

## CSTP Standard #1: Engaging and Supporting all Students in Learning

Element 1.5: Promoting critical thinking through inquiry, problem solving, and reflection.

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It has been said that in addition to the traditional core academic subjects, students will need to be proficient in learning and innovation skills (*critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration*) to be successful in the increasingly complex life and work environments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Music is a commonly overlooked and yet extremely influential medium of communication and intellectual expression in our global society today. As a universal language that speaks to all regardless of language, race and locale, it is a powerful vehicle for the dissemination of ideas, emotions and culture. Recognizing the powerful potential of music to inform, intellectually challenge and engage students, the California Department of Education has wisely included the study of musical perception and expression, aesthetic valuing, and creating historical and cultural connections through music as the main learning standards for music classes in California.<sup>2</sup> When properly taught to these state standards, music classes can far surpass the “rehearse to perform” model that some music teachers follow. Rather, music can challenge students to develop and use learning and communication skills that immediately connect to all other subject areas. It can challenge students to identify and explore diverse cultural ideas and customs in the music that they encounter. It can also challenge students to come up with creative interpretations and performance solutions to a number of musical tasks, building their ability to adapt and solve problems in all other areas in life.

One of the simplest ways that I promote critical thinking in my classes is through regular reflective journal writes. With each focused on a topic that we have discussed in class, these writing exercises require students to apply, analyze, evaluate and/or create new ideas based on their experience with the music we are studying. Sometimes this involves students reevaluating music from their own culture with which they are familiar to make new, higher-order conclusions. Other times, the prompts challenge students to step outside their own musical experience to explore new ideas and aesthetics of academic or multi-cultural significance. Through regular classroom instruction on aesthetics and expression, students expand the depth and breadth of their thinking on music in order to become proficient interpreters and expressers of this culturally-ubiquitous medium. In the meantime, they learn valuable higher-order cognitive skills that easily apply to other subject areas to improve their overall academic literacy.

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<sup>1</sup> “Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills,” <<http://www.p21.org/>>, accessed 25 Sep 2011.

<sup>2</sup> “Visual and Performing Arts: Music Content Standards,” <<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/muproficient.asp>>, accessed 25 Sep 2011.

Artifact: "Connections Between Music and Culture" Journal Write

### **Journal Write:**

Write two paragraphs on the topic we have been discussing: *the connections between music and culture*.

**Paragraph 1:** How can music express a certain culture? How can it affect or change a culture?

**Paragraph 2:** What kind of music do you listen to? How does the music you listen to express the cultures you are a part of, and your own personality?

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#### Music and Culture

Music can express a certain culture by its language, message and beat. Mexican music is very upbeat and energetic, that shows that Mexican culture is happy and likes to party. They also sing in Spanish about love and life in Mexico in the ranchera and corrido.

I like to listen to all types of music, rock, hip-hop, pop, traditional Mexican and some classical music. I think that the music on the radio shows that I identify with the culture of my friends, and the Mexican music shows my Mexican heritage. Sometimes I like music with a good beat that I can dance to, and other times I like soft slow music that is relaxing and has good lyrics.