

Understanding and Identifying Musical Expression

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Grade/Level: 9 - 12 High School Band

Length: 60 minutes

Central Focus: *Developing awareness of expressive musical elements (dynamics, phrasing, tone color, articulation) to understand and communicate artistic intent.*

Standards:

- Responding: MU.R.2.HS - *Analyze how elements of music and expressive qualities relate to meaning and intent in pieces or performances.*
- Connecting: MU.C.1.HS - *Relate personal experiences and ideas to the expressive intent of music.*

Learning Objectives:

- Students will identify expressive elements in the ensemble repertoire.
- Students will describe how expressive techniques convey musical meaning and artistic intent.

Assessments:

- Formative: *Listening worksheet analyzing expressive elements in a reference performance.*
- Summative: *Exit ticket reflection describing one expressive choice and its artistic effect.*
- Criteria for Success: *Student can accurately use vocabulary (dynamics, tone color, phrasing) to describe expressive outcomes.*

Materials/Resources

- Ensemble sheet music
- Recording of professional performance
- Expression worksheet
- SmartBoard/audio playback system
- Musical terminology reference chart

Academic Language

- Language Function: *Describe expressive elements in musical performance.*
- Key Vocabulary: *dynamics, articulation, phrasing, expression.*

Language Supports:

- Pre-teach key vocabulary with symbol and sound examples.
- Provide sentence frames for discussion (*"this section used _____ to express _____."*)
- Model responses with musical terminology.

Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks:

Introduction (10 min):

- Review the ensemble piece and discuss what makes a performance expressive.
- Introduce the term artistic intent and its relevance to performers.

Guided Listening (15 min):

- Play a professional recording. Students follow along, marking expressive choices on their Expression worksheet.
- Pause to identify where dynamics or phrasing communicate mood.

Group Discussion (10 min):

- Share findings using guided questions: "What did you notice about phrasing?" "How did the dynamic choices change the mood?"

Sectional Practice (15 min):

- Each section practices a short excerpt, experimenting with one expressive element (e.g., softer tone color in clarinets).
- Teacher circulates giving individualized feedback.

Closure (10 min):

- Ensemble performs the excerpt again.
- Students complete exit ticket reflection on how expression changed their interpretation.

Planned Supports for Varied Learners:

- Students with IEPs/504: Use visual cue cards for dynamics; provide simplified worksheet; peer mentor support.
- English Learners: Pre-teach vocabulary with icons; use bilingual glossary; model sentence stems.
- Gifted/Advanced: Assign leadership in sectional analysis or phrasing interpretation.
- Students with Attention Challenges: Break tasks into short timed segments; use visual focus cues.

Connections to Prior Learning and Theoretical Rationale:

- Students have prior experience reading dynamic markings and following conductor cues, which this lesson extends toward deeper expressive awareness.
- Bloom's taxonomy is applied as students move from recognizing expressive elements (knowledge) to describing and analyzing their function (analysis/understanding).

Example Expression Worksheet:

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Piece Title: _____

Performer/Recording: _____

Directions

As you listen to the performance, follow along with your music. Identify moments that demonstrate expressive musical choices (dynamics, tone color, articulation, phrasing). Use the table below to record your observations.

Time Stamp / Measure	Expressive Element Observed	Describe What You Heard	What Artistic Effect Did It Create?
Example: 0:45–1:10	Crescendo → sudden piano	Gradual volume increase, then sudden drop	Created a feeling of surprise and tension

Reflection Question:

In one or two sentences, explain how the ensemble used expressive techniques to communicate the character or emotion of the piece.

Example Exit Ticket:

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Directions

Answer the following in 2–3 sentences using musical vocabulary.

1. Choose **one expressive element** (dynamics, phrasing, tone color, or articulation) you focused on today.

2. Explain **how** this expressive element changed the musical meaning or emotion of the piece.

