Explore the idea of “musical excellence” with your students.

It’s not as easy as you may think. Aesthetic judgment is a difficult concept to both teach and understand. Yet, it is critical to developing both our own self-awareness, as well as an informed and invested understanding of our world – in the arts and beyond.

State content standards across the country reflect the need to allow students to develop their aesthetic judgment skills. Students need to be able to both analyze AND evaluate music. They also need to be able to build the vocabulary and communication skills needed to effectively articulate their thoughts.

Below are the representative standards and benchmarks for K-12 music instruction in the state of Ohio:

**Analyzing and Responding**

- Students listen to a varied repertoire of music and respond by analyzing and describing music using correct terminology.
- Students evaluate the creating and performing of music by using appropriate criteria.

**Valuing Music/Aesthetic Reflection**

- Students demonstrate an understanding of reasons why people value music and a respect for diverse opinions regarding music preferences.
- Students articulate the significance of music in their lives.

**Voice Your Choice** gives teachers a forum in which to engage their students in a meaningful exploration of aesthetic judgment as they learn to evaluate the history and artistry of rock and roll.

So where do you begin?

First, allow your students to think critically about the value of rock and popular music. What does musical excellence mean to them? What does musical excellence mean to musicians, scholars, and critics? How can music be evaluated? Can this evaluation be objective? Why or why not? How can musical excellence be explained? Have your students begin to articulate and justify their own musical preferences. Ask students to also evaluate and defend music they don’t “like.”

**Research rock and pop music history**

Once your students have considered these issues, they should begin to dig into the history of rock and popular music. Who are the men and women who have made rock and roll history? What have they contributed to the art form? How would you describe their music? How would you describe their musical skill and artistry?
Who have they influenced? Who were their influences? How do music critics/music historians view their legacy?

Be sure to allow students to research and explore without the burden of creating their list of potential inductees – this comes AFTER they’ve done their homework. Teachers can direct student research as appropriate and according to their own comfort level with the material, but students should explore objectively and as thoroughly as possible. Let them dig deep and see what they find (and hear).

**Make informed choices**

Only when your students have explored the history and music of the rock era should you ask them to create their own inductee class*. They can follow the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame’s [Induction Process](#) as a model, or establish their own criteria and/or categories. Students, for example, may choose to create an inductee class for the year 2037, when today’s bands and artists would potentially be eligible. Students may decide to develop their own model for a rock or pop Hall of Fame – perhaps dedicated to female musicians only, or the best guitar players, or the musicians who have had the biggest social impact. Using the given established criteria, ask students to make critically informed judgments about who (or who not) to induct. Their research should guide their choices.

**Explain those choices**

Students need to then be able to communicate their decisions as well as their decision-making process. Why do these artists deserve to be inducted? How can their legacy be communicated effectively? Students need to convince others of their musical excellence given their established criteria, persuading those who may have no prior knowledge of the given artists or their music, or even someone who is not a fan. Arguments should be thoughtful, informed, and should reflect an understanding of “musical excellence” – likes and dislikes shouldn’t be the foundation of anyone’s argument.

**Be Creative!**

Teachers and students are encouraged to approach the project with a creative and open mind. This exercise can be modified for any learner or adapted for any classroom, to help students meet a variety of instructional goals. For example, teachers of younger students can use the induction process as an opportunity to develop listening and/or reading skills or to introduce new vocabulary to their students. For older students, Voice Your Choice might lead to an investigation of recording technology and the science of sound, or could provide a framework for a math lesson on statistics. Students with special needs could work toward IEP goals. We want to see what your classroom can create!
Assessment

Using these ideas as a guide, teachers should construct the exact method of instruction that fits them, and their students, best. Teachers can develop their own tool(s) of assessment and should think creatively about what assessment tools or project ideas might be. Students can present their inductee classes and defend their choices in a number of formats. Students can hold a classroom debate, curate a mock museum exhibit, write a persuasive argument or create a persuasive PowerPoint presentation, create a news story (on video or in print) on the inductee class announcement, or produce a concert with musical performances of their chosen artists. This is a chance for students to develop their critical thinking and media literacy skills as 21st century learners. Keep reading to get ideas, discover resources, and learn how you can connect with the Rock Hall as you work!