middle school perform gives a good idea of how you will like the piece in your own class. There are also websites that have selected lists. Some directors are now listing repertoire on their school websites. These resources have been selected by teachers just like you, so there is a strong chance that these pieces are high quality. Finally, music publishers and distributors have listings that you can search in addition to audio recordings and score samples, however beware that just being online or on a promo CD is not an indicator of quality music.

AUDIO REFERENCES

JWPepper www.jwpepper.com

Yup... I scour this for HOURS - especially in the summer. I love it when I rediscover things that I liked the previous summer. I even have an assignment that I have students complete where I have THEM select music from Pepper.

Stanton's Music www.stantons.com

I can sometimes find things here that I cannot find on Pepper.

Publisher & Composer Websites

Major publisher websites such as Hal Leonard, Alfred, and Kjos have great resources. More and more composers are self publishing now, so be sure to check the websites of your favorite composers!

LITERATURE LISTS FOR BAND

McCracken Middle School Repertoire www.mccrackenband.com/we-recommend/repertoire/

This site includes a couple of free compositions by the director.

Traughber Middle School Repertoire www.thebandroomspace.com/literature.html

This list is organized by ensemble and concert cycle. I love that there are both "technical level" and "musical level" categories in this list.

LITERATURE LISTS FOR BAND & ORCHESTRA

MMEA Maryland Music Educators Lists www.mdmea.org/repertoire-lists

A solid list that you can download as an Excel file and sort however you like.

SCSBOA Approved Festival List www.scsboa.org/approved-festival-list/

This list is great for sorting and filtering!

Texas UIL Prescribed Music List www.utexas.edu/uil/pml/



Granddaddy of them all! Large list that can be sorted and filtered in different ways, or exported as an Excel file.

My Website <https://sites.google.com/view/bandroom-nerd/home>

Find my personal music lists that I keep plus other resources.



LITERATURE PLANNER

ADVANCED BAND			
<u>OCTOBER</u>	<u>DECEMBER</u>	<u>MARCH</u>	<u>MAY</u>
INTERMEDIATE BAND			
<u>OCTOBER</u>	<u>DECEMBER</u>	<u>MARCH</u>	<u>MAY</u>
			
BEGINNING BAND			
<u>OCTOBER</u>	<u>DECEMBER</u>	<u>MARCH</u>	<u>MAY</u>
			

LITERATURE ANALYSIS

TITLE _____

COMPOSER/ARRANGER _____ PUBLISHER _____

GRADE _____ YEAR _____ PLAYING TIME _____ LIST _____

FORM _____ KEY(S) _____ METER(S) _____

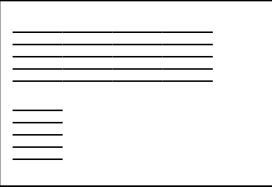
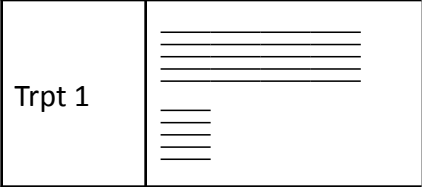
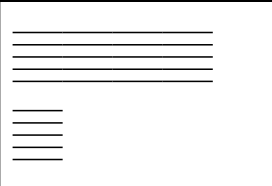
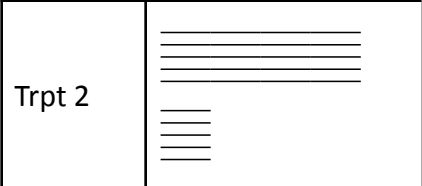
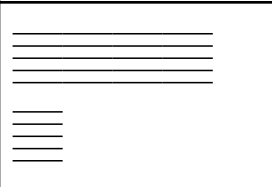
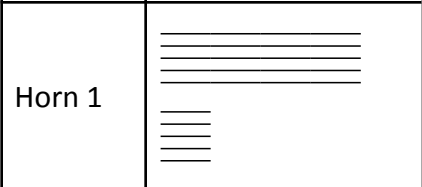
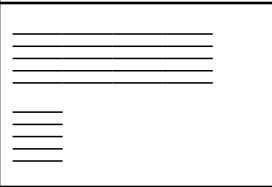
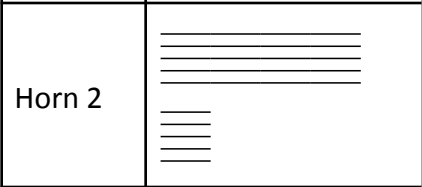
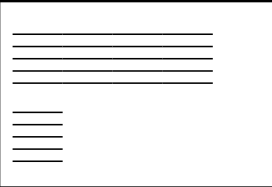
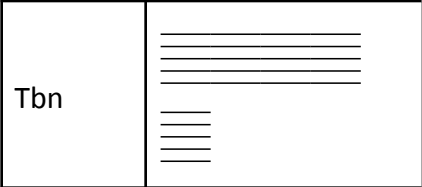
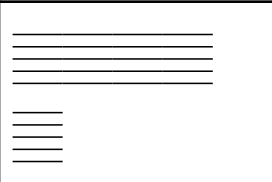
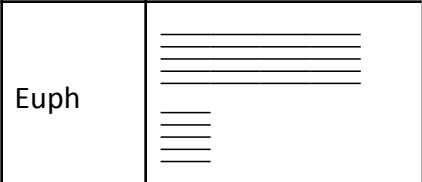
NOTE/REST VALUES _____

DYNAMICS _____ ARTICULATIONS _____

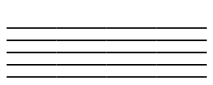

DESCRIPTION _____

GOOD FOR TEACHING _____

INSTRUMENT RANGES:

<p>Flute</p> 	<p>Trpt 1</p> 	<p>PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS</p>
<p>Oboe</p> 	<p>Trpt 2</p> 	
<p>Bassoon</p> 	<p>Horn 1</p> 	
<p>Clar 1</p> 	<p>Horn 2</p> 	
<p>Clar 2/3</p> 	<p>Tbn</p> 	
<p>Bass Clar</p> 	<p>Euph</p> 	

Alto	 
Tenor	 
Bari	 

Tuba	 
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