

# HOMETOWN ADVOCACY

## Students Share Their Stories

WMEA Advocacy Strategy



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One of the most powerful ways to describe the impact of a music classroom is through the voices of the students in that place. In this WMEA Advocacy Strategy, you can consider having your students advocate for the very thing they love doing - making music!

Your task is to provide students with a prompt and share how their submissions will be used - first, as a way to demonstrate what the students came up with during their reflection; second, for students to discover ways they can express what they are feeling; and third, to let people in the community know about the power of music in their school.

Unit title: Students Share Their Stories

Objectives:

1. Using guided reflection time, students will consider how the music opportunities they have been part of at school have impacted them.
2. Students will demonstrate ways to effectively communicate those impacts.
3. Student reflections may be used to inform others in the community about the students' perceptions of music education in their school.

Length of unit: this unit could be done in one class period or be completed over several weeks.

Materials needed: the unit could be completed with paper/pencil submission, a digital written submission, or a variety of other options (see below). The teacher can choose how students supply their reflections based on how long the educator would like the unit to last.

### Unit Start

1. Provide the structure students will need to complete the reflection  
What is the goal - sample language: "You are going to be provided with some time today to consider how being part of music experiences in our school has impacted you; some of these reflections may be shared outside of class, with your approval, so that others can get a glimpse of what you are experiencing here."  
  
How to set up the unit - sample language: "We're going to start by providing a little quiet time to consider a question and you should write down a few notes

somewhere. The notes are only for your use so don't worry about complete sentences or spelling - just start writing what comes to mind to the following . . .

2. Provide the prompt

You could begin with a simple prompt like "what do you enjoy about music at our school" or "how does being in a music class at our school impact you". Keep it open-ended as much as possible to let students go wherever they feel moved to.

3. Provide quiet time

The length of time is up to you and your sense of how engaged students are. This could take from five to fifteen minutes. Provide class time to let them begin to reflect. (There is great power in providing students with reflection time to find perspective, as compared to always needing an immediate response.)

4. Provide share time

Provide time during the class period that day for students to share in some way, regardless of other steps you may take as the unit proceeds. This sharing will help reinforce the importance of what you are doing as well as providing some examples for students who were uncertain about how to do this unit.

Structure sharing in a way that fits the personality of your class. Sometimes, partner sharing or small groups work effectively; other groups function better when students share out to the entire class. The point of this portion is to hear about the variety of ways students find powerful impact from what happens in the music classroom.

It will be important that the teacher set the conditions for the share before students begin responding. Listeners need to be encouraging of those brave enough to state their reflections out loud. Editorial comments or add-ons ("that's the same thing I wrote") should be saved for later. Consider whether you want listening students to respond to what is shared (verbally or in writing) or to listen without needing to respond.

5. Document the reflection

An important step in reflective practice is to help students learn how to document what they are thinking about. Some may find writing works well, others may need different options. It can be difficult to translate feelings or emotions into words that adequately convey what students want to express.

Depending on the amount of time you are interested in spending on this unit, students could be offered several ways to submit their reflections. If you want to complete the unit in one class period - use paper/pencil or a digital submission (something like a Google Form, for example).

## **Unit conclusion**

The unit could end at this point.

If you have more time, you could consider giving students further options, allowing them to find the mode of response that best fits their way of self expression.

Some additional ways students might choose to respond

- Write an article (perhaps in newspaper format)
- Compose music
- Create an ad
- Record a podcast (this might be a creative group option where someone gets 'interviewed')
- Create a slideshow or photo display
- Make a poster
- Make a movie, or a tv-style video interview
- Even something as straightforward as writing some bullet points on an index card

## **Sharing the reflections outside the classroom**

How can the submissions be shared effectively? This is where the community impact can happen - when you share the power of "Music In Our Schools". Begin with understanding that some of these options would require student approval to share their materials.

- ★ How about submitting materials to your local media (what if a short excerpt from a podcast got played on the local radio station!)
- ★ Does your school district have a Facebook presence? Positive messages are always valuable and get seen by a lot of people who don't have a direct connection to music classrooms. A student ad could easily be placed in this setting as could links to other kinds of submissions.
- ★ Perhaps you and the students you work with could find a prominent display area inside the school building where students, staff and visitors could see student responses.
- ★ Consider having students post materials around their performance venue so that audience members could look at them before and after an event. Posters could be on display, video entries could appear on screens using a 'loop' format, and so on.

The focus of this final step in the unit is to help your community understand why students find music experiences powerful, especially for those who haven't had that experience themselves. It is not about music as being more worthy than anything else but rather that music is worthy in itself. If someone hasn't had that experience, seeing the student reflection submissions can help them gain insight directly from the students.