# Using Nontraditional Text for Socratic Dialogue

# In a Secondary Montessori Classroom

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## Abstract

*Music is a part of the everyday lives of most people. Ensemble directors and music educators have noticed that many students are music-illiterate. While students enjoy listening to and performing music, many students cannot accurately or thoughtfully describe the thematic ideas that are represented in the music they are listening to. In this study, students participated in three Socratic seminars that used a work of music as the assigned "text." Students were guided through the process of listening to a work of music and making annotations. Various guides and strategies for annotating music were provided. Students participated in open-ended question based discussions that aimed to discover the theme of the music. After the discussions were finished, students reflected on their preparation and participation in Socratic seminar. Annotations, student surveys, teacher observations, and student observations were collected as evidence. Results showed that works of music can successfully be used a "text" for a Socratic seminar, and that Socratic seminars are an effective technique for discussing music.*

## Introduction

Throughout my training to become a credentialed Secondary Montessori teacher I realized the importance of the Socratic seminar method. I was able to participate in many Socratic seminars and witness, as a participant, how a formal discussion rooted in a thoughtful analysis of a specific text can truly help deepen my understanding of a particular subject. I also learned how this method of instruction is aligned with the Montessori philosophy of education. This project aims to combine my knowledge of the Socratic seminar method, Montessori philosophy, and music to create a system within a performance-based class that allows students to gain a deeper understanding of the music they are performing, and the skills to speak intelligently about the meaning and message of that particular work of music. The project implements various guided music listening strategies, different methods of making music annotations, three distinctly varied seminar formats, and a self-reflection process focused on future growth.

## Literature Review

### Influencing Students' Music Literacy Using Socratic Seminar

Music exists in every culture and is a part of the lives, in some form or fashion, of most people today. Music resonates with people culturally, socially, and emotionally. With today's advanced technology and young people's access to music, one would assume that students would have a high rate of music literacy and that students would be able to speak intelligently about any given piece of music. However, many music teachers, especially those at a post-secondary level, have observed that a growing number music students are "music illiterate" (Asmus, 2004, pp. 6-8).

Open-ended discussions, such as those supported by a Socratic seminar, are an instructional tool that can be used to develop students' critical thinking, creative reasoning, and a deeper understanding of a given topic. Non-textual seminars, or seminars that use a work of music as the designated "text" can be used to influence students' ability to speak fluently about music. The process by which a Socratic

seminar is conducted involves three parts, all of which can be used to increase and evaluate students' level of music literacy.

**Music Literacy**

In the simplest terms, literacy can be described as the ability to read and write. Literacy involves being able to communicate messages with others, and interpret and understand messages from other people. In regards to the Fine Arts and visual art in particular, visual literacy is known as the ability to recognize ideas conveyed through images. Combining these two definitions and applying them to music, one would conclude that music literacy could be defined as the ability to read music and understand ideas conveyed through sounds or works of music.

Across the nation, secondary and post-secondary music educators have noticed an increasing number of musicians who are unable to read music. Although music curriculum is aligned with both national and state standards, studies suggest that ensemble music classes have a greater focus on performance rather than music reading. Music ensembles face three distinct challenges in developing their music literacy: most directors are focusing on how to prepare students for their annual concerts, classes have a limited amount of time to study or rehearse, and teaching new music to students while attempting to implement literacy strategies can be very challenging (Asmus, 2004, pp. 6-8).

Music literacy is an important topic to pursue not only for students who are considering a post-secondary career in music, but for all students. Studies suggest that music and a deep understanding of music can be used to help develop students' social skills, problem-solving skills, and cognitive skills (Topoglu, 2013, pp. 2253-2256).

**Socratic Seminar**

A Socratic seminar, sometimes known as Paideia seminar, is a formal discussion held by students, inspired by open-ended questions, and designed to facilitate creative and critical answers related to a specific text. The Montessori philosophy and the Socratic method compliment one another. "The process that

Socratic Practice provides addresses two major planes of development: personality and social organization, which Maria Montessori considered key to human progress" (Loan, 2003, pp. 41). Most experienced Seminar facilitators break down the aspects of this discussion into three parts: preparatory work, which involves reading and annotating, the actual seminar itself, and the reflection process.

**Making Annotations**

The first part of seminar involves reading and annotating a text. The preparation for the seminar discussion is just as important as the discussion itself and cannot be overlooked or under addressed. Teachers cannot hope to have successful seminars if they have not first guided their students through the process of reading and annotating. "Because seminars require reasoning, predicting, projecting, and imagining, students gather and analyze information before they construct ideas" (Tredway, 1995, p.27). One teacher's specific strategy to encourage students to complete the required preparatory work is to assign a "ticket assignment" that allows students to gain entry to the discussion (Coke, 2008, p. 28-33). Students who have not completed the requirements for entering the discussion should not be allowed to participate. This is not meant to exclude students, but to include *only* students who are prepared to have a group discussion referencing a specific text to cite their ideas. One of the goals of seminar is for students to develop a deeper understand of a particular text, and students cannot do this if they are unprepared (Keegan, 2013, p. 50-51).

**Socratic Dialogue**

After the preparatory work is complete, the teacher facilitates a group discussion. The discussion is not a debate and the students should be focused on synthesizing the information that have absorbed and not simply recalling it (Keegan, 2013, pp. 50-51). Socratic dialogue becomes culturally relevant and personally interesting because, although the teacher chooses the text and the questions, the students drive the conversation (Billings & Roberts, 2006, pp. 1-8). "To support their positions, they cited evidence from the text, disagreeing with one another's reasoning, asking one another questions..." (Tredway, 1995, pp.26). This skill is

important for students to have because outside of school, students will be asked to think critically and ask questions (Coke, 2008, pp. 28-33). Educational professionals have developed tools for holding all students accountable to the discussion even when they are unable or unwilling to contribute. Some of these tools include writing down comments or even drawing pictures to demonstrate their understanding, ensuring that all students receive credit (Goodman & DeFilippo, 2008, pp. 66-69).

**Socratic Circles**

Socratic circles are a variation on the Socratic seminar method of instruction. In one variation the teacher arranges the students into two circles: an inner circle and an outer circle. The inner circle sits on the floor, speaks during the discussion, and focuses on exploring the meaning of the given text. The outer circle sits on chairs around the inner circle, makes observations and does not contribute to the discussion until the very end (Byrne, 2001, pp. 13). Teachers choose to implement this method for various reasons. Class sizes may be a factor in determining whether or not to implement this method of seminar. It is suggested that for Socratic seminar students are "usually in groups of 25 or fewer" (Tredway, 1995, pp.26). Many classrooms consist of far more than 25 students, which is why splitting bigger classes into smaller groups can be beneficial.

**Non-Textual Socratic Seminar**

Traditionally one uses a written text as the vehicle for Socratic discussion. As mentioned before, students read and annotate the assigned text before the discussion begins. While students are answering questions designed by the facilitator they reference or cite the text that they have read as support for the conclusion that they have drawn. Socratic dialogue is meant to push students to find a deeper meaning and draw conclusions based on a human work of literature. One case study follows an English teacher that has utilized the Socratic seminar method in the classroom in response to being asked to use "more sophisticated assessments" to determine students' growth (Coke, 2008, pp.28-33). Elementary school teachers use versions of the Socratic seminar to advance and enrich students

understanding of poetry (Goodman & DeFilippo, 2008, pp. 66-69). The conclusion can be drawn that the Socratic seminar is an effective way to influence, if not improve, students' literacy. If works of literature and poetry can be used as the vehicle for developing a deeper understanding of written works, then I believe that musical works can be used to further students' understanding of music, and concepts developed by composers, and therefore influence their musical literacy.

**Reflection Process**

The final and equally important step in any Socratic seminar is the reflection process. Reflections can be made in many different ways, and gives the teacher insight into the students' opinion of the seminar process. Following the National Paideia Center's guidelines, reflections should require students to assess the process and the content, and reflect on students' own individual behavior as well as the behavior of the entire group (Billings & Roberts, 2006, pp. 1-8).

**The Role of The Teacher**

In most cases the classroom teacher acts as the facilitator of the discussion. He or she does not participate in the actual Socratic dialogue, but instead asks questions that prompt the students to offer creative and critical answers. It is the leader's primary job to "guide students to (1) a deeper and clarified consideration of the ideas of the text, (2) a respect for varying points of view, and (3) adherence to and respect for the seminar process" (Tredway, 1995, pp. 28). Just as students who are new to experiencing seminar may be nervous or comfortable, teachers, as new seminar leaders, may feel unsure or insecure in their abilities. Some teachers are afraid of what will happen when they turn the conversation over to the students. "As a teacher 'looking in,' the conversation may not take the path you imagined; the students may not ask the questions you may pose and the end result may not have been the desired conclusion, but it is about the journey the students take and what they discover along the way" (Byrne, 2011, pp.14).

**Conclusion of Literature Review**

Based on the commentary of music educators across the nation, there is a need to improve student's music literacy. This improvement will benefit students who are considering music as a post secondary career, as well as those who are not. The social, behavioral, and critical thinking skills that one develops while participating in a Socratic seminar benefit students academically and in the real world, and the reflective process allows students to consider how they can improve. While it is non-traditional, works of music can serve as a vehicle for Socratic dialogue if planned and implemented correctly. Through the preparation process, Socratic seminars, and reflective process I believe it is possible to influence students' music literacy.

## Research Questions

**Research Question:**
How can non-traditional Socratic seminars be used to influence students' music literacy?

**Subsidiary Questions:**
1. What are the indicators of "music literacy?"
2. How can you gage and or track students' "music literacy?"
3. What constitutes a "non-traditional seminar?"
4. What are the characteristics of an effective music seminar?
5. What are the characteristics of effective music annotations?
6. What are the characteristics of a thoughtful or meaningful self-reflection?

## Research Design and Methodology

### Participants and Setting

The students participating in this study attend a Montessori Middle School in a large urban district in the Midwest. The school offers grades 6 through 8 and the students are ages 11-14. This school has a diverse cultural and socioeconomic population. All of the students participating in "nontraditional music seminar" are in beginning choir, which is an elective specialty class. The class meets daily for 41 minutes and is a semester (18 weeks) long class. There are 36 students total, 30 female and 6 male, in the class. Broken down by grade level, there are 19 sixth graders, 5 seventh graders, and 12 eighth graders. The class is fairly diverse with

ten Asian students, twelve Black students, eleven Caucasian students, and three Hispanic students.

All students in the class participated in the preparatory work, Socratic dialogue, and self-reflection process. I analyzed data from the group as a whole, and I have also selected a few students from each Seminar and more closely reflected on their annotations and self-reflections. Research for this project was conducted during February and March of 2015.

**Materials**

For my study on the Socratic seminar method and using works of music as a "text," I developed 3 different guides to listening and annotating music. These three guides can be found in Appendix B, D, and F. The first guide is simply a copy of lyrics to the song being studied with wide enough margins so that students have enough room to make numerous annotations. I used this material in my first Seminar. The second guide, which I used for my second Seminar, has labeled columns that help students organize their annotations into different categories. While this material helps students see the different types of annotations, it may or may not help them see the connection between what they are hearing and their analysis or interpretation. The third guide that I developed for my project, and for use during my third seminar, helps students isolate one element of the song, analyze that element, and extract the theme or message. All of these materials were created to assist students in listening to the selected work and making annotations, and to act as a reference tool during the Socratic seminar.

After each seminar I wanted students to reflect on the quality of their annotations, the comments that were made during the seminar, and how well and respectfully they listened to their classmates. To address these components, I created a Seminar Self-Reflection sheet that students completed after each seminar. Examples of these reflections can be found in Appendix C, E, and G. The self-reflection template notes goals for each category addressed so that students are able to understand what is expected of them. It is categorized into four different groups:

unacceptable, needs improvement, acceptable, and excellent. There is also a place for students to leave comments, and one opened ended reflection question that changed with each seminar.

For this study I conducted Socratic seminar using three different works of music as "text." The songs studied were *Imagine* by John Lennon, *Born This Way* by Lady Gaga, and *We Are The World* by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie. For all three of these recordings that were listened to during class time, I downloaded original versions from iTunes.

**Procedure**

My study took eight weeks total to conduct. Below is a week-by-week overview of the preparatory lessons covered in class, guided listening and annotating, Socratic seminars, and self-reflections.

| | |
|---|---|
| Week 1 | Over view of Socratic seminar guidelines and expectations |
| Week 2 | Review of Socratic Seminar guidelines and assessment activity – Seminar vs. Debate |
| Week 3 | Guided listening and annotating for *Imagine* by John Lennon |
| Week 4 | *Imagine* seminar and self-reflection |
| Week 5 | Guided listening and annotating for *Born This Way* by Lady GaGa |
| Week 6 | *Born This Way* seminar and self-reflection |
| Week 7 | Guided listening and annotating for *We Are The World* by Michael Jackson |
| Week 8 | *We Are The World* seminar and self-reflection |

In my classroom there were many different levels of experience with participation in Socratic seminars. In order for students to have clear expectations and a mutual understanding of how to conduct a music seminar, I first highlighted important guidelines about seminar expectations (see appendix A). To access students' prior knowledge, I first asked the question "What is Socratic seminar?" Since there were many different levels of exposure to seminar, there were many different answers. Students who had participated in many seminars were more

easily able to articulate the important aspects of Socratic dialogue. After students had a clear understanding of how to conduct seminar, my classroom participated in three separate seminars, each with a slight variation on either the guided listening process or the actual discussion itself. The nature of the process and the objective of the discussion remained the same, but I varied different elements in the hopes that more students would be able to successfully participate in the conversation.

During week one I taught a lesson on expectations for seminar. In class we covered that a seminar is a formal discussion held by students, inspired by open-ended questions, and designed to facilitate creative and critical answers related to a specific text. During a seminar students are expected to be "present, prepared, and respectful." Being present involves being both physically and mentally present during the preparatory work and the discussion itself. We discussed how it may be easy to allow yourself to become distracted during the discussion or let your mind wander, and we agreed as a class that in order to have a successful seminar all students need to be paying attention. We discussed that body language is an indicator of whether one is paying attention or not. During seminar students are expected to use body language that demonstrates that they are listening. The second expectation of a seminar is that students are prepared. In order to be prepared for seminar, students must have participated in the guided listening activities and made thoughtful annotations. Students are expected to bring their annotations to the discussion, as these annotations help guide their thoughts and help determine what they would like to contribute to the conversation. The third and final expectation of a seminar is that students are respectful to each other and to the nature of the Socratic dialogue. Students take turns calling on one another when they would like to contribute to the discussion. They are expected to use formal language, agree or disagree with statements and not people, and always connect what they are saying the "text." These three expectations (present, prepared, and respectful) assure that the discussion is formal and respectful, and that the answers given to questions are critically based and rooted in the analysis of the given "text."

**Seminar #1**

During the third week of my study, students had their first experience listening to and annotating a work of music. Students understood that listening to and annotating a work of music for a music seminar was the equivalent of reading and annotating a text for a traditional seminar. In order to help facilitate personal and thoughtful annotating, the students were allowed to move to comfortable spot in the room, I turned the lights down, and students listen and annotated independently. Students were given a sheet of paper with the lyrics to John Lennon's *Imagine* printed on it. The paper had large enough margins that they could make numerous annotations (see appendix B). In an effort to make a very abstract concept more concrete, I helped guide their thinking by breaking down day-by-day the type of annotations they should make. On the first day of listening students were to make descriptive annotation. As a class, we brainstormed some of the following descriptive sentence starters:

| | |
|---|---|
| Descriptive sentence starters | • "When I listen to this song, I hear..."<br>• "This song sounds like..."<br>• "At this part of the song, I hear..."<br>• "When I am listening, it sounds like..." |

On the second day of listening to *Imagine*, students were to listen and make interpretive and analytical annotations. Now instead of simply writing about what they were hearing, I asked them to think about why they thought they were hearing it, and what they thought it meant. Students were encouraged to go back and expand on their descriptive annotations, as well as create entirely new annotations. I used the following sentence starters to help guide students' thinking:

| | |
|---|---|
| Analyze / Interpret sentence starters | • "When I hear _____ it might mean _____."<br>• "When I hear _____ it makes me think of _____." |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • "The part of the song where _____ could mean that _____"<br>• "The composer could mean _____ and I hear this _____" |

On the third and final day of listening to *Imagine,* I asked the students to review all of the previous annotations and add annotations that related a possible theme. Along with determining possible themes, they were also to propose questions. These questions could be related to the composer of the song, to the listener or audience, or could be other questions that the student wanted to ask during seminar. I collected their annotations and reviewed them before conducting the actual seminar.

Reviewing the students' annotations was helpful in guiding the way in which I created my questions. I was able to clearly see what themes and concepts students had been able to discover on their own, and what areas needed more attention during our discussion. On the actual day of the seminar I had the chairs arranged in a circle and *Imagine* playing when students arrived in class. Students found a place in the circle, took out their annotations, and listened to the selection one final time before the seminar began. The day after the discussion, students reflected on the entire process, completed a self-reflection, and set a goal for the next seminar (see appendix C).

**Seminar #2**

The objective of the guided listening and annotating for each seminar was to give students a concrete framework that would help them categorize and articulate their thoughts. The objective of each seminar was to hold a formal discussion that deepened students understanding of a work of music. For my second seminar, these objectives remained the same, although I altered elements of the preparatory work and the format of the Socratic seminar to attempt to allow more students to participate and feel successful.

My second seminar was on Lady Gaga's *Born This Way.* To assist students with their annotations, I again gave them a large sheet of paper so that they felt free to make many annotations, but this time I had 4 columns already drawn on the piece of paper (see appendix D). Each day, students would focus on a new column and add annotations to the appropriate category. The categories remained the same from the previous seminar. The expectations while listening also remained the same. Students were allowed to find a comfortable, independent spot in the room. On the first day of listening students simply made descriptive annotations. On the second day, students added to those descriptions and analyzed and interpreted their meaning. On the third and final day of listening, students suggested possible themes and proposed possible questions.

During the Socratic seminar on *Born This Way* I decided to randomly split the class in half and hold two separate seminars asking the same questions. The first seminar on *Imagine* included 36 students and was held for roughly 35 minutes. I wanted to insure that students who needed more time to formulate a response, or students who felt less comfortable voicing their opinion, were offered the opportunity of a small group setting. During week 6 of my study I split the class into two groups and held Socratic seminars on two separate days. For my two seminars on *Born This Way,* I still had roughly 35 minutes worth of Socratic Dialogue, but only had 15 students on the first day, and 14 students on the second day. As before, when students entered the room, the chairs were set up in a circle and the musical selection was playing. When both seminars were finished students reflected on the entire seminar process and completed a self-reflection (see appendix E). This time instead of setting a goal, I asked them to list the pros and cons of having a split seminar.

**Seminar #3**

For my third and final seminar in my study I varied the preparatory work and seminar format again. The third seminar was on *We Are The World* by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie. Students were given a different way of organizing their thoughts into annotations. This time, I gave students a more concrete guide for extrapolating the meaning and the theme from their descriptions. Students filled in

one descriptive annotation, what they thought it meant, and what message it sent. This chart gave students the opportunity to list many descriptions, and then analyze them, and then extract the theme, which is the way we had worked the process in the past two seminars. This new chart also gave students the freedom to follow one concrete, descriptive thought through to its larger, abstract meaning in the same listening session (see appendix F). My hope was that this tool would also be more helpful in getting students to relate back to the text during our Socratic dialogue because it gave students a clear outline of how their thoughts were articulated.

During the *We Are The World* seminar, I again split the class into two groups, but this time one group participated in the actual discussion and the other group simply observed and evaluated the conversation. This is known as the "Inner-Outer Circle Method," or "Socratic Circles." This method challenged students in news ways. Some students felt insecure about being in the inner circle knowing that their peers were evaluating them, and some students found it difficult to be in the outer circle where they could not share their thoughts and opinions. After the discussion, students completed the self-reflection and listed the pros and cons of the inner-outer circle method (see appendix G).

During each seminar I was not only asking the facilitating questions, but also evaluating and recording the students' answers. For each question that I asked I would record which students were offering answers and what quality of answers they offered. The quality of answer I judged by the following standards: off topic response, on topic response, response that refers to the text, insightful response, response that makes a personal connection, or any combination.

**Data Analysis/Results**

The desired outcome of this action research was for students to engage in a thoughtful, meaningful dialogue that discussed the larger meaning behind works of music. In order for the discussion to be deep and meaningful, students first needed to complete the guided listening process and make annotations. These concrete annotations lay the framework for future abstract thinking. As previously stated, students were given a large sheet of paper with the lyrics to John Lennon's *Imagine*

written on them. The students were given class time on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday to listen to the selection and make annotations. On Monday students were asked to focus specifically on making descriptive annotations, on Tuesday students made analytical and interpretive annotations, and on Wednesday students finished their annotations by adding to their previous comments and adding new comments about possible themes and questions they had. On Wednesday their annotations were collected and reviewed. I evaluated their annotations into three categories: excellent, acceptable, and needs improvement. I categorized a student's work as "excellent" if they had many annotations, thoughtful annotations, and annotations that were clearly related to the music. "Acceptable" annotations were thoughtful and related to the music. Annotations that were categorized as "needs improvement" were not related to the music, shallow, or very sparse. The following graph shows that in preparation for our first Socratic seminar almost half (46%) of my students had made annotations that, in my opinion, needed improvement.

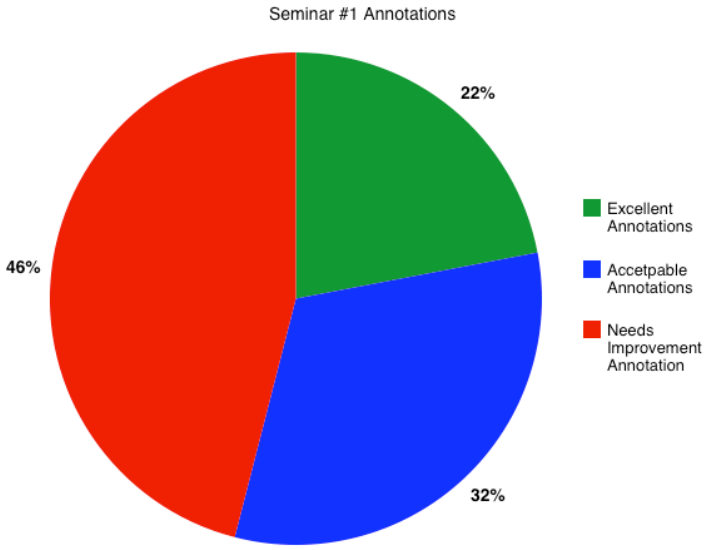


**Figure 1: Imagine Seminar Annotations**

Each seminar began with a writing prompt. This allowed students to silently, and independently gather their thoughts, and focus themselves on the seminar. After the writing prompt, the facilitator asked the first question and turned the conversations over to the students. When I, the facilitator, felt the need, I asked

another question that either probed the students further, or changed the direction of the conversation. The seminar ended with a "whip around" question that each student answered. When calculating the number of students who commented during the seminar, I did not include the whip around comments as these were mandatory of every student, and not offered on their own accord like the rest of contributions to the discussion. The following are the questions that were asked during the first seminar in this study.

| | |
|---|---|
| Writing Question | Write about what your perfect world would be like... |
| Seminar Questions | 1. What is the over all emotion of this song? Where do you hear that?<br>2. Lennon's lyric is "imagine no religion." Is this different than imagine one religion? Why or why not?<br>3. Which of the three sacrifices Lennon asks us to make would be the most challenging?<br>4. How can we eliminate prejudice? |
| Closing Question | Is this song pessimistic? Or optimistic? |

The first Socratic seminar in my study did not have the outcome that I desired. To begin the discussion, I would ask the group a question. Once I had turned the conversation over to the students, I would simply observe, and track and evaluate the comments being made. I judged the quality of the comments being made based on the following criteria: thoughtfulness, relevance, relation to the "text," connection and/or application to real world events. While most of the comments that were made were high quality, there were an alarming number of students who made very few comments or no comments at all. The following graph shows that almost half of the students who participated in the seminar on *Imagine* made no contribution to the conversation.

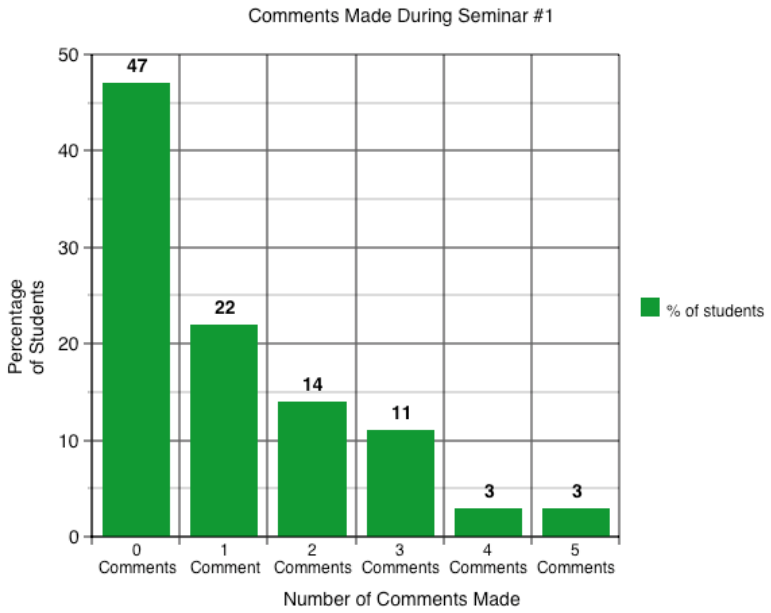


**Figure 2: Student Participation in Seminar #1**

In analyzing the data collected from the annotations and the comments made during the actual discussion, I noticed that a large percentage of students were unprepared with subpar annotations, and a similarly large percentage of students did not contribute to the conversation.

The day after the seminar, the students in my class were given a self-reflection to complete. The students rated themselves in the following areas: quality of annotations, listening during the conversation, and speaking during the conversation. The students were able to mark themselves as excellent, acceptable, needs improvement, or unacceptable. Students were encouraged to complete the reflections honestly and were made aware that marking themselves lower in any category would not negatively impact their grade.

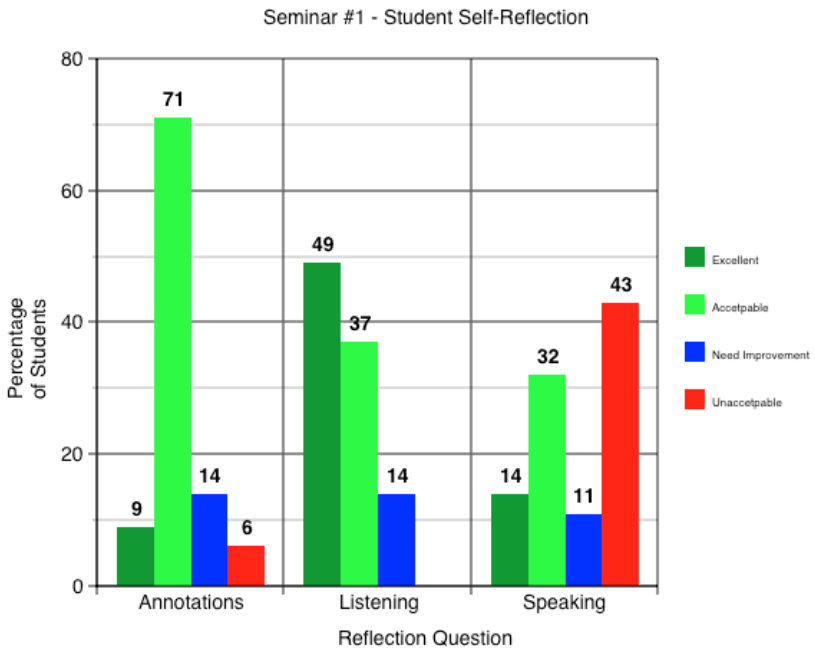


**Figure 3: Seminar #1 Student Self Reflections**

The above graph shows that the majority of students were demonstrating excellent or acceptable amounts of active listening during seminar. It also shows that students felt that they had made an acceptable amount of quality annotations, which was different from my opinion of their annotations. 42% of my students and I agreed that there were an unacceptable amount of students who did not participate in the seminar. The final question on the self-reflection was open-ended and asked students to set a goal for the next Seminar. 20% of the class set a goal relating to improving their annotations. 71% of the class set a goal to speak more frequently during the next seminar.

For the second seminar in my study, I chose Lady Gaga's *Born This Way* as the "text." Reflecting on the lack of quality annotations from the first seminar, and students' inability to organize the annotations they made into specific categories, I provided a different tool for my students to use while listening and annotating. Instead of giving students a blank piece of paper and asking them to be able to categorize their annotations, for my second seminar I gave my students a tool that assisted them in making that distinction. Similar to the previous seminar, students were given three days to listen and make descriptive, analytical and interpretive,

and thematic annotations. However, during guided listening for *Born This Way*, the tool students were given had designated spaces for them to categorize their annotations. This offered students the ability to easily return to their comments and determine what type of annotation they were. On the third day of listening to the selection, I collected their annotations for review. The following graph demonstrates the percentage of students who made annotations that were excellent, acceptable, and needed improvement. I evaluated their annotation based on the same criteria as in the first seminar.

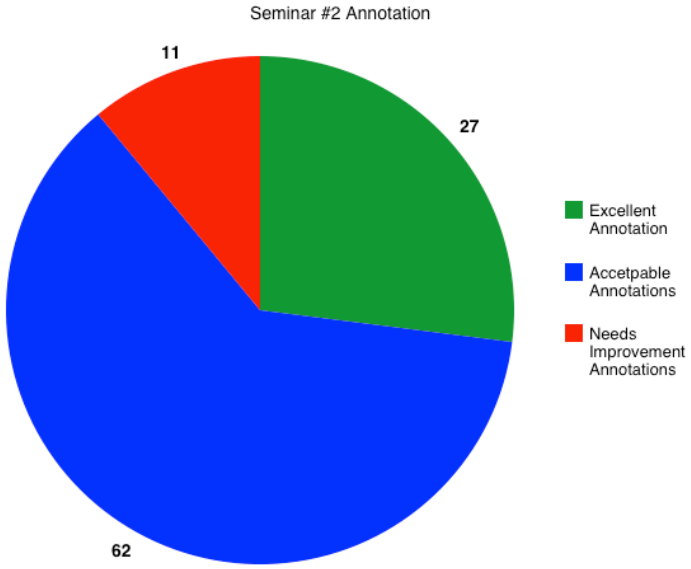


**Figure 4: Seminar #2 Annotations**

In comparing Figure 1 to Figure 4, it is clear that far more students made acceptable, and even excellent, annotations for the second seminar than they did for the first seminar. Providing students with a more concrete framework for developing their abstract ideas was successful. In an attempt to increase students' ability to listen to the selected work and make many thoughtful annotations, I adapted the annotating strategies. This resulted in a higher number of students making more annotations in preparation for seminar. I believed that these improved annotations would also improve the amount of participation during the discussion. The following questions were asked to both groups during the second seminar:

| | |
|---|---|
| Writing Question | List as many words as you can that describe who you are. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Seminar Questions | 1. What is the overall message? Where do you hear that?<br>2. Is there a lot of symbolism? Or is the message very blunt?<br>3. Why do you think Lady Gaga is so upfront about the meaning of the song?<br>4. Why is one line of the song in a foreign language? How does this demonstrate the meaning of the song?<br>5. Is it harder to change parts about you that you don't like, or learn to love yourself for who you are?<br>6. What is the most important part about a person's identity?<br>7. If you are "born this way" can you change for the better? Can you change for the worse? |
| Closing Question | Share one word that describes your identify. |

The second area that I wanted to improve for my second seminar was the number of students who were participating. After reflecting on the low level of participation during first seminar and taking into account that many students had the goal to speak more during our next seminar, I decided to change the actual discussion format. Instead of having a roughly 35 minute long discussion with 36 students, I decided to split the group in half and hold two separate seminars with fewer students participating in each discussion. The desired outcome of this adaptation was that more students would make more comments when the number of students in the group decreased. This outcome was achieved and is represented in the following two graphs.

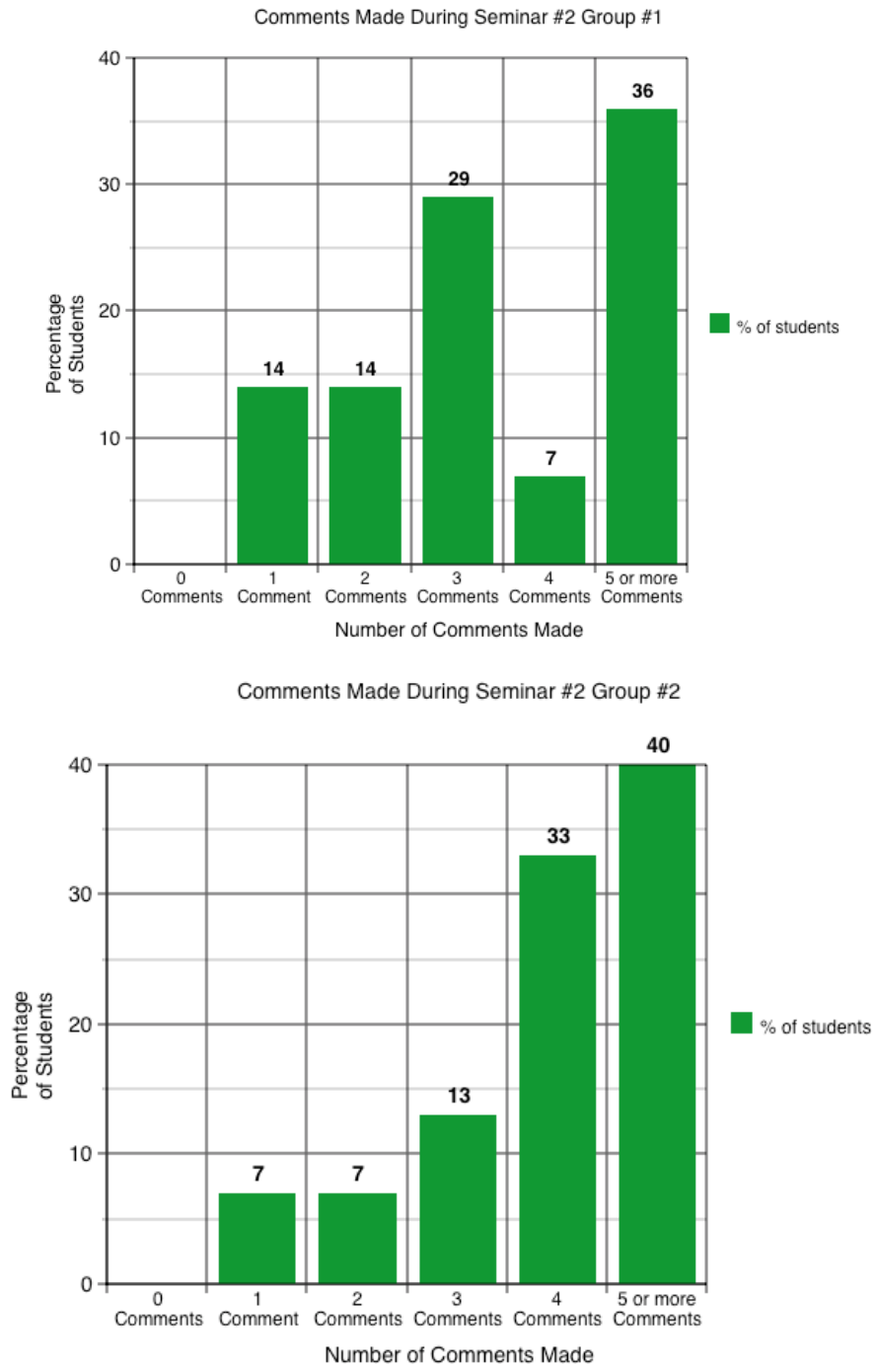


**Figure 5: Student Participation in Seminar #2**

The level of participation in seminar #2, in comparison to the lack of participation in seminar #1, demonstrates that students were better able to make thoughtful comments during a Socratic seminar when they were in a smaller group.

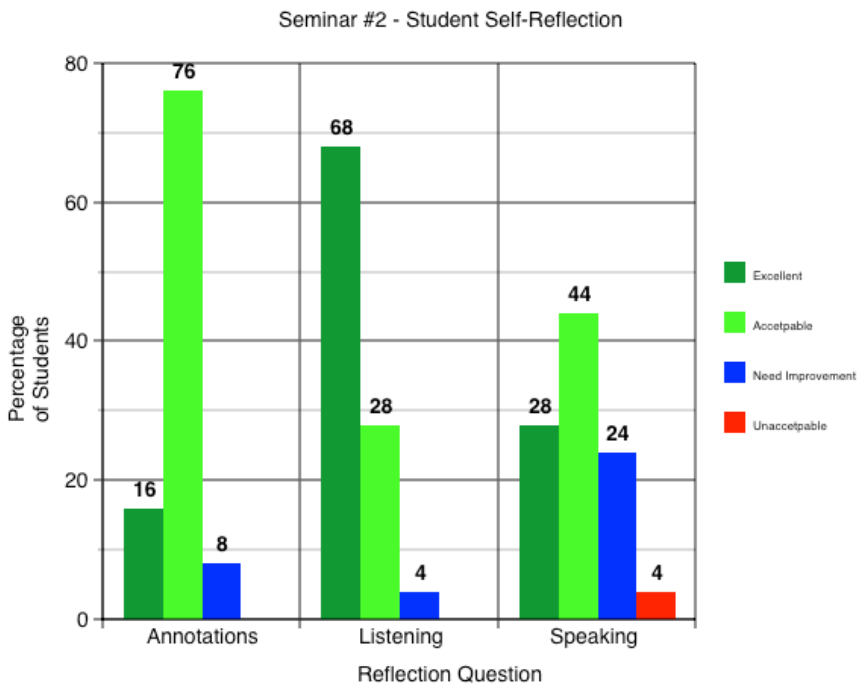


**Figure 6: Seminar #2 Student Self Reflections**

Students thought more highly of their level of participation in the second seminar, which is demonstrated in the above graph. After the first seminar 43% of students rated themselves in the "unacceptable" category in regards to their speaking participation during the seminar. In contrast to that, after the second seminar only 4% of students rated themselves as "unacceptable." According to the students' self-reflections their ability to annotate and participate in Socratic seminar improved when the method of annotating changed, and the number of students participating in the discussion was reduced.

The "text" I chose for my third and final seminar was *We Are The World,* by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie. Now that my students had improved their ability to listen to work of music and make thoughtful annotations, I wanted to design a guided listening tool that would allow them to isolate one element from the selected work, analyze it, determine the meaning, and be able to articulate that during seminar. In the first and second seminars, students made thoughtful comments but were sometimes unable to link their comments back to a specific element of music from the selected work. When students would make a statement but did not cite their musical evidence, I would prompt them with questions such as: "Where did

you hear that in the music?" or "How does the music support that?" Often times, students were unable to make the connection back to the specific element of music, or if they were able to make the connection, they were unable to articulate this during the seminar. The purpose of Socratic seminar is to have a discussion where all ideas are rooted in the text, which mean that the purpose of a music seminar is to have a discussion where all ideas are rooted in the music. The desired outcome of this adaptation to the style of guided listening and annotating was that students would be able to cite the descriptive element of music as support for the ideas they discussed during our third seminar.

Our new method of listening and annotating gave students a concrete tool that helped them discover the connection between what they were hearing, the meaning behind what they were hearing, and how to discuss this during seminar. Instead of just a blank piece of paper, or even a piece of paper with categories for the different types of annotations, our new tool had concrete sentence starters. The first sentence starter said, "When I listened, I heard..." Students made the connection that this was a descriptive annotation. The analytical/interpretive sentence starter said, "I think that this means..." and the thematic sentences starter said, "The message is..." Students had the freedom to either list many descriptive annotation as they could and then go back and analyze them, or they could start with one description and follow it through to analysis, interpretation, and theme discovery. During seminar students would be able to start with an element of music that they heard and articulate the message it conveyed, or share a message and support their statement with descriptive musical evidence.

The students were given three days to listen to the selected work and make their annotations. As before, on the third day I collected their annotations to review and evaluate them. I evaluated annotations based on the same criteria as in the first two seminars with one modification: Annotations would only receive an "excellent" mark if many of their descriptions had been followed through to the final interpretation of the theme. Annotations that were mostly descriptive, would receive an "acceptable" evaluation.

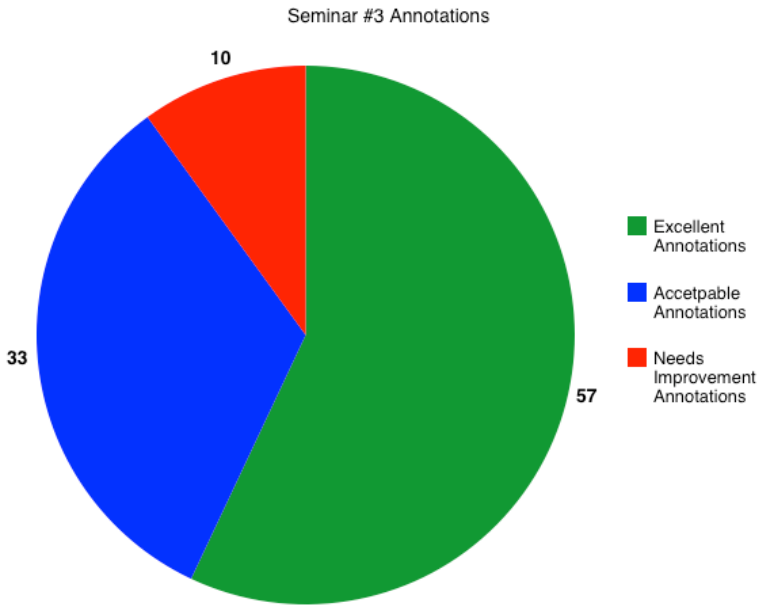


**Figure 7: Seminar #3 Annotations**

The above graph shows the percentage of students who, in my opinion, were able to make annotations that were excellent, acceptable, or needed improvement. After the modification to the guided listening and annotation process, there were still 10% of students whose annotations needed improvement. This is very slightly less the 11% from the second seminar, and far less than the 46% from the first seminar. Over half the class (57%) had made annotations that were excellent. After implementing the new annotation style, I witnessed a large improvement in the quality of annotations my students were making.

Students had not only improved at making their annotations, but also at using them during discussion. For our third and final seminar, I modified the discussion format again. This time instead of discussing with the group as a whole, I utilized the Socratic Circles method and split the class into an inner circle and an outer circle. The inner circle would carry out the Socratic seminar, while the outer circle would evaluate the conversation. The following questions were asked during the third seminar:

| | |
|---|---|
| Writing Question | Write about a time when you made a difference in the world. |
| Seminar Questions | 1. What is the overall mood of the song? Describe where you hear that? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 2. What is the importance or reason for including so many different artists in the song?<br>3. How does this song reflect society as a whole?<br>4. They sing the chorus more than they would in a typical song. Why do you think this is?<br>5. What is a theme you found and how is it supported by the music?<br>6. What is the significance of the rapping portion of the song?<br>7. What does "we are the world, we are the children" mean to the listener/audience? |
| Closing Question | In one word, describe the impact that this song had. |

The desired outcome of the inner circle adaption was that students who were in the inner circle would be able to carry out a more meaningful discussion because they had higher quality annotations and a smaller discussion group. Students in the outer circle would be able to provide feedback on the conversation from a different perspective. I evaluated comments made during the seminar based on the same criteria as during the first and second seminar, with one modification: I only counted comments made if students were able to directly reference the "text" or work of music. If students made a comment, but could not connect their idea to the text, the comment was not included. The following is a graph a high quality comments that referenced the text made during the third seminar.

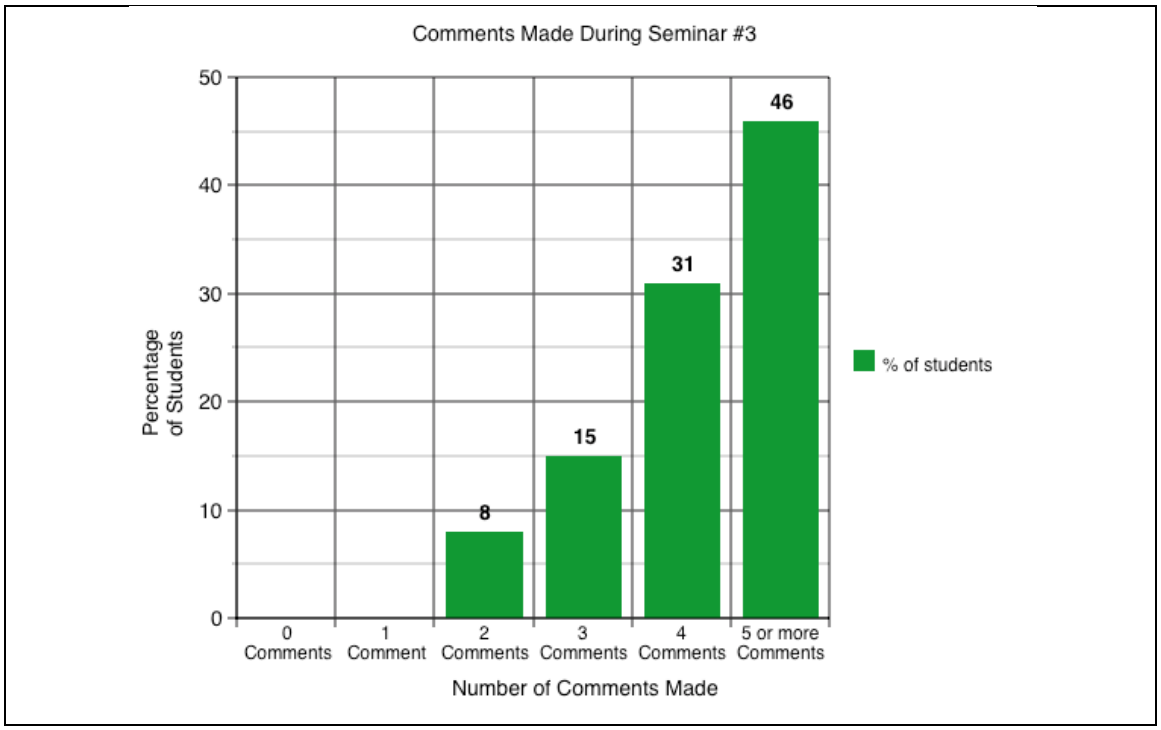


**Figure 8: Comments Made During Seminar #3**

Comparing the number of students who made quality comments during the third seminar in this study to the number of comments made in the previous two seminars, the third seminar was by far the most successful. All students made at least two comments. Almost half of the students participating in the discussion spoke a five times or more.

## Limitations

One significant limitation in my study was the lack of prior musical knowledge my students had. The students in my class come from many different musical and education backgrounds. For many students, this was their first exposure to a music class, and because of this they were unfamiliar with the more sophisticated elements of music. Some students had taken music classes prior to this, or have studied music privately, and came to class with a greater understanding of music. For the students with less experience, it was difficult for them to accurately articulate what they were hearing using the correct terminology. I often assisted students in synthesizing what they were hearing, and this may or may not have affected the annotations they made, or the answers they shared.

Another limiting factor was the short length of class periods. Socratic seminars can take anywhere from two hours to two class days. The ideal length for a Socratic seminar used in a school setting is around one hour. The beginning choir class period was only 41 minutes long. After students came to class, settled in, and listened to the selected song one more time, there was usually only about 35 minutes left for discussion and in many cases, this is not enough. I think that the opportunity for longer class periods and longer discussions could have yielded more answers and higher quality discussion.

Another significant limitation is the fact that it was my own judgment that determined the quality of students' comments. Seminars can be fast-paced discussions and it can be difficult to manage asking questions, managing classroom behaviors, recording answers given, and determining the quality of the answers all at the same time. In the future, I would like to bring in an objective observer to evaluate the conversation in the same way that I do. I also this it might be beneficial to record the seminars so that I am able to return to any specific comment if needed.

## Future Action Plan

Looking to the future, I will continue to develop guided listened materials so that students can continue to practice listening and annotating works of music. I will also continue to hold Socratic seminars in my classroom and encourage my students to take more ownership of the process. In the future I would like seminar works to be chosen by my students and the actual seminar itself facilitated by students.

In the future I would also like to see works of music used as "text" for seminar more frequently and even throughout the entire school. I believe that music is a true reflection of culture and can be used in any class to support learning and promote understanding in all subject areas. I would like to develop a music section of the Seminar Library at Parkway, which was developed by another teacher.

I would also like to have the opportunity to observe seminars in other classrooms at my school and even at other schools. Most seminars are conducted in a similar manner, but I would be excited to learn new information about how other

teachers have varied, changed, or improved the process. I think it would be beneficial to my own practice to be able to observe other classroom's seminar process.

## Discussion/Conclusion

After analyzing the quantity and quality of annotations that my students made after each seminar, I believe it is clear that students need a more concrete tool to assist them in making annotations. Most students of this age listen to music all the time, but this does not mean that they have practiced analyzing and interpreting what they are hearing. When students were given a very free and abstract method of annotation, as they were in the first seminar, most students were unable to make high quality and meaningful annotations. This significantly impacts the seminar, because for Socratic dialogue annotations are the basis for a high quality discussion. Students were able to self-reflect and recognize that they had not made quality annotations and stated this in their first self-reflection. Some students even made the connection between a lack of annotations and a lack of participation in seminar when they set their goals for the future. As my study continued, students gained more practice at listening and annotation, but they were also given more concrete tools to guide their annotating process. This improved their annotations, and I believe, improved our seminar as well. With each subsequent seminar in this study, students' annotations improve, and the number of comments made during seminar improved as well. The number of students who made no contributions to the discussion decreased to zero by the final seminar.

In order for a Socratic seminar to be successful, there needs to be a limited number of students and an appropriate length of time. In this study, I was only able to conduct seminar during a 40 minute long class period. A 40 minute long discussion with 36 students was very unsuccessful. As evidenced by the student's goals in their first self-reflection, students want to do well and participate in the discussion. If there are too many students in a group, or if the time allowed for discussion is too short, many students will not be able to participate in the seminar.

The second and third seminars, which were comprised of only half as many students, were much more successful than the first seminar.

Repeated practice is an important aspect to developing any skill. The students who participated in this study are in a beginning choir class and understand that in order to learn songs to successfully perform at a concert, the class must practice each song day after day. The same is true for practicing the skill of listening to and discussing music. I believe that just by conducting multiple seminars, and allowing students the opportunity to practice all of the skills necessary to participate in seminar, they improved over time.

The consensus of this study is that using a non-traditional text, such as a work of music, for a Socratic seminar is an effective way to influence students' music literacy. Through adaptations in the guided listening and annotating process, students were able to improve their ability to listen to and understand selected musical works. Understanding music is an important aspect of music literacy. Through practice during multiple discussions, and in varied discussion formats, students were able to convey their ideas about music to their peers, and gain an understanding of their peers' ideas about music. Being able to engage in a meaningful discussion about music is another important aspect of music literacy. Socratic seminar is a formal discussion held by students, inspired by open-ended questions, and designed to facilitate creative and critical answers related to a specific text. With the proper scaffolding and practice, teachers can utilize a non-traditional "text," such as a work of music, to influence students' music literacy.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A – Socratic Seminar Expectations

### Seminar

- Helps us achieve a deeper understanding of a work of music/text
- There are no "right or wrong" answers – This is not a debate
- We will turns using formal language to call on each other!
- We will actively listen while others are speaking!

### Present

- We will follow the discussion and make thoughtful contributions!
- We will actively listen!
- We will be physically present!
- We will be mentally present!

### Prepared

- We will read our passage and do our annotations thoroughly!
- We will bring a writing utensil and something to write on!
- We will have our best attitudes and an open mind!

### Respectful

- We will use formal language to call on each other!
- We will disagree with statements, not people!
- We will respect our time and keep the conversation moving!
- We will respect the text by not adding personal opinions or stories!

## Appendix B – *Imagine* Seminar Annotation Guide

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today...

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one

## Appendix C – *Imagine* Seminar Reflection

Name _____ Date _____ Folder # _____

*Preparation*
*Goal – I can make many thoughtful and insightful annotations to prepare for seminar. My annotations are useful to me during our Socratic Seminar.*

| **Unacceptable** I did not make any annotation. | **Needs Improvement** I made very few annotations. | **Acceptable** I made a variety of thoughtful annotations. | **Excellent** I made many thoughtful and insightful annotations. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Comments:** | | | |

*Participation – Listening*
*Goal – I can actively and intently listen to the discussion while my classmates are speaking. I am not thinking about what I am going to say next, but listening to the meaning behind what my classmates are saying.*

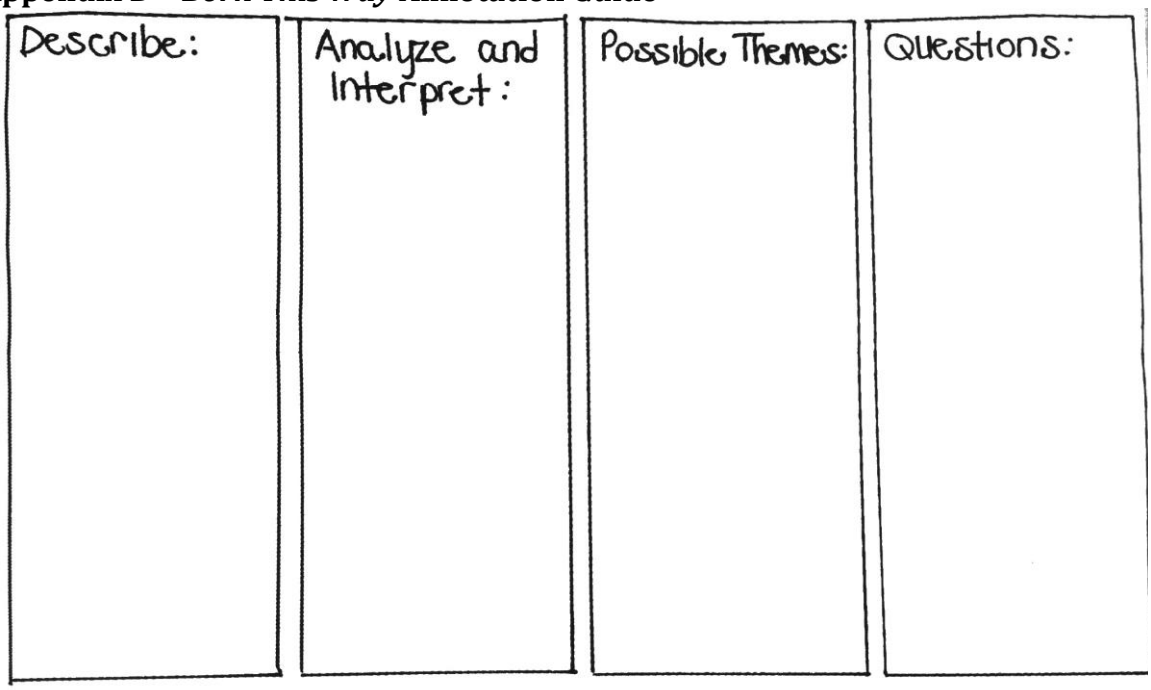
| **Unacceptable** I was visibly not listening during the seminar. | **Needs Improvement** I was listening to my classmate's some of the time. | **Acceptable** I was almost always listening to my classmates. | **Excellent** I was actively and intently listening to my classmates. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Comments:** | | | |

*Participation – Speaking*
*Goal – I can make thoughtful and relevant statements during the seminar. My statements are related to the "text" and the question being asked.*

| **Unacceptable** I did not make any statements during seminar. | **Needs Improvement** I made very few, or off topic statements during seminar. | **Acceptable** I made thoughtful and relevant statements during the seminar. | **Excellent** I made many thoughtful and relevant statements during the seminar and invited other students to participate in the seminar. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Comments:** | | | |

Write one goal for our next seminar. "During the next seminar, I want to...

**Appendix D – *Born This Way* Annotation Guide**



## Appendix E – *Born This Way* Reflection

Name _____ Date _____ Folder # _____

*Preparation*
*Goal – I can make many thoughtful and insightful annotations to prepare for seminar. My annotations are useful to me during our Socratic Seminar.*

| **Unacceptable** I did not make any annotation. | **Needs Improvement** I made very few annotations. | **Acceptable** I made a variety of thoughtful annotations. | **Excellent** I made many thoughtful and insightful annotations. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Comments:** | | | |

*Participation – Listening*
*Goal – I can actively and intently listen to the discussion while my classmates are speaking. I am not thinking about what I am going to say next, but listening to the meaning behind what my classmates are saying.*

| **Unacceptable** I was visibly not listening during the seminar. | **Needs Improvement** I was listening to my classmate's some of the time. | **Acceptable** I was almost always listening to my classmates. | **Excellent** I was actively and intently listening to my classmates. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Comments:** | | | |

*Participation – Speaking*
*Goal – I can make thoughtful and relevant statements during the seminar. My statements are related to the "text" and the question being asked.*

| **Unacceptable** I did not make any statements during seminar. | **Needs Improvement** I made very few, or off topic statements during seminar. | **Acceptable** I made thoughtful and relevant statements during the seminar. | **Excellent** I made many thoughtful and relevant statements during the seminar and invited other students to participate in the seminar. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Comments:** | | | |

What were the pros and cons of being in a smaller group for seminar?

## Appendix F – *We Are The World* Annotation Examples

| When I listened I heard... | I think that this means... | The message is... |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

| When I listened I heard... | I think that this means... | The message is... |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

| When I listened I heard... | I think that this means... | The message is... |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

| When I listened I heard... | I think that this means... | The message is... |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

## Appendix G – *We Are The World* Reflection

Name _____ Date _____ Folder # _____

*Preparation*
*Goal – I can make many thoughtful and insightful annotations to prepare for seminar. My annotations are useful to me during our Socratic Seminar.*

| **Unacceptable** I did not make any annotation. | **Needs Improvement** I made very few annotations. | **Acceptable** I made a variety of thoughtful annotations. | **Excellent** I made many thoughtful and insightful annotations. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Comments:** | | | |

*Participation – Listening*
*Goal – I can actively and intently listen to the discussion while my classmates are speaking. I am not thinking about what I am going to say next, but listening to the meaning behind what my classmates are saying.*

| **Unacceptable** I was visibly not listening during the seminar. | **Needs Improvement** I was listening to my classmate's some of the time. | **Acceptable** I was almost always listening to my classmates. | **Excellent** I was actively and intently listening to my classmates. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Comments:** | | | |

*Participation – Speaking*
*Goal – I can make thoughtful and relevant statements during the seminar. My statements are related to the "text" and the question being asked.*

| **Unacceptable** I did not make any statements during seminar. | **Needs Improvement** I made very few, or off topic statements during seminar. | **Acceptable** I made thoughtful and relevant statements during the seminar. | **Excellent** I made many thoughtful and relevant statements during the seminar and invited other students to participate in the seminar. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Comments:** | | | |

What were the pros and cons of being in the inner circle?

## Appendix H – Minnesota State Music Standards

Music Grades 6-8 2008 Revised Standards

**Strand I: Artistic Foundations**

Standard 1: Demonstrate knowledge of the foundations of the arts area.
6.1.1.3.1 Analyze the elements of music including melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, tone color, texture, form and their related concepts.
6.1.1.3.2 Analyze how the elements of music and related concepts such as articulation and major/minor and fugue are used in the performance, creation or response to music.
6.1.1.3.3 Describe the characteristics of a variety of genres and musical styles, such as electronic, jazz, opera and gamelan.

Standard 2: Demonstrate knowledge and use of the technical skills of the art form, integrating technology when applicable.
6.1.2.3.1 Read and notate music using the standard notation system such as dotted rhythms, clefs, mixed meters and multipart scores, with or without the use of notation software.
6.1.2.3.2 Sing alone and in a group (two- and three-part harmony) or play an instrument alone and in a group using music expression such as phrasing, dynamic contrast, technique, balance, and accurate articulation.

Standard 3: Demonstrate understanding of the personal, social, cultural and historical contexts that influence the arts areas.
6.1.3.3.1 Compare and contrast connections among works in music, their purposes and their personal, cultural and historical contexts, including the contributions of Minnesota American Indian tribes and communities.
6.1.3.3.2 Analyze the meanings and functions of music.

**Strand II: Artistic Process: Create or Make**

Standard 1: Create or make in a variety of contexts in the arts area using the artistic foundations.
6.2.1.3.1 Improvise, compose or arrange a new musical composition using available technology to preserve the creation.
6.2.1.3.2 Revise a musical composition, improvisation or arrangement based on the feedback of others, self-reflection and artistic intent.
6.2.1.3.3 Develop an artistic statement, including how audience and occasion influence creative choices.

**Strand III: Artistic Process: Perform or Present**

Standard 1: Perform or present in a variety of contexts in the arts area using the artistic foundations.
6.3.1.3.1 Rehearse and perform music from a variety of contexts and styles alone or within small or large groups.
6.3.1.3.2 Revise performance based on the feedback of others, self-reflection and artistic intent.

6.3.1.3.3 Develop an artistic intent, including how audience and occasion impact performance choices.

**Strand IV: Artistic Process: Respond or Critique**
Standard 1: Respond to or critique a variety of creations or performances using the artistic foundations.
6.4.1.3.1 Analyze and interpret a variety of musical works and performances using established criteria.