



The Life and Music of Dmitri Shostakovich

**A Curriculum Unit for
Middle School Students**

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Teacher Notes

LESSON GOALS

The activities in this lesson are intended to help your students understand the life and music of Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich. Students will gain an appreciation for music as both a controversial form of human expression and as a response to pressing social issues. In the process, students will learn to listen to music carefully and critically. By studying Shostakovich in this way students will 1) understand the ways in which various forms of artistic expression respond to social concerns; 2) learn about Soviet history and geography; 3) understand how life during the Soviet period posed complications for artistic expression; 4) work cooperatively to learn more about Shostakovich through game-based Internet-research; and 5) listen to a musical selection by Shostakovich, identifying the messages and emotions he tries to convey.

ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

- *How Does Music Make Me Feel?* By listening to *String Quartet No. 8*, the listening component of the lesson, and completing the *Active Listening Guide*, students will develop a deeper appreciation for music as an expression of personal emotions and reflection of historical times.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- The *Warm-up Activity* will give students the opportunity to reflect on the connection between culture and important social issues, as well as how artists use artistic forms, such as music, to convey their thoughts and opinions.
- With the *Introduction to Soviet History (1917-1953)* and the *Biography of Dmitri Shostakovich*, students will learn more about the historical context in which Shostakovich composed his music.
- *Human Bingo* will provide students with a background of Shostakovich in a fun and interactive way through small group work and Internet use.

LESSON TITLE Dmitri Shostakovich

GRADE LEVEL Middle school

RATIONALE

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce students to the life and music of Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich. Students will gain an appreciation for music as both a potentially controversial artistic genre and as a response to pressing social issues. In the process, students will learn to listen to music carefully and critically.

MATERIALS

Paper

Pens

Internet Access

A copy of *String Quartet No. 8* (optional)

Worksheets and background information in this lesson:

- *Warm-up Activity*
- *An Introduction to Soviet History (1917-1953)*
- *Map of Russia and Former Soviet Republics*
- *Biography of Dmitri Shostakovich*
- *Human Bingo*
- *Human Bingo Teacher's Guide*
- *Background Information String Quartet No. 8*
- *String Quartet No. 8 Active Listening Guide*

LESSON DURATION: 2 hours, 45 minutes

Activity 1: 45 minutes

Activity 2: 60 minutes

Activity 3: 60 minutes

OBJECTIVES

This lesson is aligned with TEKS for Culture and History (6th Grade):

Students will:

- Culture: Explain the relationships that exist between societies and their architecture, art, music and literature (621: 18A)
- Culture: Describe ways in which societal issues influence creative expressions (622: 18C)
- Culture: Identify examples of art, music, and literature that have transcended the boundaries of societies and convey universal themes (623)
- History (115): The student understands the accomplishments of notable individuals from different periods of history.
- History (116): The student understands how historical figures exhibit individualism and inventiveness and reform.

ACTIVITY 1—Warm- up (45 minutes)

How do aspects of culture address important social issues?

1. Individually, students will brainstorm how they believe social issues (e.g., racism, homophobia, poverty, sexism, etc.) impact culture (e.g., art, music, film, literature, poetry, etc.). Encourage students to think widely, reaching into history and modern times. Some examples may include messages in hip-hop music about racism, public service announcements about teenage smoking, etc.
2. Reconvene as a large group and have students share their answers with the class.
3. Explain to students that they will now learn a bit about a particular historical period that influenced the music of a renowned Russian composer of the Soviet times, Dmitri Shostakovich. Read aloud *An Introduction to Soviet History (1917-1953)* and *Biography of Dmitri Shostakovich*. Use the *Map of Russia and Former Soviet Republics* for geographical context.

Warm-Up Activity

Types of artistic expression	Social issue(s) it addresses	How it is achieved
Example: Hip Hop Music	Racism, poverty	Lyrics, emotion (anger, aggression, etc.)

An Introduction to Soviet History (1917-1953)



The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union) was established in December 1922 by leaders of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) on territory generally corresponding to that of the old Russian Empire. A popular uprising in Petrograd overthrew the imperial government in 1917, leading to the formation of the Provisional Government, which intended to establish democracy in Russia. At the

same time, to ensure the rights of the working class, workers' councils (soviets) sprang up across the country. The Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir I. Lenin, agitated for socialist revolution in the soviets and on the streets, and they seized power of the Provisional Government in November 1917. Only after the ensuing Civil War (1918-21) was the new communist government secure.

From its first years, the government in the Soviet Union was based on the one-party rule of the Communists, as the Bolsheviks called themselves beginning in March 1918. After unsuccessfully attempting to centralize the economy during the Civil War, the Soviet government permitted some private enterprise to coexist with nationalized industry in the 1920s. Debate over the future of the economy provided the background for Soviet leaders to contend for power in the years after Lenin's death in 1924. By gradually consolidating influence and isolating his rivals within the party, Joseph V. Stalin became the sole leader of the Soviet Union by the end of the 1920s.



Photo source: Probert Encyclopaedia
<http://www.probertencyclopaedia.com>

In 1928 Stalin introduced the first Five Year Plan for building a socialist economy. In industry, the state assumed control over all existing enterprises and undertook an intensive program of industrialization; in agriculture, the state

appropriated the peasants' land to establish collective farms; in the arts, government-imposed sanctions that restricted artistic freedom. These sweeping economic innovations produced widespread misery, and millions of peasants perished during forced collectivization. Social upheaval continued in the mid-1930s when Stalin began a purge of the party; out of this purge grew a campaign of terror that led to the execution or imprisonment of untold millions of people from all walks of life. Despite this turmoil, the Soviet Union developed a powerful industrial economy in the years before World War II.

Stalin tried to avert war with Germany by concluding the Nazi Soviet Non-aggression Pact with Adolf Hitler in 1939, but in 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The Red Army stopped the Nazi offensive at the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943 and then overran much of Eastern Europe before Germany surrendered in 1945. Although severely ravaged by the war, the Soviet Union emerged from the conflict as one of the world's great powers.

During the immediate postwar period, the Soviet Union first rebuilt and then expanded its economy. The Soviet Union consolidated its control over post-war Eastern Europe, supplied aid toward the victory of the Communists in China, and sought to expand its influence elsewhere in the world. The active Soviet foreign policy helped bring about the Cold War, which turned Britain and the United States into its enemies. Within the Soviet Union, repressive measures continued in force; Stalin apparently was about to launch a new purge when he died in 1953.

Text adapted from:
The Library of Congress Country Studies
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/sutoc.html>



USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) Flag

Flag Adopted 1914
Abandoned 1991

This flag is the former flag of the now defunct Soviet Union. The red color was for communism. The red background was emulated around the world by most communist countries.

The hammer was the symbol of the proletariat and the sickle represented the peasants. The gold star represented unity and contained five points (one for each class in communist society – workers, peasants, intellectuals, youths and soldiers).

When adopted in 1914, the communists banned all other flags of the member republics of the USSR. When abandoned, most of these independent republic flags were restored.

Map of Russia and Former Soviet Republics



Source: Perry-Casteneda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin
<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/commonwealth.jpg>

Biography of Dmitri Shostakovich



Photo source: Wikipedia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dmitri_Shostakovich

Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich was born in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1906. A musical prodigy of the mid-20th century, Shostakovich studied piano at the Petrograd Conservatory from 1919-1925. He earned early international acclaim with his graduation piece, Symphony No. 1.

Like many Soviet composers of his time, Shostakovich had to write under strict, government-imposed standards of Soviet art. During this

period, two government ideologies with regard to art prevailed: 1) art had to advance the political

ideology of the state through education and/or enlightenment; and 2) art could not be seen as a potential challenge to party authority or political ideology. In sum, art that served the dominant political ideology was seen as good, whereas art that challenged it was suppressed. Shostakovich's first two operas, *The Nose* (1930) and *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1934), based on pre-Soviet literature, received popular and critical acclaim, although they were condemned by publications from the Communist Party. After this condemnation Shostakovich devoted himself primarily to symphonies, concertos and quartets. His Symphony No. 5 (1937) and No. 6 (1939) were well received by both the Communist Party and the public.

On the outbreak of war between Russia and Germany in 1941, Shostakovich and his family were evacuated to Kuybishev (now Samara). In 1943 they settled in Moscow where Shostakovich taught music composition at the Conservatory. When he was condemned again in 1948 for formalism, most of Shostakovich's works were banned. Shostakovich was forced publicly to repent, and his family had privileges withdrawn. As a result, he spent the next five years devoting himself to film music to pay the rent and official works aimed at securing official rehabilitation. The restrictions on Shostakovich's music and living arrangements were eased in 1949, in order to secure his participation in a delegation of Soviet notables to visit the U.S. The rigid controls over artistic expression eased with the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953. In 1960 Shostakovich joined the Communist Party. The decision has been interpreted in various ways as either a mark of commitment, an act of cowardice, or as having been forced.

----- **Dmitri Shostakovich** -----

Later in life, Shostakovich suffered from chronic health illnesses, including a debilitating condition affecting his right hand, forcing him to give up playing the piano. In 1965 Shostakovich was diagnosed with polio; he died of lung cancer in 1975. Nonetheless, Shostakovich's legacy remains. Throughout his lifetime, he received many awards including the University of Oxford's Royal Philharmonic Society Gold Medal and the Supreme Soviet honor, the Order of Lenin. Shostakovich's works include two operas, 15 symphonies, two violin concertos, two cello concertos, two piano concertos, ballet music, songs and scores for motion pictures.

Activity 2—Human Bingo: Dmitri Shostakovich (60 minutes)

1. In groups of three or four, students will use the Internet to learn more about the life and work of Dmitri Shostakovich. Using the *Human Bingo* worksheet, the first team to answer a row of questions vertically, horizontally, or diagonally, wins. A second victory goes to the team that can answer the entire sheet. Prizes for the winning teams are optional.
2. A reporter from each group should then share with the class what they found most impressive in their discoveries about Shostakovich. These activities will lay the foundation for a better appreciation of his music.

Suggested websites for students:

Wikipedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shostakovich>

BBC Online, Artist Profiles

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/profiles/shostakovich.shtml>

Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts: About the Artist

http://www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index.cfm?fuseaction=showIndividual&entity_id=3497&source_type=C

Small Group Human Bingo

What country is Shostakovich from?	To what religious group did Shostakovich belong?	What instrument did Shostakovich play?	What was Shostakovich's first major musical achievement?	What was the theme of Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony?
What disease forced Shostakovich to give up piano?	What was the title of Shostakovich's second symphony?	What was the name of the Russian film for which Shostakovich produced an extensive composition?	What was the name of Shostakovich's second wife?	What was the name of the political party that Shostakovich joined in 1960?
What was Shostakovich's first job?	How many symphonies did Shostakovich write?	What was the name of Shostakovich's 1934 opera?	What was the name of the university that Shostakovich attended?	What was the name of Shostakovich's daughter?
To where did Shostakovich evacuate on the outbreak of war between Germany and Russia in 1941?	What was the name of Shostakovich's son?	What was the theme of <i>The Gadfly</i> ?	From what disease did Shostakovich die?	Who wrote the story upon which Shostakovich's satirical opera, <i>The Nose</i> , was based?
What was one of Shostakovich's pastimes?	In what year was Shostakovich born?	What dictator ruled Russia during the time of Shostakovich's musical career?	In what city was Shostakovich born?	What did Shostakovich's son grow up to be?

Small Group Human Bingo (Teacher's Guide)

<p>What country is Shostakovich from? <i>Russia</i></p>	<p>To what religious group did Shostakovich belong? <i>Judaism</i></p>	<p>What instrument did Shostakovich play? <i>Piano</i></p>	<p>What was Shostakovich's first major musical achievement? <i>First Symphony</i></p>	<p>What was the theme of Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony? <i>Anti-Semitism</i></p>
<p>What disease forced Shostakovich to give up piano? <i>Polio</i></p>	<p>What was the title of Shostakovich's second symphony? <i>To October</i></p>	<p>What was the name of the Russian film for which Shostakovich produced an extensive composition? <i>The Gadfly (Russian: Ovod)</i></p>	<p>What was the name of Shostakovich's second wife? <i>Margarita Kainova</i></p>	<p>What was the name of the political party that Shostakovich joined in 1960? <i>The Communist Party</i></p>
<p>What was Shostakovich's first job? <i>Playing the piano to accompany silent movies</i></p>	<p>How many symphonies did Shostakovich write? <i>15</i></p>	<p>What was the name of Shostakovich's 1934 opera? <i>Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District</i></p>	<p>What was the name of the university that Shostakovich attended? <i>Petrograd Conservatory of Music</i></p>	<p>What was the name of Shostakovich's daughter? <i>Galina</i></p>
<p>To where did Shostakovich evacuate on the outbreak of war between Germany and Russia in 1941? <i>Samara</i></p>	<p>What was the name of Shostakovich's son? <i>Maxim</i></p>	<p>What was the theme of The Gadfly? <i>Anti-religion and revolution</i></p>	<p>From what disease did Shostakovich die? <i>Lung cancer</i></p>	<p>Who wrote the story upon which Shostakovich's satirical opera, <i>The Nose</i>, was based? <i>Gogol</i></p>
<p>What was one of Shostakovich's pastimes? <i>Card games</i></p>	<p>In what year was Shostakovich born? <i>1905</i></p>	<p>What dictator ruled Russia during the time of Shostakovich's musical career? <i>Stalin</i></p>	<p>In what city was Shostakovich born? <i>St. Petersburg</i></p>	<p>What did Shostakovich's son grow up to be? <i>A composer and pianist</i></p>

**ACTIVITY 3—How does music make me feel? Listening to String Quartet No. 8
(60 minutes)**

1. With their background knowledge of Shostakovich, students will now listen carefully and critically to his music. Explain to students that they will now be presented with one of Shostakovich's works, *String Quartet No. 8*. Select a student to read *Background Information String Quartet No. 8* aloud.
2. Listen to String Quartet No. 8
You can either present the entire CD version, or use a narrated version containing selections from the Quartet available from the BBC¹:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/discoveringmusic/pip/zd63j/>
3. Instruct students to pay close attention to items such as tempo, orchestration, harmony, rhythm and melody. On a piece of paper, have students record their emotions following different segments of the composition. For example, when the music is heavy and somber, what might Shostakovich be trying to say? Throughout this section of the lesson, students should use the *Active Listening Guide* to record questions that they may have about particular segments of the music or elements of Soviet or European History. They can be addressed later in the lesson.

¹ If this link should become unavailable, you can find it by using an Internet search engine of your choosing and typing the following key words into the subject line:
“Shostakovich String Quartet No.8 BBC listen”

Background Information String Quartet No. 8

The String Quartet No. 8 by Dmitri Shostakovich was written during three days (July 12–14) in 1960. According to the score, Shostakovich dedicated the quartet "to the victims of fascism and war." The piece is about anger towards inhumanity against the Jews, fascism and war, and confirming a solidarity with the Jewish victims.

The quartet, extremely compact and focused, is in five interconnected movements and lasts twenty minutes:

1. *Largo*
2. *Allegro molto*
3. *Allegretto*
4. *Largo*
5. *Largo*

The first movement opens with the DSCH motif which was Shostakovich's musical signature. It is in the key of C minor.

The work is filled with quotes of other pieces by Shostakovich: the first movement quotes his Symphony No. 1 and Symphony No. 5; the second movement uses a Jewish theme first used by Shostakovich in his Piano Trio No. 2; the third movement quotes the Cello Concerto No. 1; and the fourth movement quotes the 19th century revolutionary song "Tormented by Grievous Bondage" and Shostakovich's opera, Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District.

Source:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/String_Quartet_No._8_%28Shostakovich%29

String Quarter No. 8 Active Listening Guide

How the music makes me feel:	What I think Shostakovich is trying to convey:	Questions I have:

CLOSURE

1. Have students share some of the questions that came to mind as they were listening to different parts of *String Quartet No. 8*. Have a large group discussion about the issues raised.

EXTENSION

1. Have students compare and contrast Shostakovich's music with that of another musical composer or artist. How does the expression of current social issues differ by types of musical techniques and/or style?
2. Have students imagine what it would be like to live in a time and/or a place where there was no freedom of expression. What would be their major concerns? What would they do?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources on Shostakovich are available for loan from the Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies at University of Texas at Austin <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/creees/>

- Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8 in C minor (audio CD)
- Shostakovich – Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk (opera DVD)
- Sonata for Viola (documentary film DVD)
- Shostakovich Against Stalin: The War Symphonies (documentary DVD)
- *Mitya: An Illustrated Biography Of The Russian Composer Dmitri Shostakovich* (children's book)
- *Shostakovich* [Paperback] by Wilson, Elizabeth (biography)

Online Resources

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dmitri_Shostakovich

BBC Music, Performer Biographies: http://www.bbc.co.uk/cgi-perl/music/muze/index.pl?site=music&action=biography&artist_id=833647

Russian History (recommended for historical context):

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union

Library of Congress Country Studies: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/sutoc.html>

Listening

BBC Radio 3, Discovering Music

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/discoveringmusic/audioarchive.shtml>

Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

http://www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index.cfm?fuseaction=showIndividual&entity_id=3497&source_type=C#

BBC Music, Artist Profiles

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/profiles/shostakovich.shtml>

Reading

- Fay, Laurel (1999). *Shostakovich: A Life*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 0195134389.
- Ho, Allen and Feofanov, Dmitry (1998). *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. Toccata Press. ISBN 0907689566.