



TEACHING PLAN FOR 8TH GRADE
ORCHESTRA

ELLIS ISLAND
ALAN LEE SILVA
CARL FISCHER, 2005

WENDY BUEHL

Background

Ellis Island opened as a port of immigration on January 1, 1892 and was closed on November 12, 1954. More than 12 million immigrants passed through Ellis Island during this span of time, with the bulk of them arriving between 1892 and 1924. The immigrants that arrived at Ellis Island were predominantly white northern Europeans from Germany, Italy, Ireland, Austria, Hungary, England, Scotland, Wales, Russia, and Sweden.

The process of entry into the United States began when the ships entered the harbor. Inspectors boarded the steamship and examined first- and second-class passengers on board the ship. These people were most often the well to do or were visiting the United States and they were quickly passed through. Those who were traveling by steerage or third class (the majority) were taken to Ellis Island for more extensive examinations. Every immigrant was tagged with their name and the name of the ship on which they arrived. Men were separated from women and children for the examinations. These included medical exams to look for eye diseases, lung disorders, mental deficiencies, physical deformities, scalp disease, and any other conditions that the inspectors felt would make the immigrant a burden on society. Those who were found to have any of these conditions had a chalk mark placed on their chest and were taken for further observation or for deportation. Immigrants were also asked a list of 32 questions concerning their identity, place of origin, occupation, literacy, understanding of English, financial status, and their planned destination in the United States. Inspectors used these questions and conversations to determine if an immigrant should be admitted.

Those who were detained could be kept for days, weeks, or months depending on their condition. Ellis Island had its own hospital and medical staff and those whose medical condition were both treatable and would not permanently affect their health and employability were taken to the hospital for treatment. Women who were traveling alone were routinely held at Ellis Island until a male member of their family arrived to take charge of them. While most immigrants were allowed to enter the United States, Ellis Island was also called the “Isle of Tears” because members of a family who failed the inspection were forced to return to their country of origin while the rest of the family was allowed into the United States.

There were many reasons for people to emigrate, but most were due to economic, political, and/or religious reasons. Most immigrants were poor and brought trunks and suitcases

filled with all they possessed: practical items like clothes and household goods, but also precious family heirlooms that were reminders of their homeland. Their voyage to America was often long and difficult with people suffering from seasickness that was intensified in the cramped and uncomfortable quarters on the ship. Most of those who came were able to find a better life than what they left behind, even if there were difficulties and hardship at the beginning. To those who came, Ellis Island was the gateway to this new way of life.

Elements of Music

Form:

Ellis Island is in a broad ABA' form:

1 -10	introduction
11 - 46	A section
47 - 57	transition
58 - 76	B section
77 - 78	transition
79 -98	A' section
99 - 111	coda

Melody:

The A section contains 2 themes. The first theme falls within the range of an octave plus a P4. This melody uses both stepwise motion and larger skips (P5, 8). It appears in its entirety in the 1st violin and cello parts, but also appears in segments split between sections. The melody starts in the high register and then ends an octave lower than the beginning note. This melody also makes use of many accents and syncopations, as well as augmentation in measures 30 - 39.

The second theme falls within an octave and uses more of the larger intervals. An eighth and two sixteenths are the building blocks of this melody, which includes augmentation of the melody in the transition to the B section.

The B section has a range of an octave plus a P5 in its opening extended version and then stays within an octave in the rest of the section. This melody has more steps and smaller skips except in the measures that take it to the higher register in the first extended statement of the theme. The theme follows an arch form in the phrasing and only uses the triplet figure in the first statement of the theme. This theme is marked *cantabile* and is played in three different keys (A Major, C Major, and D major).

Rhythm:

The A section contains complex rhythms that are often strongly syncopated. The rhythms make use of many 8th and 16th notes as well as 16th note triplets. Dotted rhythms are also used and there are many ties both within measures and across bar lines. Measures 30 - 33 and 53 - 57 contain augmentations although there is always a feeling of forward motion. Some sections containing complex rhythms pass the rhythms between parts.

The B section's slower tempo affects the feeling of the 8th and 16th notes in the section. The rhythms no longer have the same drive and energy as in the A section. This section also makes use of eighth note triplets in the melody and also has some dotted rhythms. The rhythms in the harmony parts are a contrast to the melody, having longer note values.

Harmony

Overall, the piece is in E Dorian. The A section is in E Dorian with the transition in measures 47 - 57 moving through keys to reach A Major. The B section uses the keys of A Major, C Major and D Major before transitioning back to E Dorian for the return of the A section material. There are many suspensions in the B section of the piece and the composer also makes use of passing tone dissonances.

Timbre

Both melody and harmony explore the contrast of colors and ranges of the instruments. In the A sections there is a contrast between the upper strings in their brighter range and the lower strings in their darker range. There are only a few measures in which the 1st violins play in their low range (39 - 42). There is also some use of pizzicato in the bass part to vary the timbre slightly.

In the B section, most of the instruments are in the low register creating darker colors. The last part of the section takes the violins back up to the brighter register to transition back to the A section timbre. In contrast to the A section, the B section has short sections in which the basses are not playing, removing the lowest and darkest timbre from the orchestral sound. During these two four-bar sections, the cellos move down to their low register to take over the role of 'bass line'. When the cellos move to the melody in measures 66 - 69, the timbre changes to a brighter one since the upper strings provide harmony in their mid-to upper register.

Texture

The texture in the A sections is quite thick with all the parts being very active. These sections are more polyphonic in nature and, while there is some doubling of the harmony parts to reinforce the rhythm, the parts still show independence from one another. The optional solo at measures 11 - 14 with its pared down harmony parts (a drone in the 2nd violins and violas) sets up a contrasting texture that is further highlighted by the return to tutti playing in measures 15 - 18. The composer occasionally makes use of double stops to provide even thicker textures on some of the chords.

The texture in the B section changes when the basses are tacet. The use of a solo cello in one of these places further thins the texture. This section is more homophonic with a clear melody and harmony parts that provide a simple, chord-like accompaniment. Most of the harmony parts have the same rhythm in this section.

Expression

The piece uses a wide range of dynamics from *pp* to *f*. There is also extensive use of crescendo and decrescendo markings as well as accents, *sfp*, and staccato. Tempo changes occur between the A and B sections with *ritardando* and *accelerando* markings at the transitions.

Heart statement:

In *Ellis Island*, the composer captures the contrasting moods associated with the act of tearing up and transplanting ones cultural roots. Through the use of rhythmic complexity and rich harmonies, the composer portrays the excitement and energy of the ‘promised land’ as well as the pensive longing for the places and people left behind.

Introducing the piece:

“Imagine that your family will be moving far away from your hometown. You will be going to a country where the customs and language are very different and unfamiliar. You will be leaving all of your relatives and friends and you aren’t sure when or if you will see them again. You have heard wonderful things about this new country and many of your friends are a bit envious that you are going to settle in this exciting place. As you prepare with your family to move, you must decide which of your possessions you will be able to take. You have only this suitcase—everything must fit in here. You need to fit in all of the practical things (clothes, shoes, coats) and your personal things (photographs, books, music, games), choosing what is most important to you and what will help you settle in your new home. Write down your list on the A side of your sheet and remember that everything must fit in this suitcase.”

Have the students share their list with a partner and then bring the discussion to the whole class. Make a list of those things that appear most often on the students’ lists. Talk about the difficulty of making the decisions and how it felt to have to leave some things behind.

Outcomes

Skill

Students will be able to use the bow to create a variety of dynamics and to interpret expressive markings in the music.

Strategies:

- Students will discuss four properties of the bow that influence dynamics and sound production: weight on the bow, amount of bow, speed of the bow, and placement of the bow in relation to the bridge (WASP). Given a variety of rhythms and dynamics, they will work with partners to determine how these four properties need to be manipulated in order to produce the most accurate dynamics and sound.

- Students will create a chart using the example below.

Dynamic/ Expressive marking	Weight	Amount	Speed	Placement

The students will write in all of the dynamics and expressive markings they find in their music and then experiment with the WASP properties to determine the best balance of the properties to produce the dynamics.

- Students will suggest measures with challenging dynamics and expressive markings from the piece and these will be used as warm-ups. During the warm-up, the students will discuss what makes the passage challenging and what needs to be done with the bow to successfully play the composer's markings.

Assessment:

- √ The teacher will assess the information on the students' charts to make sure that they understand the relationship between the properties of the bow and the combinations that will most accurately produce the dynamics and expressive markings called for in the piece.
- √ Students will work alone or in pairs to design a warm-up exercise based on one of the dynamic markings or expressive markings in the piece. Their warm-up should help other students understand how to use the WASP properties effectively to produce the dynamic.

Knowledge

The students will recognize and understand the ways tension and release are used in music.

Strategies:

- The teacher will guide students in a discussion about how tension can be created in music. Students could imagine music that might accompany a tense scene in a movie or novel. The class will compile a list of ideas and note that their ideas manipulate harmony, rhythm, or timbre to create or release tension.
- The teacher will introduce the concepts of suspensions, syncopation, and augmentation to the students.
 - ◊ All students will start on an E. Using the E Dorian scale, the students will either move up or down the scale following the teacher's directions. The teacher will use the left hand to guide the violins and the right hand to guide the lower strings. The teacher will lead the students through a number of suspension/resolution intervals before resolving everyone back to the octave E tonic note. The class will discuss what notes created tension and how it was resolved. The class will then repeat the exercise and indicate when there is tension and when it is released.
 - ◊ Students will play quarter notes together either on scales or on a chord. When the teacher indicates half the students will change to play a syncopated rhythm against the constant quarter note rhythm and then will change back to join the other half. The class will discuss what happens when the syncopation is introduced and when it is removed.
 - ◊ Students will play a two octave scale, repeating each note four times. They will begin with 4 16th notes on each pitch. When the teacher or a student leader signals, they will switch to 4 8th notes, then 4 quarter notes, then 4 half notes and possible 4 whole notes. The students will discuss how the change in note values impacted the sense of energy in the scale.
- Working in groups, students will brainstorm when composers might use one of the three techniques introduced above. They will discuss how the tension is created and/or released in each case and what this does to the mood or energy level of the piece.
- Students will play sections of the piece and label the places where they hear the use of suspensions, augmentation, and syncopation in the music. The class will discuss what they heard and speculate about the composer's reasons for using each technique at that point in the music.

Assessment:

- √ Students will identify the three techniques either in other pieces they are playing or in examples that the teacher gives them.

- √ Students will write an 8-measure piece that includes at least one melody and one harmony line. The composition should make use of at least one of the techniques studied.

Affective

The students will explore the emotions and story reflected in the piece.

Strategies:

- The teacher will ask students to share any information or associations that they have with Ellis Island to activate background knowledge on the subject.
- The students will work in small groups, each group reading a different immigrant's story of their trip to Ellis Island and the process of becoming new citizens of the United States. Each group will report back to the whole group on the following: why the person left their country, their feelings on leaving that country or regrets they had on leaving, difficulties of their journey, their feelings about arriving at Ellis Island/seeing the Statue of Liberty, any other feelings or experiences the person relates that illuminates the process for them.
- The students will watch a short video about the arrival of immigrants to Ellis Island and the process of being accepted. They will note any connections that they observe between their reading and the video.
- Students will revisit their list from introducing the piece and on side B they will write down any changes that they would make in their list. With their changes, they will also give a brief explanation of why they made the change.
- The students will listen to a recording of the piece or play the three sections of the piece. After each section, students will share ideas about what the music is describing, based on the immigrant journeys that they have explored.

Assessment:

- √ The students will briefly write their "story" to each part of the piece.