Kelsey DeGuise

Derek Mueller

WRTG 596

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Introducing Genre Through Music

Introduction:

I wanted to introduce the concepts of genre and genre conventions through a medium they use frequently and might get excited about. I thought that music might be the easiest way to do this.

Timing:

We did this activity right after they turned in their Project One. The concept of genre had not even been mentioned, let alone defined. I hoped to come to a consensus about genre through this activity.

Course Outcome:

Genre Conventions

Lesson Plan:

I created a playlist for this lesson. I ordered it carefully, taking time to find an example of each basic musical genre in a pure sense. Then I found pieces of music that blended genres or might be considered difficult to define. The playlist was as follows

Wide Awake by Katy Perry - pop

Beethoven’s 5th Symphony - classical

Cleanin’ Out My Closet by Eminem - hip hop/rap

No Woman No Cry by Bob Marley - reggae

Down by Stone Temple Pilots - hard rock

One in a Million by Ne-Yo - R&B

In a Week by Hozier - alternative/folk

Discord by Eurobeat Brony - electronic

Burden in My Hand by Soundgarden - rock

House of the Rising Sun by Doc & Richard Watson - folk

No One Mourns The Wicked from Wicked - Broadway/Musical Theatre

The Future Soon by I Fight Dragons - chiptune

Make You Miss Me by Sam Hunt - country

Thks fr th mmrs by Fall Out Boy - 2000s alternative

Inside Out by Eve 6 - 90s alternative

Used To by MUTEMATH - alternative

Ride by twenty one pilots - alternative

Sabotage by Beastie Boys - 90s hiphop

Rockstar by Hannah Montana - pop

Billie Jean by David Cook - alternative

Bad Religion by Godsmack - rock

The Reynolds Pamphlet from Hamilton - Broadway/rap

Cowboy by Kid Rock - rock/rap

No Me Diga from In the Heights - Broadway/latin/salsa

It is important to note that I did not play each of these songs in their entirety, just clips. The first fourteen songs were used to set up a base line of genres in music. I played a clip and asked them to tell me what type they would classify it as. Then I would write that genre on the board. After these fourteen songs, it got a little more complicated. First I asked what they thought we were doing. After a little discussion, they came to an agreement that we were naming music genres. Next, we had four songs in a row that were classified as alternative, but didn’t sound alike. I asked them how this was possible. We discussed and I told them that all of these songs were released in different time periods and that genre constraints can change with time. Sabotage was a little upsetting to them. They really believed that it was a rock song. I told them that it was actually considered hip hop and that you can find elements of the Beastie Boys in a large part of the hip hop music released today. Rockstar by Hannah Montana sounds like pop music. They all easily identified it as such. I then asked what the title was and asked them why it wasn’t a rock song. This was a way to show them that it doesn’t matter if you call your writing piece a certain genre if it doesn’t fit those constraints. Billie Jean is a cover of Michael Jackson’s Billie Jean. It’s slow and dark. I played it and asked them to identify the song. It took them a second, but they realized that it was Billie Jean. I asked them what they would classify the original song as. They all said pop. Then I asked if the cover was pop. They all said no. I challenged this to make them think. I told them that the lyrics were the same, so why wasn’t it pop. They told me that all the other elements change the genre. This was exactly what I wanted! It was a great way to show them how genre isn’t solely dependent on the message the author is trying to convey, it’s how they present the information. Bad Religion starts and ends with a preacher giving a sermon, with no musical element. Saying things like “Praise God,” but it quickly transitions into a hard rock song, complete with screamo elements. I stopped the song before the music actually started and asked my class to tell me what kind of song they thought it would be. They all said gospel. I then played the actual song so they could hear what actually came next. I used this to show them that you can use elements of a completely different genre in order to strengthen the one you intend to use through the juxtaposition. The next three songs were to demonstrate that some may be on the cusp and not clearly fit into any one category.

Overall, my students really enjoyed this activity! They were excited to hear songs they knew and liked mixed into songs that they either didn’t know or were only vaguely familiar with. They really engaged with the music and even debated with me on their classification. This class period was easily when I saw them the most engaged. This introduction to the idea of genre seemed to give them solid ground to stand on. None of them defined genre as a ‘type of book’ throughout the course of the class. They portrayed a very clear understanding of genre, which allowed us to better cover the social aspect and creation part of genre. I think it is important to note that we covered the typical definition of genre. I asked them how many of them would have told me that genre was something like horror, fantasy, epic, comedy, etc. Most of them admitted to thinking that was what genre was. I told them that this was a different meaning of genre, and not the one we would be using. Addressing this definition and presenting it as a separate word really seemed to help them grasp the ‘genre’ we were using in class.

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