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THE RECITAL LIBERATED: WHERE ART ENDS AND LIFE BEGINS

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ABSTRACT

The Recital Liberated was a series of three artistic events formatted as classes, or workshop-like sessions, in which attendees and I collectively examined an aspect of the human spirit as it manifested in a number of artworks of my choosing, across various mediums and genres. Unlike conventional recitals, this event did not consist of me imposing a selection of art upon a silent and captive audience. Rather, I sought to engage those in attendance in an active exploration of the very meaning of art, and the way in which each of our individual lives and experiences could inform infinite unique interpretations of a singular artwork. This concept began as a reaction against the traditional Western Classical “art-music” recital format, but has since become a complete departure from it. I replaced formulaic with organic, elitism with individualism, “concert black” with a t-shirt and jeans. And by returning to the core of what I believe art to be—communication, a true dialogue among equals, rather than a lecture from “artist” to “audience”—I created an event that can help us remember that art and its creation are not merely extracurricular pastimes, but are indeed truly practical endeavors. This document will detail The Recital Liberated through its conception, development, and realization; summarize attendee feedback to the three sessions as a whole; explain applications of this concept to education in a secondary general music setting; include materials I created and used for each session (such as programs, posters, worksheets, and lesson plans); as well as contain a partial video recording of one of the sessions.
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Chapter 1
Conception and Overview

Over the summer of 2014, after my sophomore year of college and having just been formally accepted into the Music Education program here at Penn State, I started thinking a lot about what art meant to me. Why was I doing this? Why did any of it matter? What does “art” mean anyway? Why is music important? I began to have all these ideas about how I personally defined art, what I counted as art, who could be called “artists,” and what the human purpose of participating in art was. I consider that period of time in my life to be my own sort of artistic awakening—the time I truly started to form my own artistic philosophy, and think for myself as an artist. So as a natural result, I began questioning the existing artistic ideals I encountered on a day-to-day basis as a student of a classical art form at a major educational institution.

I wondered why no one ever seemed to introduce the pieces they were playing on their recitals. I always figured there should be a reason for a person to present a piece of music to the public, and I couldn’t imagine not wanting to elaborate on the purpose of a performance, if I were to give one. These ruminations spurred me to think in a more concrete way about the senior recital I would someday give. As I crossed the threshold from recital consumer to budding recital creator, I naturally started analyzing all the recitals and concerts I went to. And while there were a handful of events I attended each year that I could add to the list of greatest performances I had ever experienced, a much larger number were simply not that memorable. So many of the junior and senior solo recitals I had attended were already starting to run together, and I desperately did
not want my very last efforts as a member of this university to get lost in the crowd: I wanted to find out what made an event more than just “concert credit.”

Looking back on two years of sitting through the same old “play four pieces, say your ‘thank you’s and be done” recital formula, I discovered that the most uninspiring of recitals had three things in common: a stuffy atmosphere, a distant performer, and a sheer lack of lasting purpose. Something about the experience of watching a fancily-dressed individual high up on a far-away stage play unexplained music in an uninviting dark room where no one can talk or get up or even cough or move at all, for seemingly no other reason than because the event as a whole is in some way part of both the performer’s and audience members’ degree requirements, made me feel disillusioned. So I began to dedicate myself to constructing a senior recital that was the exact opposite of all of those things: informal, personal, meaningful, and perhaps even fun.

But trying to realize my vision led me to even further question the artistic world around me. I wondered why so many of my peers and professors seemed to think classical music was not just great, but superior to everything else. Now, of course if one makes the choice to devote four or more years of study (or an entire career) to an art form, hopefully that person adores it. But the thought that all those who do not experience music the same way that classical music majors and professors do, are somehow inferior, left a bad taste in my mouth. After all, a huge part of my musical life has always revolved around popular music—which is often degraded as “lesser” by classical musicians; but if you asked me to name my favorite song, it’d be something from the radio. I could understand and accept that some people might not like popular music, but the idea that the music that had literally shaped fundamental aspects of my identity could be baselessly swept aside as somehow invalid awakened me to a culture of elitism that surrounded the classical music world—a culture which I no longer wanted any part of. And as I began to
distance myself from the doctrine of classical superiority, I became more aware of just how different I wanted my “senior recital” to be.

Once I started detailing those differences, I couldn’t stop. I wanted to tear down every recital convention I could think of: introducing my pieces and talking about their meaning instead of relying on program notes, keeping the house lights on instead of focusing them on me, replacing concert black with a T-shirt and jeans, swapping the stage and auditorium seats for an open floor where everyone is on the same level, allowing the audience to do more than just sit silently still with rapt unwavering attention, talking with them instead of to them—asking them questions to create discussion! By the time I had finished outlining the performance I wanted to give, I realized it wasn’t a performance at all—it was a class. I didn’t want to impose a selection of art upon a captive audience, I wanted to engage them in a discussion and exploration of the very meaning of art.

Ultimately, I wanted to give a presentation of art that was not confined to my own interpretation of it. In traditional recitals, the only artistic ideas that get addressed are those of the performer, with the individual interpretations of each audience member relegated to only their own thoughts. I wanted to free those thoughts. I wanted to liberate the idea of a solo recital from its own constricting design, and turn it into something communal. A recital, in its most basic form, to me, constitutes a sharing of art. Traditionally, though, it is only a one-way transfer from performer to audience, with the performer’s ideals elevated over the audience’s by design. But because I began to believe that artistry is something inherent in all people regardless of talent or experience, what I wanted was a mutual distribution of artistic thought among a group of equals.

What I have developed to accomplish all those desires is called “The Recital Liberated”—for at this point, it is no longer a recital. It can be thought of as shared artistic
experience and discussion, with me serving not as a performer, but as more of a moderator. It consisted of three artistic events formatted like a series of classes, or workshop-like sessions, in which attendees and I examined an aspect of the human spirit as it manifested in a number of artworks of my choosing, across various mediums and genres. Its goal was to liberate the ideas of “art” and “artistry” from being confined only to Western Classical traditions, so that the artistry inherent in all people could be recognized and validated in its many forms.

Each session was born of a central theme (“Idealism,” “Imagination,” and “Intuition,” respectively), contained a backbone of four different artworks, and was fleshed out by discussion of their meaning as related to the theme. I structured them very much like short lessons, as one of my hopes for this concept is to be able to adapt it for use in the general music classroom. Each session, on my side, had a lesson plan with discussion questions, transitionary elements, and even activities that required participation from those in attendance. Indeed, the success of the sessions was very much dependent on the response I got in the moment from the people at each event. Like any classroom setting, the exact flow and atmosphere of every session was also determined by the participation I received, and the direction that each point of the conversation took us.

The bottom line is that this was not about just me. If I had wanted to highlight only my own artistry, I would have put this on a stage, worn black, dimmed the lights, and expected silence while I alone performed. But that’s not what this was. I wanted this to be fun, I wanted this to be personal, I wanted this to be informal. This was not a “phones off, sit still, don’t talk, don’t get up or cough or clap in between movements” kind of event, because I was not the only artist there. My interpretations, experiences, and philosophies were not the only ones that mattered. I wanted the artistry of the audience to be a part of this, too. Their life, their ideas, and
their ways of explaining the world were all just as valid as mine. Regardless of talent, regardless of experience, no matter whether one’s favorite song is from an opera or the radio, no matter whether one would rather write poetry or fanfiction—every single person is an artist. All of it is legitimate, and all of it was valid at my events.

The art that I chose to share in these sessions was the art that unlocks my passion for life. But I am only one person; art affects more than just me. I wanted to know how art gives other people life, too! The Recital Liberated was merely a template through which I hoped that each of us could connect to the universal human artistry that flows through us all. Whether someone explains their world through ballet or basketball, whether their dreams are fueled by violin concertos or comic book superheroes, that common thread of artistry that runs through every human endeavor—that’s what I wanted to talk about. That’s what I wanted this to be. Just you and me, sitting together and discussing the world, out on the edge where art ends and life begins.
Chapter 2
Philosophical Foundations

The next two items that I have chosen to include in this document are really where this all started. The following are poems of mine that demonstrate in a more detailed way the underlying philosophy behind the Recital Liberated. In “Gold and Silver” I seek to help the reader understand the practical value that I place on art, as well as how I use it in my life. “Travelling” goes a step further and asks the questions: “What is art?,” “What is the purpose of art?,” “What counts as art?,” and “Who counts as artists?” Redefining art and what it means to be an artist was vital for me in both conceptualizing and justifying my ideas for the Recital Liberated. Both poems go beyond that, however, and seek to meet art where it becomes life.

The most basic underlying goal of all of this is to release the ideas of "art" and "artistry" from the cage of "Western Classical" traditions, so that an inherent and universal artistry—encompassing innumerable styles, forms, mediums, and genres—can be recognized as a basic human trait. I want everyone to feel as though they are entitled to enjoy and participate in whatever forms of art resonate with them. Regardless of skill, talent, or experience, all people are artists, and anything that is meaningful to even one person can be called “art.” Art must no longer be seen as some untouchable “high-brow” endeavor of the divine that seldom few can ever attempt. Art is just as much on the ground and in the dirt as it is in dreams and in the heavens. Art is raw. Art is common. It exists in everything and everyone. It is expression uninhibited by standards and structure. It is me; it is you. It is liberated.
Gold and Silver

money means nothing to me
it has no value.
it’s not that cool to look at
it doesn’t have any special personal significance:
bills and coins are not treasured memorabilia from my childhood.
Money is actually pretty boring,
and I don’t see why anyone would want it in exchange for anything.

of course,
all I’m really doing here,
is rudimentarily seeing through the “token”
in our token economy.
paper money isn’t supposed to be valuable on its own:
it’s a symbol that we trust.
but the problem comes when people begin to value
not the purpose of money,
but money for money’s sake—
blindly worshipping a hollow symbol stripped from meaning.

it’s just funny to think about sometimes.
I mean, completely out of context,
and separate from everything you already know,
if someone handed you a small green piece of paper
with some old guy’s face on it
would you really be willing to give them anything for it?

if you had never seen paper money before,
what about it would inspire you
to trade any service or physical possession you had for it?
I could understand why gold and silver were used as money;
at least they’re shiny and entrancing to look at.
even if you’ve never seen them before and don’t know what they are,
at least they catch your eye:
to a certain degree they just look valuable.
but when you take away its symbolism,
what characteristics does a five dollar bill have
that make it a suitable trade for an autobiography by Maya Angelou?

if you ever want to motivate me to do something,
know that—idealistiically, at least—
money alone is not much of an incentive for me.
sure, it’ll get me to do it,
but money doesn’t activate my passion.
the price of my enthusiasm
is getting to borrow your favorite band’s best album.

if you ever want to really compensate me for anything,
don't give me something that I can appreciate the entirety of in one look.
instead of a check,
write me a list of your favorite books
pay me in movies, CDs, or sheet music
in video games and Netflix subscriptions
or literally just in friendship;
honestly, just let me pet your dog!
if you want me to feel as though I’ve truly earned something,
give me an artwork I can read or watch or hear or play over and over for years
and still never completely understand the depths of.
one year, my high school English teacher and play director
let me keep the script to the play we were putting on that year:
“Our Town,” by Thornton Wilder.
if she ever feels, or has ever felt, indebted to me in any way,
it’s already covered by that script.
I wish I could give her the collected works of Shakespeare to read
and have it be the first time she ever read them.
for me, money can never embody what someone has done for me
and it can never represent how I feel about anyone.
— but a literary masterpiece certainly could.

I am more protective of the paper in that script than the paper in my wallet,
because “Our Town” means something to me
it brings back memories
it tells a beautiful story
its phrases shape my approach to living life and philosophy about appreciating it.
… all I do with money is give it to other people to get more books.
and I don’t mind hoarding art:
indeed, books are one of the few things that it is perfectly healthy to own hundreds of.
you can appreciate wise phrases and witty observations
again and again for as long as you live;
money is only in my life long enough for me to spend it on more art.

of course,
it is idealistic to think and dream
that we could just survive on art alone
I wish that money couldn’t stop us.
I recognize its symbolic value
in that it allows me to obtain music,
but the relationship ends there—
metal and paper fulfill a temporary and shallow purpose
I only use them; I don’t *live* with them.

I wish we could live in a world
where wealth in knowledge and worldview
meant more than paper and coins
do you see what I’m trying to say?

money itself as an independent physical object is worthless to me
it means nothing and has no value.
whereas literature, cinema, and music:
these are my gold and silver.
Travelling

What is art?

yes,
a painting
a novel
a symphony,
but also:
a building,
a cell phone,
life-saving surgery,
certainly must be works of art?
clinching that business deal is art
pitching a no-hitter is art
killing millions of people in the name of warped politics and twisted “ideals”
…could that also be art?

Art, as I see it,
is one person’s attempt
to explain the world around them.
to create a physical manifestation,
a tangible representation
of their life experience, beliefs, and ideals
in a way that may, or may not, allow other people to understand them.
above all,
it is our answers to the questions
of “what is life?
and death?”
some people’s explanations happen to validate or affirm the ways in which many people go through life already, while others present fresh new ways to live which resonate with just as wide an audience. these become the popular, revered, most widely accepted explanations: the “masterpieces” that everyone knows and loves.

some people’s explanations happen to invalidate or interfere with the ways in which people currently live, and while some may even be entirely new ways of living, they are met with indignation, revulsion, and cries of “evil!”: the infamous acts of tyranny that everyone knows and hates. and while they may not be morally conscionable, even they still serve the purpose of explaining the world of their creator, Just like the masterpieces do.

In such terms, might Adolph Hitler have been an artist just like Haydn?

for the purpose of explaining his ideas about sound and silence, Haydn’s art was successful. for the purpose of explaining his ideas about human inequality perhaps Hitler’s “art” was successful, too?…

you see, art is neither right nor wrong. because it is tied to each individual human being’s life experience—
each one of us exhibiting a varying degree of moral character—
art itself does not distinguish between good and evil.
art is the expression of everything
that anyone has ever believed, thought, and experienced,
and “everything” means every thing.

art is not always beautiful
it is repulsive as much as it is alluring,
it is vulgar as much as it is innocent,
it is evil as much as it is divine,
we think that it is supposed to be “good”
so we only recognize as Art that which is.
we only bestow the label upon that which meets a certain moral prerequisite,
because an evil immoral “art” is terrifying.

but art is the expression of ideas—any ideas
art is that which makes us feel any feeling,
that which has the innate capacity to provoke us
to move us in some way,
to elicit something, anything;
it may be joy, but also anger
it may be peace, but also violence.
art may be purity, but also wickedness,
and even if it just makes you bored,
it is still art.

art is how we take what no one can hear
or see
or taste
or touch
or even believe,
and we allow them the opportunity
to hear and see and taste and touch and believe it.
it is merely an inevitable consequence of life, then,
that these senses can be provoked both positively
and negatively

But it is not just about accepting
that what we call “art”
is no longer confined to the label of “good”
—in the sense of ethics and morality.
because the beauty of this definition
of art as explanation,
is that what we can now call “art”
is no longer confined to the label of “good”
in the sense of skill and talent, either.

I reject the idea that art is only for the “elite,”
that it is only for the “trained,”
only for the “learned,”
only for those who “know enough” to appreciate it.
Who are we to reserve art and its creation
only for those who we deem “worthy”—
those who we *give* ourselves the power to judge
*against the standards that WE create*—
AND only in the mediums predetermined by us
to be of appropriate depth and significance?

we wonder why no one supports “the arts,”
when we, the so-called artists, refuse to validate
the precise ways in which the rest of the world already experiences art!
maybe it *is* symphonies in our concert halls
or paintings in our museums,
or *perhaps* it’s a little less stuffy…

graffiti, comic books,
pop music, rock concerts,
fanfiction, social media—
they are the mediums in which the vast majority of the world
experiences that which we confine to auditoriums and art galleries.

—I’m not saying you’re obligated to enjoy any of it personally,
and I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with classical art,
but the people’s art deserves the same right to exist as the professional’s.

I believe that the continuum from Mozart to Michael Jackson
is not based on artistic “quality”:
I believe there is just as much value
in a pop song that makes you somewhat glad
as there is in a symphony that makes you overcome with joy.
each of those emotions has a place in our lives
there are times you *need* to feel *ecstatic*,
and then there are times
that you just need to feel a little bit better;
thus each of those pieces of music,
each of those artworks,
has its own unique and equally valuable place in our lives, as well.
it’s all the same emotion;
it’s all the same art!

we must relinquish our death-grip on the words “art” and “artist,”
and what they are “allowed” to describe.
the purpose of art is to be expressive:
who can justify limiting what it expresses?
because if art is explanation,
then to say that any one medium or genre
is of better quality or greater value than another
is to pretend that any of us knows more than anyone else
about what we’re really doing here
about what’s really going on in this life.

no one’s explanation is “better,”
each one is right,
relative to the experiences of the individual that created it.
each work of art primarily serves its creator
each of us takes in the world around us, and our own experiences
and we make something out of it
to try to define and explain it.
we relate our art first to ourselves
—and sometimes others find themselves able to relate to it as well,
and sometimes none of it ever gets beyond its creator
and that is OKAY!

art doesn’t have to mean everything to everyone
nor anything to anyone
it’s just each of us positing our best guess
about the greater forces shaping this life, this world, this universe
—or our knowledge of which amounts to a handful of sand on the beach in the end.

because,
in the end,
it’s not really about the art,
is it?
it’s never really been about
becoming a better musician
or a better writer
or a better cook, athlete, teacher, or scientist.
it has always been about becoming a better person,
increasing the quality of human life,
and trying to get some answers before we die.

we’re all stumbling in the cosmic darkness
of the question “why are we here?”
our various arts are the maps we create
of the roads that we forge on the way to an answer—
they are the signs and streetlamps we put up
to guide the way of those following after us

whichever art any of us individually chooses to be our guide,
keeping us going on this great journey,
is like the particular mode of transport we may select
to carry us across the Earth on any given day—
each type can take us different places.
some of us drive cars
some sail boats
some of us fly in planes
and some choose to walk
as we sing or write
or paint or dance
or perhaps just appreciate
the art produced by others.

each type also has an energy cost
and an effect on the environment.
some art only walks with its creator
for that is its purpose,
only to affect the life of one,
and it is no lesser art because of that.
some art is designed to appeal to the masses:
the public transportation that anyone can take
on their way to look for answers

and some art is used specifically as a force for change
to reshape the land as it tries to find a path through the universe
and the danger of this mode of transport
is that it is up to the driver to decide
whether the destination will come at the expense
of those who may stand in the way.

each method of travel
clears a different path
and allows us access to new destinations
and no one way of getting there
is any better than any other,
unless its effect on the environment is needlessly destructive
and its energy cost is human life

so let us no longer qualify people’s art
based on skill, talent, or experience
but based on whether or not it comes
at the expense of living beings.
if we allow Beethoven and Beyoncé
and some small town’s local cover band
to exist under the same umbrella term of “art”
we can free ourselves from the needless and petty chore
of restricting the art of the people
in order to focus on restricting the art of evil.
in the end,
as long as our endeavors
don’t require life to be taken
as fuel for the journey,
no matter whether we travel in million dollar machines
or cheap little contraptions that we built ourselves—
every option, every way, every explanation
and the different purposes they all serve,
the different places they all go,
are all equally meaningful
depending on our life experiences,
our beliefs, and ideals
what we value
and where we’re trying to go.

here, I recognize
that you have the power
to manage your own journey.
no matter what my predispositions
about music or writing might be,
it all means nothing
if you’d rather draw comics instead.

the world we discover while traveling
may not come with any predetermined significance,
but the beauty of it all
is that since it doesn’t have to mean something,
we could make it mean anything!
you are allowed to choose how you define what you see
and even if your explanation of your world
doesn’t make sense to anyone but yourself,
it’s just as valid a reality as mine.
your life is art,
and you, too, are an artist.

I have given the art that I enjoy,
the road that I choose to take,
a particular significance in my life,
based on my own purposes for it.
I have created art in my life
that represents what I have lived
how I’ve gotten here
what I know
and how I see the world.
I have defined my world in a way that makes sense to me,
but you too have that power
to give meaning to meaningless things
revel in your ability to validate your own passions!
I am not concerned with the reasons you paint or dance
it does not matter to me whether you walk or fly;
there are beautiful things to be discovered
wherever you go,
however you get there.
the important thing
is that we allow each other the opportunity to travel
whichever way best suits our dreams.
Chapter 3
Development

The realization of those ideals took place over about a full year, and it was a long time before I was satisfied with the way I had integrated them with the idea of a more personal and less formal “senior recital.” The following pages will detail the Recital Liberated in the five drafts and iterations it took on before arriving at the sixth and final form it has today. For each version of the Recital Liberated that I will detail below, I first give a brief explanation of the focus of each particular version, as well as what was added, removed, or revised from previous versions. Following that will be the working program that I had devised for each iteration of this “recital.”

Version 1

My first thought I ever had about this was that I just wanted a more personal less formal atmosphere to my senior recital, with no real alterations in the overarching structure. So the first aspect of the traditional recital that I altered was the format. Here I was focusing most on the style and general environment of the performance. I wanted to introduce my pieces instead of just walking out on stage, playing, and leaving. I wanted to say what the pieces meant to me, why I chose them, what they’re about. I didn’t want to wear a suit and tie—or even concert black at all. Essentially, I wanted to give a recital without following typical recital behavior, because I
found it stuffy and uninviting. I wanted a relaxed atmosphere where people could enjoy a classical performance without there being any imposing expectations of audience behavior.

With the informality aspect covered, I then turned to the actual selection of music to be performed as a means to make the whole experience more personal. I constructed a program of classical music that was important to me, but the main alteration I made here was that I expanded the scope beyond my primary instrument. Almost as long as I have played saxophone, I’ve also sung and played piano, so I wanted to include those performing areas, too. Additionally, moving beyond even music, I wanted to include something spoken; I wanted to read some of my own poetry, as well as a few excerpts from a self-defining play that I got the opportunity to be a part of in high school: “Our Town” by Thornton Wilder.

The working phrase I used at this point to sum up my ideas about the Recital Liberated was: my “artistic portfolio,” as it drew upon not only my primary instrument, but also my secondary performing areas; not just my musical background, but my literary background as well. Applying my desire for an informal performance atmosphere with this highly personalized program, I had created a solid foundation upon which the Recital Liberated grew and changed many times over the course of the next year. Those two main principles of informality and personalization remain as mainstays throughout each subsequent version—but the format, purpose, and basic structure, by the end of its development, have been altered so drastically that the first and final versions of the Recital Liberated are almost two entirely separate ideas.
This is the first working program that I ever devised for this endeavor. It includes music entirely from the classical tradition (with some music theatre), as well as one of my own poems and excerpts from the classic Pulitzer-Prize-winning masterpiece of American theatre, “Our Town,” by Thornton Wilder. Surprisingly, the only element of this program that made the final cut was the “Our Town” excerpts – and not any of the pieces of music! After each piece, I have in parentheses the way I intended to perform it (instrumentally, sung, or spoken). [Occasionally I have included, in brackets, either my own commentary looking back on these drafts now, or quoted excerpts of my original thought process then in conceptualizing this and subsequent programs: little phrases and bits of old ideas, gleaned from the many Microsoft Word documents in which I brainstormed.]

- Sonata for Oboe and Piano – Francis Poulenc (soprano saxophone)
- Sonate Pathetique, Mvt. 2 – Ludwig von Beethoven (piano)
- Rhapsodie pour Orchestre avec Saxophone – Claude Debussy (piano accompaniment)
- Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum – Claude Debussy (piano)
- Concertino da Camera – Jacques Ibert (alto saxophone, with full orchestra)

—Intermission— [“with food fun and conversation”]

- Excerpts from “Our Town” by Thornton Wilder (spoken)
- Nocturne in Eb major – Frédéric Chopin (piano)
- Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Wind Ensemble, Mvts. I, IV, and V – David Maslanka (piano accompaniment)
- The Fifth Sense (spoken – one of my own poems, which has since been revised and given a different title)
- “Vissi d’arte, vissi d’amore” from Tosca – Giacomo Puccini (alto saxophone)
• Selections from West Side Story for Saxophone Quartet – Leonard Bernstein (arr. James Boatman)
• “Maria” from West Side Story – Leonard Bernstein (to be sung as an encore)

[“My recital is about beautiful melodies, reconnecting with the expressiveness of tonal music”]

Version 2

Version two of this concept expanded upon the idea of customizing the recital program to be a more unique and nuanced expression of my own artistic background/preferences, and its focus was still heavily on me performing. It included more songs and poetry, and less saxophone overall. Some new elements were the inclusion of pop music as a legitimately-treated genre that I wished to perform—as much of my own musical history started with exposure to/an appreciation for pop music—as well as spoken excerpts of literature other than my own poetry. However, all together, this yielded an almost comically large volume of material that I intended to perform: if the previous version was an “artistic portfolio,” this was more like an “artistic autobiography”!

A key structural element which was conceptualized with this version, and which stayed true in some form through to the final version, was the idea of organizing my selection of artworks within a thematic framework. This was the first time I started thinking about sharing art in a way that walks people through how I use it in my own life. The thematic threads in this program were largely identity-based, divided into three parts: “What I Feel,” “Who I Am,” and “What I Stand For.” The first two parts were intended to show how I use music in my life (the first major art form I connect with) and the last was to show how I use writing in my life (the other major art form I connect with, and experience life through). At its core, this version was
about where my personal identity meets the ways in which I express myself—with the goal being that by helping people see how I personally use art to navigate my life, others may be able to do the same with the art that is important to them.

Program 2

Part one: What I Feel

[“The first way that I experience music in my life is that it helps me express both frustration and hope. Playing it gets out the raw emotion, and listening to it gives me sympathy, as well as hopeful ideas to cling to.”]

[“Music for when I’m sad”]
- Nocturne in Eb major – Frédéric Chopin (piano)
- “Vissi d’arte, vissi d’amore” from Tosca – Giacomo Puccini (alto saxophone)
- “Arms” by Christina Perri (sung)
- “Memory” from CATS – Andrew Lloyd Webber (sung)

[“Music that gives me hope”]
- Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum – Claude Debussy (piano)
- Rhapsodie pour Orchestre avec Saxophone – Claude Debussy (piano accompaniment)
- “Astonishing” from Little Women – Jason Howland and Mindi Dickstein (sung)

Intermission

Part two: Who I Am

[“The second way I experience music is as a reinforcement of my identity. In addition to listening to music that helps me express emotion, I listen to music that appeals to my experience, and underscores what I believe in.”]

- “Let it Go” from Frozen – Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez (sung)
- “Maria” from West Side Story – Leonard Bernstein (sung)
Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Wind Ensemble, Mvt. I – David Maslanka (piano accompaniment)

“Dancing Through Life” from Wicked – Stephen Schwartz (sung)

Part three: What I Stand For

[“The second art form I use to experience life is writing. I use writing to solidify my core ideas about life.”]

[The following are all poems of my own that I intended to read]

- Orchid Show
- The Living
- Gold and Silver
- In Writing
- Frustrations, Part 4: Life Was So Big
- Is It Just Me?
- [Here, I wanted to include some Bible readings that I found poignant, and that had been helpful to me at the time.]
- Earth-Music
- HD existence
- Afterthoughts
- The Beautiful Dark (in the Daunting Night)
- The Fifth Sense
- Excerpts from “Our Town” by Thornton Wilder (spoken)

And as an encore:

“The Circle of Life” from The Lion King – Elton John and Tim Rice (sung)
Version 3

Version three of the Recital Liberated was the last solo-performance-based version of this concept. This was perhaps the most mature version of when I still thought this project would be largely performance-based, as it featured me really reigning in the volume of pieces to be performed, and simplifying the organizational aspects. In this version, I began to think of perhaps spinning this “recital” as more of a cabaret or an open-mic night type of event. This idea encapsulated the informality that I desired very well, but still was founded on the same artistic integrity with which I had treated the previous versions.

I divided this program into a “pop half” and a “classical half,” the pop half being entirely made up of a set-list of popular songs I wanted to sing as if at a pop concert—my vocals backed by guitar, drums, and keyboard. The classical half paired a number of my own poems each with a piece of classical music or music theatre, alternating as such. Here I thought more deeply about the idea of explaining why I chose to share the pieces that I did, coming up with almost a script to detail the progression of artworks. And it was with that idea that this project began to move from being an artistic portfolio centered on my own experiences, to something much less focused on me. I no longer wanted this to be a strict performance, following the program to a ‘T.’ I decided here that I wanted there to be elements of discussion; I wanted to talk to my audience; I wanted to really hone in on making this a personal experience, by revealing what each artwork meant to me and how I use it in my life. Here, the seeds were planted for an idea that later exploded into growth and enveloped this entire project: the basic idea of wanting to actually set an explicit intention with this—wanting to demonstrate and make a larger unified point throughout the event, rather than just play music.
Program 3

[“Have conversations somehow? Talk to people. Bring up memories. Don’t just lecture. Don’t just read. But fashion it somehow so that I still have control over it, I don’t want it to get off track, I still want this to be a performance. Just not an elitist “art-music” conservatory style recital.”]

“Pop half” (all sung, with either me at the piano or other guest musicians on piano, guitar, drums, etc.)
- “Falling In Love At A Coffee Shop” by Landon Pigg
- “Arms” by Christina Perri
- “Words” by Christina Perri
- “I Won’t Give Up” by Jason Mraz
- “93 Million Miles” by Jason Mraz
- “Latch (Acoustic)” by Sam Smith
- “Tidal Wave” by Owl City

“Classical half”
(Pieces without composers listed are my own poetry, to be read)
- The Garden of Order
- Nocturne in Eb major – Frédéric Chopin (piano)
- The Fifth Sense
- Concerto en Mi bemol pour Saxophone Alto et Piano – Alexander Glazunov
- Earth-Music
- “Maria” from West Side Story – Leonard Bernstein (sung)
- Is It Just Me?
- “Astonishing” from Little Women – Jason Howland and Mindi Dickstein (sung)
  If All the Lights Go Out
This version was my breakthrough moment. This was when I kicked the doors down, figuring out how to break a lot of barriers that were keeping The Recital Liberated from being as informal, as personal, and as meaningful as I wanted it to be. Several innovations occurred during this period. First and foremost, I decided that for this to truly be a demonstration of how I experience art in my life, I needed to include on the program a manner of artistic experience that reflected the chief way that I do that—which is simply appreciation. Over the years I have begun to realize that performing art is not necessarily my passion. My primary relationship with art has always fundamentally been listening to or watching it—consuming it as opposed to performing it. So I knew that to make this project 100% personal, I needed to bring that experience into this “recital,” by not just performing my favorite songs, but having the audience actually listen to a recording there with me at the event.

This opened the door to a host of other innovations. What followed this newfound freedom in inclusion of modes of artistic experience most closely was a corresponding freedom in the genres of art that I could present—as well as a validation of my earlier choice to include more than just classical music on the program. Keeping with the diversity of genre that this project already exhibited—in pop music, classical music, and poetry—I also decided to also include a new audiovisual component, in the form of a scene from a movie, TV show, or even a YouTube video! With this, my idea transitioned concretely from being a show of my own artistic talents, to being more of a presentation of my favorite artworks (still with the idea of showing people how I use them).

The program itself however actually solidified when I, on my own time and separate from any thoughts on my thesis, decided what my top four favorite pop songs were. I then
associated each song with a word—“sorrow,” “love,” “life,” and “dreams”—because I enjoy defining things and giving things in my life personal meaning beyond whatever they are on their own. As they were my favorite songs, I considered including them in my thesis. And as I continued to think about those songs and the words I associated with them, I realized that those words could also easily describe some of the other pieces I wanted to include in this project. I discovered that I could use those words as my new thematic links to organize the program. And so, coupling this idea of thematic organization with my desire to include a wide array of genres of art, I had a major structural breakthrough. I got the idea to organize this version’s program in four “cycles” each comprised of one example of every genre I wanted to include and linked by one of my favorite song’s theme words. These cycles each began with one of my four favorite pop songs, and continued from there following the theme that each song brought up, exploring that theme in my own poetry, a classical piece of music, an audiovisual, and then culminating in a performance by me (now only either piano or a song—for the first time I did not intend to perform on saxophone at all for this project).

So now, with the focus finally shifted away from just my own solo performance, and away from the idea of a performance at all, I began to change my overall intentions for this project. I was now only truly performing a fraction of the duration of the event, the rest of it being made up of listening to recordings, reading poems, and watching scenes of audiovisual art. I started calling this an “event” rather than a “recital.” The main guiding principle of this version was getting people to see art as practical in order to increase the value placed on art. I wanted to show people that, in my life, art is not just extracurricular, but is indeed truly necessary—demonstrating that I don’t just engage with art in only the context of classical academia, I use it on a daily basis in my own personal life for specific reasons based on my emotional state, career
goals, and desire to continually educate myself. So now I was basing this project on an appeal to art forms that resonate with people’s own experiences, beyond just classical art, with my ultimate goal being to advocate for a way of life which validates us using whichever art form speaks to each of us individually as a personal means of navigating the world.

Program 4

Below is the outline I came up with for the format of each cycle, followed by their respective programs.

[“Restoring the practicality and relevance of art in the modern world by escaping traditional recital conventions, through shared artistic experience, discussion, and performance.

Each cycle made up of:

1.) A pop song
   • Solely to listen to and discuss choice lyrics

2.) A poem of mine
   • Encourage audience to think of something they’re experiencing right now related to the overarching theme (sorrow, love, life, dreams). Either have them define their emotion in one sentence, or give them time to write & then share. After brief discussion of whatever transpires, I’ll share mine.

3.) A “classical” piece of music
   • Again mostly just to listen to, but it is another major genre in my life. Possibility for some discussion, but here the momentum shifts towards being directed by me as opposed to the audience, as it largely was for the first half.

4.) A scene from a film or TV show, or a YouTube video
• Upgrading to a 3-dimensional art form, increasing the emotion felt by myself and the audience, this pushes the session towards the high point, providing the basis for my subsequent performance

5.) A performance by me
This provides the final release of emotion by finally expressing it, bringing the session to a close—also hopefully the most intense feeling and expression of that emotion.”

[“Part 1: Art I use as an escape from this life”]

Cycle 1 – Sorrow
• “Arms” by Christina Perri (recording from her album Lovestrong.)
• The timeless unity of life and strife (read)
• “Vissi d’arte, vissi d’amore” from Tosca – Giacomo Puccini (performance by Angela Gheorghiu on YouTube)
• The stampede scene from The Lion King (movie)
• Nocturne in Eb major – Frédéric Chopin (performed by me on piano)

Cycle 2 – Love
• “Falling In Love At A Coffee Shop” by Landon Pigg (recorded single)
• The child of cat and mouse with fervid eyes (read)
• “O Holy Night” – Adolphe Adam (performance by David Phelps on YouTube)
• “The Language of Love” – written and performed by Kim Ho (short film on YouTube)
• “Maria” from West Side Story – Leonard Bernstein (sung by me)

[“Part 2: Art that helps me appreciate this life”]

Cycle 3 – Life
• “Hot Air Balloon” by Owl City (recorded single)
• HD Existence (read)
• Fuzzy Bird Sonata, Mvt. 3 – Takashi Yoshimatsu (recorded by Nobuya Sugawa)
• An undetermined episode of the animated TV show Adventure Time – created by Pendleton Ward on Cartoon Network (DVD)
• Excerpts from “Our Town” by Thornton Wilder (spoken)

Cycle 4 – Dreams
• “Drops of Jupiter” by Train (recording from their album *Drops of Jupiter*)
• Is It Just Me? (read)
• “Astonishing” from Little Women – Jason Howland and Mindi Dickstein (performance by Sutton Foster from the Original Broadway Cast Recording)
• An undetermined monologue by the character Mohinder Suresh from the TV show Heroes – created by Tim Kring on NBC (DVD)
  “Morning Glow” from Pippin – Stephen Schwartz (sung by me)

Version 5

Plagued by the now once again vast amount of art I wanted to include on the program in version four, another breakthrough on streamlining the format yielded version five. I now decided to separate each cycle into its own self-contained session, instead of just doing one monster “recital” and being done with it, and I decided to space the four sessions up over the course of the semester. This was more of a cosmetic change than a radical philosophical revision, but it did alter the fundamental nature of what I was trying to do. Now, with these relatively short “hour or less” programs, and with the performance aspect completely de-emphasized, this is where more of an explicitly-defined educational focus started to creep in.

I began to see the artworks I included as not just expressions of my personal artistic journey, but also as the material for a lesson of sorts which would accomplish the goal of garnering the amount of audience participation I had originally wanted, but hadn’t known how to
get. I decided to ask my audience specific questions; I planned writing activities and created worksheets with discussion topics. This is the point where I realized that I was no longer even putting on a “recital” at all, given how dependent it had become on audience interaction. In scripting these sessions, it felt much more like I was planning to teach a lesson about how people can use art to serve a practical role in their lives, rather than explaining only my own world of art.

So now the aesthetic ideals of informality (dressing down, letting people sit anywhere and move around, keeping the lights on, me talking, them talking) became second nature to this event, because the setting became a classroom. No longer a recital, no longer even a personal artistic demonstration, now the focus shifted beyond me and my artistry to shine on those of my audience of “students,” and on convincing people that all forms of expression have a place in our lives. It was now about encouraging people to embrace art however they experience it—how to use it in practical ways in one’s life through example and discussion. Here my philosophical foundations finally met my personal artistic experiences and combined to harness both elements of my degree—music and education.

[“The Recital Liberated: Where Art Ends And Life Begins (An Active Demonstration of Artistic Values)

A series of instructional sessions designed to show how art can be of practical value in one’s life; through shared artistic experience, discussion, and performance.

In each session, I will take the audience through a journey of emotion based on the overarching themes: Sorrow, Love, Life, and Dreams.”]

(The program for this version remained the same as version 4.)
Version 6

Taking version 5 one step further, the final iteration of the Recital Liberated was to continue the idea of structuring each session as if they were classes that I were teaching: with lesson plan, discussion questions, activities for participation by “students” (audience). Additionally, I cut it down to three sessions and only four artworks, and based it more in my own artistic ideas about elements of the human spirit that inspire my own art (as opposed to random emotions), which both reduced the amount of art I intended to include, as well as induced a few important final revisions.

The structure of each session now paired each of the four artworks with a participatory activity designed to engage the attendees and elicit their reactions to and thoughts about both the art that we experience and the ideas contained within and brought up by those artworks. The exact activities largely remained the same, but I added/revised some of the activities to the second and third sessions after my experiences with the pilot session. The specific activities and changes are detailed in the next section of this document.
Final Programs

Session 1: Idealism
(from which comes a simplicity which affords us innocence, allowing us the ability of pure compassion)

- “Falling In Love At A Coffee Shop” by Landon Pigg (recorded single)
- The child of cat and mouse (read)
- “Kids React to Gay Marriage Ruling” – Fine Brothers Entertainment (video on YouTube)
- “Corner of the Sky” from Pippin – Stephen Schwartz (sung by me)

Session 2: Imagination
(using our creative minds to see the dreams that walk amidst reality)

- “Hot Air Balloon” by Owl City (recorded single)
- High-Definition Existence (read)
- Adventure Time – Season 1, Episode 23: “Rainy Day Daydream” (TV show created by Pendleton Ward on Cartoon Network)
- Excerpts from “Our Town” by Thornton Wilder (Act III – pg. 98-112, spoken)

Session 3: Intuition
(connecting to the cosmic flow of universal truth, the idea that there is something more)

- “Glorious” by Muse (recording from their album Black Holes And Revelations)
- Is It Just Me? (read)
- Selected scenes from Heroes – Season 1, Episode 1: “Genesis” (TV show created by Tim Kring on NBC)
- “Astonishing” from Little Women – music by Jason Howland, lyrics by Mindi Dickstein (recording from the Original Broadway Cast Recording, sung by Sutton Foster)
Chapter 4

Reactions and Reflections

The next section of this document will discuss how The Recital Liberated played out in practice, after all three sessions were designed and enacted. I will be discussing each session individually, commenting on the theme and structure of each before detailing my own thoughts and reactions to how each event played out. For the sections regarding the second and third sessions, I will also note any changes I made from the previous session based on my own impressions and those of participants. Additionally, I will summarize attendee feedback concerning the success of each session, which I collected via an online survey through Google Forms. As I explain the structure of, react to the experiences in, and summarize attendee feedback to the three events, it may be helpful to refer to Appendices A, B, and C, as well as the previous page of this document (“Final Programs”), which contain relevant materials used in the planning and presentation of these sessions.

Pilot Session

This first session of the recital liberated was originally intended to be a public event, just like the following two sessions. But after talks with my thesis supervisor, I decided to turn this session into an invite-only pilot session, so as to test out the format and structure of this idea before inviting a wider public audience. For this test run, I invited just a few of my close friends and colleagues—people who I knew would respond and participate, so as to ensure the event
would not stagnate. This proved to be a great decision and a valuable experience to reflect on and inform my approach to the subsequent two sessions, all of which I will detail in a later section.

The first artwork was a pop song, which I paired with an aesthetic analysis activity I designed called the “Three Words Activity” (which became a mainstay throughout the next two sessions). In this activity, I told the attendees to, while listening to the following song, come up with three words to describe it—one for the music, one for the lyrics, and one for the overall impact/message. We then shared our words verbally, and I explained that my hope was for those words to become “theme words” for each individual person in attendance. My intention was that each person might possibly experience those words in the subsequent artworks, as they continued on with the themes introduced in the first song. Ideally, this would provide each person with an individualized thematic thread that they could trace throughout the rest of the artworks, and within which they could frame their entire experience of the session. This was the way that I came up with for the session to truly be about more than just my own interpretations of the artworks. By encouraging each attendee to experience the session as authentically to their own identity as possible, I believe I was able to finally completely de-emphasize myself as a “performer,” in order to highlight and validate the differing ways we each respond to art based on our own experiences.

The next activity was a writing activity, intended to give the attendees a chance to expand on their theme words by describing where and how they experience those words in their life—either in other artworks or just in general. I allowed time for discussion, and then provided my own expansion of my theme words, in the form of reading aloud a poem I had written (which was the artwork that this activity was paired with, loosely). After that, I explained to the attendees my rationale for theming the session the way I did. This was done to propel the
discussion of the session’s themes to a deeper level; correspondingly, the next artwork I
introduced was the audiovisual component (this time a YouTube video), designed to be a more
significant and emotional experience connected to the theme. I paired this video with a thematic
analysis activity which essentially amounted to guided group discussion. After showing the
video, I allowed time for discussion on both attendee reactions to the video itself as well as the
deeper ideas about life brought up by the video. Finally, to cap off the session, I shared one final
artwork that I believed epitomized everything we had talked about (or that at least captured my
chosen theme words, and the theme of the session, in a concise and representative manner). For
this session, this was done via an actual performance by me—the one and only time I truly
“performed” for this entire project!

The theme for this session was “Idealism.” The four artworks chosen for this session
were a sampling of art from various mediums and genres which I believed best encapsulated my
conception of idealism. Idealism, to me, is epitomized by the way children think about the world.
Ideals are clear and logical, simple and often innocent; children perceive the world in an
imaginative, yet very clear-cut way. And while thinking idealistically is not always practical, I
believe it is an important skill to be able to employ in certain scenarios, as being able to break
complex issues down into their fundamental basic ideals can be useful for remembering the
bigger picture. We get bogged down in so many of the details of the problematic adult world,
that I think we forget how refreshing it can be to think simply. So I constructed this session
around that idea of returning to that childlike way of thinking in order to step back from staring
at the bark on the trees, to remember what the whole forest looks like—reminding ourselves that
life doesn’t always have to be so complicated.
My Reactions

I was very happy with the way this session played out in practice, and the debut of this concept as a whole! Five people ended up coming to the event, in addition to myself, which created a uniquely intimate atmosphere that I thought was perfect for this event (and which turned out to be rather different than the subsequent sessions). The small-group setting allowed discussion to be able to flow naturally, without me having to organize it in any particular way. And the fact that the few of us who were there knew each other on a personal level beyond simply being peers or classmates, allowed us to talk freely and openly. Overall, this was an enlightening test-run in that I was reassured that the basic format would work, I could now predict that most people would enjoy the concept, and it also revealed some important changes that I felt I needed to make in order to streamline the event and strengthen its artistic impact.

There were a few specific impressions I got from the event as a whole, which influenced some key revisions for the following session which will be detailed in the later sections corresponding to those sessions. Originally, I had conceived of the “Three Words Activity” (paired with the pop recording) and the theme word expansion writing activity (paired with my poem) as separate. But as we shared and discussed our theme words in the first activity, people ended up expanding on their words right from the start. The two activities sort of connected themselves organically in the moment, to the point that we were already having an in-depth conversation about each of our three words before even getting to the writing activity, so having that writing activity be a further discussion of the theme words felt redundant.

Another impression I got from this test run is that I did not need to script nearly as much of the session as I had. By no means had I scripted any part of the session overly strictly, but I did have certain sections typed out so that I had an idea going into the session of what I wanted
to say when we reached certain points in the event. But in practice, it turned out that as group
discussion wound down and it came around to me to either transition to the next activity or sum
up what we had just done, the things I had planned to say seemed somewhat removed from the
exact context of the event, because I had composed them before finding out what the unique
experience of the event would require me to say. Because I had so much planned out in advance,
I ironically wasn’t experiencing my own event authentically in the moment—an event which I
had specifically designed for the audience to experience authentically in the moment.

One final observation I had (which some of the attendees shared) was that I needed to
make the thematic link stronger. It was faintly present in the parts I had scripted, but the event
grew to be much different than what I had scripted. Since so much of what I had scripted did not
turn out to be useful or relevant to the unique context of the event, some of the thematic links
were either lost or became ineffective, as they only linked together my own hypothetical
conceptions of what I thought the event would be like, and not the realities of what the event
truly was. All of these observations gave me a lot to think about as I worked to revise this
concept in the month that I had scheduled between the pilot and the first public event.

**Public Session 1**

The first public session of The Recital Liberated was designed to be a much more
organic, unified, and impactful event than the pilot. This was partly based in my own desire to
simply keep improving my concept, but also in the need to have a more polished product to
present to the general public for the first time, in order to engage a wider audience. I went about
accomplishing this in a few different ways. The first was to dramatically reduce the amount of
scripted material I presented, in favor of allowing the bulk of the duration of the event to be made up of whatever may transpire in discussions with and among attendees—which involved a certain amount of faith that the participants would indeed participate! A noticeable measure of this change can be seen even in the length of my lesson plan for this session—a succinct two pages instead of the five page plan I has created for the pilot.

Another important structural change was to the writing activity and the poem of mine that it was paired with. In the pilot, the writing activity was an expansion of the theme word activity, and my poem was sort of tacked on after the fact as the manifestation of my own theme words. But since the initial theme word discussion ended up being significant enough to render the theme word expansion unnecessary, I came up with something else that both made for a more significant writing activity, as well as strengthened the purpose of including a poem of mine at all. I decided to include my poem in the attendee packet for the session this time, using it as the source material for a writing prompt which related to the theme of the session. This allowed my poem to be a more substantial aspect of the session content-wise, and allowed the writing activity to generate a greater depth of discussion, instead of just rehashing what we already spent ten minutes discussing in the previous activity.

This change made it so that the writing activity was what sparked the majority of the discussion for the session. The remaining two activities/artworks mainly served as ways to propel the session to an emotional climax and to provide closure (though there were additional opportunities for discussion). After the final artwork, I did add another activity to help tie everything together, again hoping to strengthen the overall thematic thread. This activity harkened back to the initial one, asking participants to re-examine their theme words at the end
of the session now, to see if they still applied, or if they wanted to offer any revisions to the way they framed their individual experiences in the session.

The theme of this session was “Imagination.” Imagination, to me, is the ability to invent things that are not there, as well as to truly see the things that are. It is the ability to embellish reality with made-up narratives and arbitrary meanings, as well as to clarify reality with authentic appreciation for the significance of every literal detail. It is the balance between playing pretend, and not taking life for granted. We always think the real world is so boring, so it’s tempting to use imagination only as an escape from this world through our various artistic creations. But I think if we are imaginative enough, we can use art to remind ourselves that the most beautiful things can sometimes be right in front of us.

My Reactions

The changes I made to this session were massively successful. Changing the writing activity to be a separate writing prompt based on my poem—instead of having my poem be some sort of extension of a writing activity that was redundant to begin with—gave this portion of the session much more legitimacy as a separate activity and a noticeable progression of emotional intensity and thematic depth. The response I got during the writing prompt, people sharing little things they notice about life that they wish people appreciated more, was poignant. This portion of the session really tapped into one of the fundamental philosophical ideas of this project, which is that every human being is an artist with the capacity to make deeply meaningful observations about life. In sharing their unique perspectives on the little details of the world, the participants at
this session contributed greatly to the artistry of this event—their stories had as much of an impact on me as I hope that the event as a whole had on them.

Part of what made that so significant was due to the other revision I made, the lack of scripting. Even though I had still scripted certain elements of it, I only tried to script transitions, and attempted during the session to synthesize responses from attendees into the bigger picture ideas I wanted to talk about—or to revise even those bigger picture ideas to more accurately reflect the naturally developing themes of the session, growing and changing moment-by-moment beyond my original intent. This helped to transition between activities more effectively while still staying within the unique context of the session (as affected by the participants’ input). It also strengthened the thematic link throughout the session, as I essentially improvised connections between the themes and artworks I selected, and the perspectives and experiences offered by attendees. The added final theme word revision activity also helped provide that thematic structure, by truly examining whether the participants’ experiences were cohesive throughout the session, or perhaps whether they understood their theme words (and the thematic concept as a whole) in a different context after the experiences we had that day.

Because of the bonds that I was able to forge in this session between my presented content and the participants’ reactions to it, I believe this session was able to capture the nuanced dynamic that I set out to find when I first conceived of this concept—an informal yet impactful artistic event that was personally meaningful to all participants precisely because it valued the individual experiences of those participants as being important enough to be an integral structural element of the event itself. It communalized the entire process of artistic creation by favoring no single person’s ideals about life or interpretations of the artworks presented and discussed. And this was accomplished in this session specifically by taking that leap of faith that
I did not need to rehearse this event as a speech, but rather rely on my own ability to honestly reflect on the participants’ responses in the moment, and allow the overarching theme and collective artistic ideals of the event to be organic and malleable according to those responses.

**Public Session 2**

The second public session, and final session overall, of the Recital Liberated was really just for fun. The only reason I divided this concept into three performances is because I had a large amount of art that was important to me and which I wanted to present in this way. I had three thematic ideas, and figured with this concept being so new and different, three opportunities for people to come see it would be beneficial. At this point, given the success of the first public session, I did not change anything about the structure of the third session. I kept the three words activity based on the initial pop recording, the writing prompt based on a poem of mine, a deeper thematic discussion based on selected scenes from a TV show, and a final theme word reflection based on a final culminating performance. However, this time the final “performance” was not done by me, as it had been in the previous two sessions with my vocal performance of “Corner of the Sky” in the pilot and my spoken performance of selections from *Our Town* in the first public session. I originally intended to perform “Astonishing” from the Broadway musical *Little Women* as the final artwork on this final program, but a few weeks out from the date of the last session, I opted to replace my performance with simply playing the recording of Sutton Foster singing it from the original Broadway cast recording of *Little Women*. I just felt that, given the nature of this concept—especially now in its most mature iteration—for me to give any performance at all would undermine the collaborative artistic effort that this event
had become, and the vitally informal atmosphere I had worked so hard to achieve. Since this event was never about my personal interpretations of the artworks anyway, I figured there was nothing that I could give to a performance of “Astonishing” that Sutton Foster’s recording couldn’t.

The theme of this session was “Intuition.” Intuition is a vague concept that is difficult to define and impossible to prove, but I describe it as a simple faith in the idea that there is more to life than what we can see. There is knowledge in feelings and instincts, gut reactions and unshakable suspicions. Some people connect this knowledge to the idea of spirituality, whether in a religious sense or not. For me, connecting intuition to spirituality implies that there are forces out there beyond our control, which indeed may have more control over the happenings of the universe than we do—and intuition may be the way these forces communicate with us. Never direct, never specific, not always even benevolent, these forces make up our gods and goddesses, our beliefs, our various faiths or lack thereof. Ultimately, it comes down to a sort of reassurance that there is a reason for the existence of anything. And whatever that reason may be, the mere idea that there could be one at all is comforting—a comfort we desperately crave. For if we are reassured that life in general has a purpose, it helps us believe that each of our individual lives has its own purpose too. It gives us the courage to try to discover what that purpose is—trusting our beliefs about ourselves, about the world, about our desires, trusting that intuitive knowledge about our ideal future to lead us down the road to creating it.
My Reactions

As it dealt with themes of spirituality, this final session was notably more serious than the others—not in the sense that we all took ourselves “too seriously” and did not have any fun, but rather in the sense that we were all being genuine. It seemed as though none of us were hiding behind contrived personas or fronts of disaffection; the thematic material of this session took away our façades and allowed us to connect on a fundamental level to that which makes us human—the perception of our own humanity. The honesty and vulnerability that the participants gave to this session amazed me. There were freshmen students at the event who had only been attending Penn State for three months, thus having only that short amount of time to make connections with me and with their peers, but who were among the first to offer intensely personal narratives concerning spiritual moments they had experienced that lead them to believe there was something more to life. This was greatly inspiring, and reassured me, more than anything else, that The Recital Liberated—with its goals of creating an inviting atmosphere of artistic exploration in which each person felt their experiences were valued—had been a success.

Attendee Feedback

In order to collect feedback from those in attendance at the three events of The Recital Liberated, I created a feedback form through Google Forms, which I sent attendees a link to via Facebook after the session. This form included five structural aspects of the event which attendees were to rate the success of on a scale from one to five (with a place underneath each aspect for additional comments), as well as five additional questions requiring a short response. The text of the form was as follows:
“The Recital Liberated: feedback form

Thank you for attending a session of The Recital Liberated! Please provide your name (optional) and rate the success of the following aspects of whichever session(s) you attended (providing any comments or suggestions you may have):

- Informal, inviting atmosphere
- Encouraged participation
- Individual experiences of attendees were valued
- Overall experience felt personal and meaningful
- Felt like a shared artistic event rather than a solo performance

Additional Questions:
1.) Would you attend events like this in the future? (if this became a more widely used format for artistic presentations)
2.) Do you feel that a program like this could be done in a secondary general music setting? (why/why not?)
3.) Do you feel as though this event could serve the same purpose for a "non-performer" as a typical senior recital would for a performance major? (as in: for a music major who doesn't necessarily enjoy performing, do you think an event like this could still fulfill the same academic/artistic requirements (at the same level of intellectual merit) as a traditional senior recital? Could this work as an equally viable/legitimate option for performance-averse people to satisfy their degree "performance" requirement?)
4.) Are there any other suggestions you have to make this idea work better? concerning the format, pacing, duration, theme, selection of artworks and activities, room set-up, etc.
5.) Any other general comments?”

In total, I received eight feedback form submissions. All submissions rated the effectiveness of the aspects listed above as a four or five out of five. Concerning the atmosphere, participants “enjoyed having a small amount of people,” and liked the room set-up that I chose for the event. We were in a classroom in Music Building I at Penn State, and I actually pushed
most of the desks and chairs to the back of the room, stacking them on top of each other to create more open space. I then brought in some of the furniture from the lobby of Esber Recital Hall (two-person couches and cushioned benches), and arranged it in sort of a semi-circle facing the front of the room. One person in particular commented that “keeping the participants in a circle, rather than rows and columns, [created] a healthy and comfortable environment to talk.”

Concerning whether the event felt like a shared, personal, and meaningful event, rather than a distant solo recital, one participant said that they’ve “never felt so connected with a recital” and that “it was cool being able to share some of [their] own ideas on the art of someone else’s senior project” However, a couple participants had slight reservations about the seriousness of the themes and predicted that their willingness to participate probably would have been somewhat less if they had not personally known the other people in attendance. When asked if they would attend an event like this in the future, one participant said “Yes, but only for people I knew. Because it is interactive in such a personal way, I would not feel comfortable with people I didn't know already.” Another said that while “it was a very inviting atmosphere and easy to contribute in . . . the topics being discussed might have hindered that just a bit,” as this person considered them “very heavy.” However, the same person stated that even though they “personally only knew a few people in the room, [they] still felt very comfortable with the environment,” and that “it did feel like everyone there, whether they spoke or not, added to the event and that was really cool.”

Every respondent said they would attend an event like this in the future if given the opportunity. One even said they “wish [they] could attend something like this every week,” calling this “an interesting approach to a recital,” and remarking that “engaging musical conversations are crucial to individual development, especially when it comes to philosophy and
feelings about where ‘I’ fit in the musical world.” Another participant said: “It was a great way to experience art in a more informal way that pushed beyond the art itself and included the thoughts of others.” This event also seemed to have impact and significance even beyond the realm of the School of Music, with one participant stating: “As a non-music major, it was nice to be around people with a slightly different perspective on life and really made me think in a different light. It was a great event and [I’m] glad I could experience it!”

An issue I found to be particularly important to consider was one concerning the lasting impact and greater significance of this event within the context of the academic career of a music major. The underlying question that, to me, would determine the practical success of this event, was the question of whether this event was truly equal in artistic merit to the traditional senior recital that I sought to react against and make a departure from. I wondered whether participants thought that this event, could, in the end, serve the same purpose as that of a traditional senior recital. Could this be considered to be at the same level of artistic and intellectual effort, integrity, and achievement as would be the culminating recital of a performance major after four years of study?

Responses were divided in nature, but ultimately promising. Every response stated that this event was significant enough to count for some part of a music major’s degree requirement. The issue of how much it could count garnered more disparity. Two participants stated that they do not believe this event could be given completely in lieu of a senior recital. One said it could still “certainly fulfill academic requirements, but in my opinion it's not appropriate for performance requirements,” citing the need for there to be a more specifically dedicated solo-performance aspect of the event for it to count as a senior recital in full. The other stated that “it could definitely act as a supplement,” but remarked that “as musicians, it is equally as important
to perform as it is to delve into the meaning of the music and be able to discuss things on a deep intellectual level.” Another respondent was more on the fence, saying that it could perhaps be worthy of merit equal to a senior recital if it were more organized. Elaborating further, they said the event “felt a little bit like it was ‘Jake’s personal interests’ [rather] than a cohesive unit.” It should be noted, however, that this participant was commenting on the pilot session, which I, too, felt needed to be more cohesive.

As I revised the concept in subsequent sessions to give the event as a whole better thematic unity and artistic impact, I believe the final product left attendees at future sessions more convinced that this event could indeed be just as significant as a senior recital. Two respondents thought this event took “just as much work” as a traditional recital. Three others remarked that an event like this “may embody [the performer’s] artistic experiences better,” was “a more refreshing experience than a recital,” and “might even hold more meaning for some.” One respondent went so far as to state that “while this kind of event does not focus on performing and so is inherently different from a recital, it does display what the student has mastered over the course of 4 years of musical study. That is the whole point of a senior recital with respect to a performance major anyway, so absolutely, yes it does fulfill the same objective of a senior recital.”
Chapter 5
Application to Education

This next section will first summarize participant feedback to the following question: “Do you feel that a program like The Recital Liberated could be done in a secondary general music setting?” I will then demonstrate how I believe the Recital Liberated could be adapted for use in the classroom—taking it from being a somewhat ethereal artistic event documented only personally for my own needs, to being a specifically organized curricular framework for an academic class, including sample lesson plans and corresponding materials. This section of the document can be read as a short essay making the case for the inclusion of an arts-based class in the public school setting, founded on the principles of The Recital Liberated. The class I propose is intended to be more personally relevant to students as it gives them greater agency in their education. This proposal can additionally be seen through the lens of advocacy for the arts as practical endeavors and equal in merit to all school subjects.

Attendee Feedback

All participants said they believed the concept of The Recital Liberated could translate well to a secondary general music classroom setting. This approval did not come without a few slight hesitations, however. A couple participants had reservations about how the activities would be received by middle schooler students—both in terms of taking the activities seriously and in terms of being comfortable enough with their peers and their instructor in order for the
activities to reach the personally meaningful emotional level necessary for them to be impactful. One respondent said they could “see it going well . . . but the class would have to be willing to participate . . . I can also see students of that age having a hard time being vulnerable in front of other people.” Another respondent put it more bluntly: “12 year olds can be mean and intimidating . . . [but] I think it would definitely be useful for kids to at least see what their peers are thinking even if they don’t feel comfortable participating.”

Assuming students were to take it seriously and feel comfortable participating, one attendee’s rationale for including this concept in the classroom was that it “was interactive and asked participants to think but didn’t make it feel like a test or like the participants were being judged.” A second attendee shared this sentiment, saying: “it really [allowed] people to open up and share, not just be judged based on a grade or performance.” Another stated that it “would give students the opportunity to think out of the box and reflect on themselves, which would in turn give them a deeper, more meaningful connection to the music or whatever topic is being discussed.”

Concerning the heaviness of the themes discussed in the sessions, one attendee had no reservations about middle school students’ ability to handle discussing such subjects. In the pilot session, I showed participants a video entitled “Kids React to Gay Marriage Ruling,” a video in which YouTube content creators The Fine Bros showed children ages 13 and younger a compilation of news footage covering the June 26th 2015 Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide, and filmed the kids’ reactions to the footage, also asking them additional questions about the issue of same-sex marriage as a whole. The participant alluded to above referenced this video in their statement in favor of including the ideas of The Recital Liberated in schools, saying: “as we observed from the YouTube video, children have strong
opinions and can discuss ‘big issues’ in a succinct manner. It’s good to learn music and how to
music, but discussion stimulates our thoughts and creates interest. If innate curiosity doesn’t
exist, it’s our jobs as teachers to inspire it (through conversation and discussion).”

The Recital Liberated Within A Curricular Framework

Whenever music advocacy comes up, there is logically always a discussion of the “value”
or “importance” of music and how we get people to recognize it. Most often, one hears
arguments advocating for music education by illustrating all the brilliant real-world skills that
music can teach a student—“among them curiosity, creativity, collaboration, self-discipline, and
motivation” (NAfME, 2015). Sometimes one even hears the argument that music is important
because it teaches all the other subjects: notation and rhythm are math, expressive text is world
language, acoustical properties are science, the very act of singing or playing is physical—
athletic, even.

These arguments seem to be raised at every conference of music educators, every band,
choir, and orchestra concert, every school board meeting, and even on social media platforms
now: Music makes you smarter (Schellenberg, 2004). Music improves academic achievement
(Gardiner, Fox, Knowles, & Jeffrey 1996). Music raises test scores (College Board SAT, 2012).
Music makes you better at math and reading (Vaughn, 2000; Standley, 2008). Music improves
attendance and graduation rates (Harris Interactive Inc. 2006). Music improves childrens’ self-
esteeem (Costa-Giomi, 2004). Music educators tout these research conclusions as though they
allow us to say “checkmate” to any doubting administrator, parent, or community member—
forever instilling in their mind the importance of music. But I would like to offer a different
argument: music is not important—or at least, not any more or less important than any other subject.

Because while we musicians are off in our own little worlds, frantically trying to get the world to believe in us, every other subject whose legitimacy is frequently subject to administrative scrutiny is doing the exact same thing. In fact, they’re even making the exact same arguments! How many times have we said that music education programs “engage students and keep in school those at-risk of dropping out”—and yet this quote is taken from a National Art Education Association (NAEA) advocacy flyer for the visual arts. How often do we hear that music “improves language and memory skills”—and yet this quote is taken from the Educational Theatre Association (EdTA). We assert that music provides “opportunities for cognitive growth and inclusion for special education students”—but here the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO) is quoted. Finally, our seemingly most coveted argument—that participation in music yields a “positive relationship with academic achievement and test scores”—but even these words come from a Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE America) advocacy poster for physical education (P.E.) and health classes.

And this isn’t just baseless advocacy jargon. Just as our efforts are founded in research, so are the efforts of all these other commonly marginalized school subjects. Each document cited above contains anywhere from five to fifty-two references to anything from the Journal of Dance Education to the International Journal of Neuroscience. So then the question is begged: if everyone else can make the same research-based claims that we can about why their subject is “vital” to every child’s education, is music—or are any of these subjects—really so important? If art can improve self-esteem, why do we need band? If choir can improve attendance, why do we need theatre? If P.E. can improve academic achievement, why do we need the arts at all? How
can music be important, if anything music can do for our students can be done just the same by any other art form, or gym class?

Some modern advocacy efforts have begun to pick up on this. The newest arguments we hear begin to press the idea of advocating for music not because of its relationship to other subjects or because of the achievement/attendance/emotional “side-effects” of participating in music, but rather trying to argue “music for music’s own sake.” After all, if art, theatre, dance, and P.E. can provide students with all the same cognitive benefits as music, what is it music CAN do that no other subject can? But even there I believe is an impasse—for there are things that ANY subject can do that no other can. This is inherent for no other reason than the fact that we make any distinctions at all between art forms. If music did the same things as dance, we wouldn’t call them by two separate names. So we are again mired in the same dilemma: if every subject can bring unique opportunities to our students that no other subject can, how do we choose which subjects to include in education? Here it inevitably comes down to a precarious judgment of innate value: which subjects are more important?

Unfortunately, this is where the research stops. No study has proven that music makes you smarter than does visual art. There is no objective proof to guide our decisions from here on out, concerning which school subjects are more valuable than others. And I doubt that there ever will be, because I do not believe that value is an inherent characteristic of anything. Unlike mass or density, “value” is not a scientifically measurable quality that just exists for us to discover. Thus our answers to the question “Is music important?” or “Is art important?” can come only from our own personal bias. And not only is it impossible to make truly objective curriculum decisions based on personal bias, it is also supremely irresponsible. Who can justify limiting the education of an entire school district’s population of children based only on whims and opinions
of what is important? This is why it becomes such a competition between subjects to fight for a place in public education—gladiator style advocacy battles that pit football against jazz band, pottery against drama. It becomes a game of who can cite the fanciest statistic, rather than taking into account what model of education will work best for students. Perhaps it is better when children are simply given options, rather than being forced to choose between whichever classes were able to win the fight for inclusion.

There is much discussion of the idea of flexibility in education—particularly with regard to assessment format (Boud, 1995; McClenaghan, 2006; Hanafin et al. 2007). Hall (1982) showed that for many students, having a choice in assessment format allows for more suitable ways for them to demonstrate their learning. Konur (2007) indicated that this is especially true for students with disabilities. In particular, Abramo (2015) recommended flexibility of choice in how students both receive information and demonstrate knowledge as one main technique that teachers can use to meet the needs of “twice exceptional” students—those who are both gifted and have a learning disability. But as is the mantra often heard in special education pedagogy, this technique “benefits all learners, not just 2e [twice exceptional] students,” thus these findings could surely impact the music education of a general population of students (Abramo 2015).

Irwin & Hepplestone (2012) suggested that flexibility of choice could look like “using a web page, reflective blog or video presentation” as a substitution for an essay—as each of those options could satisfy the original purpose of the essay, which is to “demonstrate a coherent, well-structured critical argument.” But I would like to take this idea of equivalency of purpose being the rationale for allowing student choice in assessment format and extrapolate it to student choice in development of a personalized curriculum. As I have noted above in comparing the outcomes and benefits of the art forms of dance, theatre, visual art, and music; if the various arts can all
essentially be used for the same real-world benefits, just as equivalent assessment options can all be used to accomplish the same demonstration of knowledge—essentially saying that there is no empirical difference between whether students write an essay or film a video; take an art class versus join band—then I believe that students should simply be able and allowed to make the best choice that they can in order to tailor their education to what will best enable them to succeed. And for that flexibility of choice to be at its maximum capacity, thereby affording students the greatest potential to have their needs met, it follows that students must have as many options available as possible.

This is a tandem proposition in that not only might students be allowed more control over their education, but teachers should also provide them with as many options as possible, so that the idea of even having a choice in one’s education at all is at its most meaningful. I cannot design a course that does not allow for students to input their own experience, and which does not accept those experiences as a valid and legitimate basis for learning in my classroom (manifested as student agency over their own education, shaped by their individual experiences). So the ideal course that I’d like to design would encompass not just music, but any and all art that is relevant to both my students and myself. Combining this desire for a learning environment that values student input with my belief that teaching is best done through the lens of the teacher’s own experience, the course will be mostly based around the three art forms that I know best: poetry, music, and audiovisual art—but will also allow room for anything else that my students bring to the classroom.

I want to teach a great diversity of art from both modern and historic time periods in relevant ways based on how it can be used to benefit our lives. I believe the chief function of art is that it allows us to engage with, critically analyze, and respond to both the modern world and
cultures of the past. We can use it to support our own individual experience, challenge stereotypes, foster empathy, inform worldview, shape identity, promote emotional intelligence, and advocate for change. The principal ways I experience art in my life, which will form the basis for how my students and I would be experiencing art in my classroom, are through aesthetic analysis (What does it look/sound like? What am I feeling while experiencing this?), personal analysis (What does this mean to me?), thematic analysis (What is this about? What message does it send?), and advocacy (How can I use this to stand up for my interests, beliefs, and identity?).

The following four lesson plans are samples of basic activities through which I would teach these concepts. The premise of this unit is that students will select an artwork in the beginning of the year that has particular significance to them—largely within the realms of music, literature, and audiovisual art, but with creative options allowing for explorations of other mediums that are less familiar to me, but may be more meaningful to the students. This artwork will be analyzed throughout the unit in various ways, culminating in a persuasive advocacy-based piece of writing in which students will engage with a criticism of their chosen artwork (e.g. a negative review) and then rationally defend it as valid and of artistic merit, based on their analyses done throughout the unit.

The lesson plans outlined below would effectively be the introductory lessons to each form of analysis and to the advocacy project. These lessons would be my own models of how to analyze and advocate for an artwork, providing students a template within which to conduct their analytical and advocacy efforts for their own artworks during future class periods. The materials I use for these lessons are the same artworks I presented at the first public session of The Recital Liberated. For that event, the activities were presented informally with only a rough
documentation of procedures in order to guide my own moderation of the event; but in order to adapt them more concretely for use in the classroom, they have been fleshed out into fully curricular lesson plans.

Lesson Plan 1: Aesthetic Analysis

The idea of aesthetic analysis is centered around getting students to be able to process and understand their immediate sensory responses to art. This is the ability to take in sights, sounds, textures, etc. and being able to describe with specific language what those stimuli look, sound, and feel like, as well as the particular emotions that those stimuli evoke. This form of analysis captures our response to art in its most visceral form, and is truly the most genuine form of analysis simply due to its being derived from the ability to honestly gauge our spontaneous, immediate, in-the-moment reactions to art. This activity has students attentively listen to a song, guided by a worksheet with questions to consider while listening. Students are asked to come up with three words to describe their experience listening to the song—one for the music (the sounds alone), one for the lyrics (the text alone), and one for the overall impact (music + lyrics). Students then are given an opportunity to share their words, and expand on their reasons for choosing them.

Materials:
• Worksheet with instructions/questions for listening activity, song lyrics (see end of document)
• Audio recording of “Hot Air Balloon” by Owl City

Objective:
Students will be able to-
Describe and analyze music in terms of its sound, lyric meaning, and overall impact, using precise verbal and written language

**Assessment:**

Achievement is determined by assessing worksheet completion, and by informally gauging student comprehension/participation during class discussion activities

**Procedures:**

1.) Teacher (T) will begin by passing out the guiding questions worksheet to Students (S)
2.) T will introduce the song to be used for the subsequent activities
3.) T will play recording of song, instructing S to think about and write their answer to worksheet question 1
4.) After recording is played, T will direct S to the song lyrics on the back of the worksheet
5.) T will instruct S to read through lyrics on their own, answer worksheet question 2
6.) After about 5 minutes, T will play the audio recording again, instructing S to answer worksheet question 3
7.) Once all worksheet questions have been answered, T will ask for S volunteers to verbally share the words they came up with to describe the song (writing them on the board)
8.) When S stop volunteering, T will ask if anyone else wants to come write their words on the board themselves
9.) T will then write own answers on the board (also ensuring that those who have not shared have written down their answers for T to review upon worksheet collection)
10.) Next, T will ask students to explain their word choices, starting with those written on the board (trying to get them to think about what in the music made them hear those specific words)

11.) T will also explain own words, first asking the students if they can guess why T picked those words
12.) T will again ensure that those who have not shared their explanations of word choices have written them down.
13.) T will collect worksheets, thanking S for sharing and reminding that there are no correct answers; since art is subjective, everyone’s interpretation is valid.
Listening Activity:
“Hot Air Balloon” by Owl City

INSTRUCTIONS:
While listening to the song, think about and answer the following prompts:

1.) Come up with one word or phrase (just one!) to describe the music itself – just the sounds. (*Think about the singer’s voice, the instruments, and the “mood” of the song. How do the sounds make you feel?)

   **1 word:** __________________________

2.) Write one word/phrase to describe the lyrics of the song – the “main idea” of the text:

   **1 word:** __________________________

3.) Now write one word/phrase to describe the overall impact/message of this song. (*How do the music and lyrics work together? See if you can sum up the whole song in one word!*)

   **1 word:** __________________________
Lyric Sheet for “Hot Air Balloon”

We wrote a prelude to our own fairytale
And bought a parachute at a church rummage sale
And with a mean sewing machine and miles of thread
We sewed the day above L.A. in navy and red.
We round a racetrack through your mom’s kitchen chairs
And fought the shadows back down your dark basement stairs.
I lit a match and let it catch to light up the room
And then you yelled as we beheld an old maroon hot air balloon

I'll be out of my mind
and you'll be out of ideas pretty soon.
So let’s spend the afternoon
in a cold hot air balloon.
Leave your jacket behind.
Lean out and touch the treetops over town.
I can’t wait to kiss the ground wherever we touch back down.

We drank the great lakes like cold lemonade
And both got stomach aches sprawled out in the shade.
So bored to death you held your breath and I tried not to yawn.
You make my frown turn upside down and now my worries are gone.

I'll be out of my mind
and you'll be out of ideas pretty soon.
So let’s spend the afternoon
in a cold hot air balloon.
Leave your jacket behind
Lean out and touch the treetops over town.
I can't wait to kiss the ground wherever we touch back down.

I'll be out of my mind
and you'll be out of ideas pretty soon.
So let’s spend the afternoon
in a cold hot air balloon.
Leave your jacket behind
Lean out and touch the treetops over town.
I can't wait to kiss the ground wherever we touch back down.
Lesson Plan 2: Personal Analysis

The idea of personal analysis is a much more informal form of analysis based on being able to process and articulate a relationship between art and our own individual experiences (beliefs, interests, memories, goals, etc.). This is the ability to recognize when the message of a poem aligns with our personal beliefs, or when the chord progression of a song evokes a childhood memory, and express those relationships. This activity is simply a free-writing/journaling activity wherein students will read a poem and respond to a short prompt based on the ideas touched on by the poem. Students will be given a period of time to record their responses, which they will then be asked to share.

Materials:
- Hand-out with text to poem and response question

Objective:
Students will be able to:
- Describe and analyze poetry in terms of its textual meaning and its relation to self by relating it to personal narratives, using precise verbal and written language

Assessment:
- Achievement is determined by assessing response completion, and by informally gauging student comprehension/participation during class discussion activities

Procedures:
1.) Teacher (T) will begin by passing out the hand-out to students (S)
2.) T will introduce the poem to be analyzed
3.) T will read aloud the poem to S (who will have the text to follow along)
4.) T will direct S to response question on back of the text hand-out
5.) T will allow 5-10 minutes for S to respond to the question
6.) T will initiate, foster, and maintain a class discussion on student responses—asking for volunteers to share what they wrote, synthesizing and connecting responses to an overall thematic discussion if possible.

7.) T will ensure that all students have recorded a written response (especially those who did not share during class discussion)

8.) T will collect response sheets, thanking S for sharing and reminding them that there are no correct answers in their individual response to art.

*(see below for student materials)*
High-Definition Existence (6 PM) (by anonymous)

light creates the images we see,
but at six o’clock in the spring
it goes so magnificently far
as to imbue each picture with a radiance
as if that tree
that mountain
that house
becomes a star trapped on Earth—
it’s not merely being illuminated,
it’s the one doing the illuminating.
the light is not reflecting off of it,
the light is piercing it,
permeating its appearance,
and pulsating through it,
and out of it.
from it.

it acts as a window or a cloud
not just throwing the light back,
but keeping it.
swallowing it without extinguishing it
and allowing it to engulf every molecule of its entire being.
it becomes the light.
the surface the light reveals
pales in comparison
to the impossibly spectacular divinity
that blazes from where the light transcends surfaces.

when the Sun hits the trees
at six o’clock in the spring,
the sky becomes a flood light.
leaves become light bulbs
branches become torches,
shining like moons
igniting reality.

isn’t it funny
that the video games we like the best
are the ones that look the most like real life?
we’re so focused on creating better graphics on our televisions,
that we forget
that we already live
in High-Definition Existence.
High Definition Existence: Response Question

What is something you notice about every day life, that maybe most people don’t? As in, what is something you wish people appreciated more? Describe something in life that seems like a little thing, but to you, is actually pretty important.
Lesson Plan 3: Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is simply what we are accustomed to doing in English classes—based in a thorough understanding of the fundamental structure of the work, the ability to critically engage with the themes, messages, and ideas brought up by the work. We are used to doing this with texts, be it a poem, short story, novel, or play; but for the purposes of this unit, I seek to expand the idea of thematic analysis to be employed with other art forms as well. In particular for this activity, students will be asked to critically engage with a medium perhaps not often encountered in a classroom—an episode of an animated TV show. But as you will see below, the particular episode to be analyzed in this lesson is not simply a frivolous cartoon, but is rather a thoughtful exploration of the idea of imagination, as well as the relationship between balancing the use of imagination with the exploitation of reality in order to construct a meaningful existence in this world. Students will watch the full episode of the show (11 minutes long), answering both comprehension questions and discussion questions in order to describe and analyze the themes of the episode.

Materials:
- DVD: Adventure Time – Season 1, Ep. 23: “Rainy Day Daydream”
- Worksheet with comprehension and discussion questions

Objective:
Students will be able to-
- Describe and analyze audiovisual art in terms of its plot and overall thematic meaning, using precise verbal and written language
Assessment:

- Achievement is determined by assessing worksheet completion, and by informally gauging student comprehension/participation during class discussion activities

Procedures:

1.) Teacher (T) will begin by ask students (S) if they have seen Adventure Time, asking for (or providing, if S are unfamiliar) a brief premise of the show

2.) T will pass out worksheet to S, explaining its function as a guide both while S are watching the episode, and for a subsequent discussion activity

3.) T will play episode of Adventure Time, again directing S to the comprehension questions to be completed while watching

4.) T will allow a few minutes after the end of the episode if needed, for S to finish their responses

5.) T will begin to go over the first four questions with S, gauging S comprehension of the basic plot of the episode

6.) Once plot comprehension is established, T will then direct S attention to the discussion questions at the bottom of the worksheet, fostering a class discussion of the ideas contained within

7.) T will ensure all students have recorded a written response to the first four comprehension questions, and then will collect worksheets

(see below for student materials)
Adventure Time – Season 1, Ep. 23: “Rainy Day Daydream”
created by Pendleton Ward on Cartoon Network

INSTRUCTIONS:
While watching the episode, think about and answer the following four questions:

1.) At the beginning of the episode, which did Finn prefer: imagination or reality?

2.) Which did Jake prefer?

3.) How did Finn’s opinion about imagination change by the end of the episode?

4.) What did Jake do to change Finn’s mind?

Discussion Questions:

1.) What are some ways we use imagination to make “the real world” more fun?

2.) What are some ways that reality is already fun by itself?

3.) Can you enjoy life with just your imagination?

4.) Can you enjoy life with no imagination?
Lesson Plan 4: Advocacy

This final lesson plan takes place later in the sequence of this unit, and serves to transition the class as a whole from learning the necessary skills to thoughtfully describe and analyze an artwork, to actually putting them into practice. In this phase of the class, students will begin to engage with criticism of their chosen artwork, and the goal is that by drawing from their prior analyses done throughout the year, they will be able to form counterarguments to defend their artwork as a legitimate artistic creation.

Beyond simply helping students to be able to stand up for their particular artwork, the idea is that the template of analytical and advocatory skills learned throughout this unit will give students the ability to be a better advocate not just for art, but for their own interests, beliefs, and even identity. Particularly this final activity, engaging with criticism in a healthy and ultimately positive way that fosters students’ ability to construct logical arguments, is designed to have utility far beyond the classroom, beyond school, beyond even art!

In the activity, students will find two negative reviews (3 stars or less) of their chosen artwork on Amazon.com. Students will summarize these reviews (to ensure they understand the points the reviewer is making), and then will write whether they agree or disagree with the review and why. This will become the basis for further days of classwork wherein students will go back to their prior analyses of their artwork to find concrete analytical evidence to use as counterarguments to the negative reviews. Essentially, over the course of several days, students would be piecing together an advocacy essay that demonstrates both a thorough understanding of their chosen artwork (based on the three forms of analysis), as well as engagement with criticism
to construct a logical defense of the artistic merit of the work, and this lesson is the first piece of
that.

**Materials:**
- Computer/iPad lab, or individual student laptops
- Worksheet with activity instructions

**Objective:**
Students will be able to-
- Logically engage with criticism of the aesthetic, personal, and thematic structures of art in order to construct counterarguments, using analytical information as evidence.

**Assessment:**
- As this is part of a larger project, final overall assessment will be withheld until all the components are assembled, but informal assessment of task completion may be assessed at the end of this lesson (Have students compiled the requested materials and completed the corresponding tasks?)

**Procedures:**
1.) Teacher (T) will begin by passing out activity instructions worksheet to students (S)
2.) T will model everything on the worksheet with T’s own selected artwork, finding it on Amazon, selecting two reviews, showing the process of sorting through reviews not based on the actual artwork, summarizing the reviews in a word document, and then responding to the criticism
3.) S will then have the remainder of the class period to complete the activity with their own selected artwork, with T assisting as needed
4.) At the end of the period, S will send the document they’ve created during class to T, through email, Google Drive, or whatever service is available at the school. If no such service is possible, S may print their documents and T will collect them in order to assess completion.

*if a student’s artwork cannot be found on Amazon, reviews may be searched for elsewhere on the internet

(see below for student materials)
Activity: Engaging With Criticism

INSTRUCTIONS:

1.) Go to Amazon.com and search for your chosen artwork.

2.) Under “Customer Reviews,” find one 3 star review and one 1 star review. The reviews must be at least three sentences or more, and must be reviewing the ARTWORK itself, NOT the product quality, shipping time, or other aspects of online purchasing that are not related to the reviewer’s actual opinion of the artwork.

3.) Copy and paste those reviews into a Word document

4.) Underneath each review, summarize its main points. What arguments is the person making about the artwork?

5.) Finally, under the summary of each review, write whether you agree or disagree with this person’s review, and why.
Chapter 6
Conclusion

In the end, I cannot say why music is important. Perhaps it is not—at least, not inherently, not for everyone, and certainly not more than any other human endeavor. But as an option, surely it is vital—just the same as anything else. Because what is important is giving children the opportunity to learn, and giving all people the opportunity to experience the world, in whatever way speaks best to them—whether it is through math, science, literature, drama, dance, visual art, music, or anything else. It does not matter how we learn to navigate the world—only that we do at all, learning to travel through life in a manner which best suits our desired destination. Now, I do not know how a public school within the current structure of the American education system could ever offer every single conceivable subject to its students—perhaps it could not. But I know that we must try to revolutionize our schools so that children can receive an education that is both personal in its relevance and complete in its opportunities. I know we must try to revolutionize the way we all share our art with each other, so that everyone can begin to believe that their unique interpretation of this life is valid.

Subjects in school, areas of study, the various arts, our hobbies, careers, and interests, are all like textiles in a cloth. Each of the arts is but a single string. English is another; science, another. No one area is a thread of greater quality than another, but every stitch is vital in order to keep the whole cloth from unraveling. If there were any “innate” value in the arts (or in anything) it would be that, without it, there would be a hole in the tapestry of human expression. The value of art is precisely in the fact that it has none on its own. But in conjunction with every
other expressive textile, the woven composite of humanity attains value. What we do as people is not valuable alone, but we are valuable because of what we do. None of our efforts can therefore be seen as any more or less important than any other; all of our endeavors rely on each other with equal importance so that complete education, complete expression, complete humanity, does not become unraveled. Music is not important—let my efforts here be remembered as the recital that liberated music from the task of trying to be “important”—for like every other art form, it is much more than important. Like every other stitch, it is necessary.
Appendix A
Pilot Session Materials

Poster

Saturday, September 26th
Room 117, Music Building 1
Jake Russo

Allowing us the ability of pure compassion,
from which comes a simplicity that offers us innocence,
idealism.

"The Recluse Liberated: Where Art ends and Life begins" — session 1:
Lesson Plan

The following portion of the document that I’ve enclosed in [[double brackets]] consists of excerpts from the lesson plan that I used to guide my moderation of this session:

[[Introduce RL as a concept briefly

“bell-ringer”/starting activity: while listening to the following song, come up with 1 word to describe the music (the sounds themselves), 1 word to describe the lyrics (the words themselves), and 1 word to describe the message. [5 minute intro up to here]

Falling in love at a coffee shop [4:30]

-does anyone want to share the words they came up with? [just call on whoever wants to share, not really discussing yet]

-now, those three words you came up with, they’re going to be your theme words for this session. These are my theme words: innocence (for the music), simplicity (for the words), and compassion (for the message). These aren’t the right answers, by the way. Even if you didn’t share, each person’s words are important, because they are going to be the framework within which you experience the rest of what we do here today.

[3-5 minutes for activity and me talking more]

writing activity: So now take your theme words and I’m gonna give you five minutes to write. Flesh out those words into a sentence, or two, or as many as you want. Write about how you experience them in your life, where you see them, what you think of when you think of those words. It can be a short sentence, it could be a poem, it could be a quick little narrative story. Maybe a cool or weird story that happened to you related to one of those concepts or something.
A list of other words. Just think about the three words you chose, and try to express those thoughts. [2 minutes to explain, 5 minutes to write]

would anyone like to share what they’ve written?

-ask for volunteers, if none ask: who wrote a sentence, who wrote a few sentences, paragraph, etc.

-after someone shares, talk about what they wrote. Remind people of their theme words.

And just free form discussion, try to relate, see if anyone else feels similar. See if anyone else wrote about the same words

[allow no more than 10 minutes for this]

share mine: (now of course, this isn’t exactly fair cause I had about…21 years to write mine and I only gave you five minutes… but this is something I wrote that I think describes my three words (repeat them), and the broader theme of this session, which is idealism.

**Child of cat and mouse** (read from my written out notebook)

[2 minutes to introduce and read]

(semi-scripted interlude: get deeper. Why are we doing this? Why idealism?)

- This session is called idealism because it’s an important aspect of the human spirit
- Being able to simplify broad concepts into basic ideals helps us remember the point
- Reducing a complex issue, concept, or perhaps just a song into a few words that best describe it – you can categorize it, and explain it easier, the sense of order that comes with labels
- Hard to get all the details in one sentence, but it’s remarkable what you can learn when you step back from staring at the bark on the trees and remember what the whole forest looks like.
- So we’ve been thinking, writing, now let’s experience innocence, observe idealism
- Who better than children?
- explain Fine Brothers Entertainment
- kids reactions give us insight, perspective, refreshing to see complex things approached simply
- draw attention to the page in the packet with points, quotes, questions)

[5 minutes to explain]

**Kids react to gay marriage ruling [12:16]**

bigger discussion activity: after—ask for thoughts? Just let people free respond for a while (if no responses, just ask a general like “what surprised you, what stood out, what you expected vs. what happened”

things to mention, if people aren’t responding/when discussion dies down—

-kids understand all these issues just within this one broader debate – that is plenty enough material to make an entire class of it and have substantial discussion with them! They understand more than we think, and we don’t tap into it often enough

-lucas, the 7 year old kid who had been against it before but “read more books, got more information” and now feels differently—the importance of education even at such a young age. That’s what makes the difference.

-they weren’t reluctant to talk about this stuff. It’s not so taboo for them.

-it’s not hard for kids to understand current events. What we think are complex issues really aren’t that difficult for kids to get. And some of it was simplified and toned down, like the workings of the court system and some of the more explicit negativity/homophobia that gay issues result in. but idealistically—kids get it. Love is love.
[no more than 15-20 minutes, less if nothing to say, more if more! Go off on tangents, let it be like a random late night discussion]

-Once discussion has wound down, like the initial reactions and then my chiming in with certain points, I’ll have a sort of rehearsed bit here at the end to transition into the performance.

Really digging in with my final points

(To me the art we’ve experienced today, and the ideas we’ve been talking about, it all just reinforces the idea that

- life can be so much more enjoyable when we don’t overthink things.
- When we keep things simple.
- It doesn’t mean we have to ignore the bad in the world,
- but it’s refreshing to return to that idealistic innocence that kids exhibit so well,
- and just remind ourselves that life doesn’t always have to be so complicated.

[~3 minutes to wind down/sum up]

**Corner of the sky** [3 minutes]

- explanation of how he sees the world,
- how he understands the potential we all have for greatness,
- that innocent view on what it means to make it in the world.
- The message isn’t as much about idealism as it is an idealistic view
- on wanting to find oneself and how to succeed

[~45 minute framework of things I can control]

[like 1 hour 15 mins, with discussion time estimates of I guess just half an hour?] Ask for feedback, inform of survey that will be sent via FB]
Attendee Packet

The following item is the physical printed packet that I handed out to each attendee, in order to guide their experience in the session (much like materials that might be passed out in a classroom to retain student attention throughout a lesson).

The Recital Liberated: Where Art ends and Life begins
by Jake Russo

Pilot Session: Idealism
from which comes a simplicity that affords us innocence, allowing us the ability of pure compassion
"Falling In Love At A Coffee Shop"
by Landon Pigg

I think that possibly, maybe I’m falling for you
Yes there’s a chance that I’ve fallen quite hard over you.
I’ve seen the paths that your eyes wander down
I want to come too

I think that possibly, maybe I’m falling for you

No one understands me quite like you do
Through all of the shadowy corners of me

I never knew just what it was about this old coffee shop
I love so much
All of the while I never knew
I never knew just what it was about this old coffee shop
I love so much
All of the while I never knew

I think that possibly, maybe I’m falling for you
Yes there’s a chance that I’ve fallen quite hard over you.
I’ve seen the waters that make your eyes shine
Now I’m shining too

Because oh because
I’ve fallen quite hard over you

If I didn’t know you, I’d rather not know
If I couldn’t have you, I’d rather be alone

I never knew just what it was about this old coffee shop
I love so much
All of the while I never knew
I never knew just what it was about this old coffee shop
I love so much
All of the while, I never knew

All of the while, all of the while,
It was you
“Kids React to Gay Marriage Ruling”
by Fine Brothers Entertainment (on YouTube)

Things to think about:

- Range/depth of comprehension on:
  - the state vs. federal debate
  - religious opposition
  - the extent of religious freedom
  - conflict between old religious texts and modern values
  - conflicts between two aspects of the same religion
  - nature of sexuality
  - historical context/significance
- Lucas
- Reluctance? Hesitancy?

Quotes:
- “If you’re not able to marry somebody that you love, then what is the point?”
- “Hi, have you heard of gay and lesbian people?”
- “One thing, it’s religion about God, and one thing it’s about rights. They should be able to do this. Should we do what’s right or should we follow the way of God? It’s kind of hard to make that decision.” (a 9 year old said this?!)
- “Twelve more years until college!”

Salient points:
- The importance of education/good parenting
- Kids understand more than they get credit for
- Should we talk to kids about controversial subjects?
  The perspective that innocence grants us
Appendix B

Public Session 1 Materials

Poster
Lesson Plan

The following portion of the document that I’ve enclosed in [[double brackets]] is the lesson plan I used to guide my moderation of this session:

[“bell-ringer” – three words to describe the following song. If you want some framework for picking words, you could do 1 for the music, 1 for the lyrics, 1 for the message, but don’t feel confined to thinking along those terms

**Hot Air Balloon**

When we’re done – share!

-on the board

-or just aloud

(don’t necessarily limit the discussion element, but be conscious of where it goes and how deep it gets initially)

My three words: **dream**/(imagination), **create**(vision), and **adventure**

**observation, reality, precision, description, authentic, genuine,**

these are hopefully gonna be your theme words throughout the session – what I’m hoping is that if I’ve organized and sequenced this well, you’ll be able to trace them throughout the session, and they’ll keep popping up for you. So don’t forget them. Use them as your framework for the rest of our experiences today

and now for my writing:

**HD Existence**

(after reading, give brief explanation/clarification)
now, writing activity: “So I have a question for you. What is something that you notice about every day life, that maybe most people don’t? What is something you wish people appreciated more? What is a little thing in life that to you, is actually pretty significant? See if you can connect any of this to your theme words – maybe start there for inspiration”

[10-15 min. discussion]

so now….why imagination?

we’re talking about appreciating the little things in life – and I think that’s hard. I think it’s so easy to overlook all these things. And I think it really takes a good bit of imagination for us to really look closer at every day things and really see the beauty. But I think as we grow up, sometimes we need reminders on how to do that… it can be hard for adults to be imaginative, but I don’t think it’s something we’ve lost – just something we’ve lost touch with. We’re out of practice, because we tricked ourselves into thinking that adults aren’t supposed to play pretend anymore. But we can always return within ourselves and find those aspects of our soul that never grow up.

For me, one of the best sources of inspiration to remember how to imagine is kids shows. The really good ones are tremendously creative and refreshing just to remember how kids think you know? So I’d like us to actually watch one now, a cartoon, one of my favorites – the cartoon network gem: “Adventure time.” [brief idea explanation] So now I want us to actually watch an episode of adventure time [draw attention to packet], and immerse yourself in it as if you were still 10. Remember what it’s like to dream while you’re awake.

**Adventure Time: Season 1, Ep. 23 “Rainy Day Daydream”**

Salient points—(turn these into questions somehow)

Using imagination
Jake’s side was imagination, finn’s was just reality (adventure)

Finn realized reality could be boring without imagination (or at least jake was)

Can you have fun with only imagination – only art?

Can you have fun with only reality – no embellishments?

Using imagination not to escape from reality, but to augment it

We always think the real world is so boring

So it’s tempting to use art as an escape from this world “getting lost in the music”

But I think if we are imaginative enough,

We can use art to remind ourselves

That the most beautiful things are sometimes right in front of us

And one final artwork I’d like to share with you all, that really epitomizes this way of thinking, is just a quick excerpt from my favorite play of all time, “Our Town” by Thornton Wilder [brief explanation of plot]

Return to theme words, reexamine in terms of the whole session. Would you still use those words to sum up your experiences? Or would you revise or expand upon or clarify them? New words entirely? Or do you understand your old words in a new context now? How would you reframe your experiences in this theme of imagination, given what you’ve experienced now? Sum up your entire experiences now into the main takeways you’ve gotten today. Three new (or same) words.

Excerpt from Our Town]
Attendee Packet

The following item is the physical guiding packet for this session.

The Recital Liberated: Where Art ends and Life begins
by Jake Russo

Session 1: Imagination
using our creative minds to see the dreams that walk amidst reality
"Hot Air Balloon"
by Owl City

We wrote a prelude to our own fairytale
And bought a parachute at a church rummage sale
And with a mean sewing machine and miles of thread
We sewed the day above L.A. in navy and red.
We round a racetrack through your mom’s kitchen chairs
And fought the shadows back down your dark basement stairs.
I lit a match and let it catch to light up the room
And then you yelled as we beheld an old maroon hot air balloon

I'll be out of my mind
and you’ll be out of ideas pretty soon.
So let's spend the afternoon
in a cold hot air balloon.
Leave your jacket behind.
Lean out and touch the treetops over town.
I can’t wait to kiss the ground wherever we touch back down.

We drank the great lakes like cold lemonade
And both got stomach aches sprawled out in the shade.
So bored to death you held your breath and I tried not to yawn.
You make my frown turn upside down and now my worries are gone.

I'll be out of my mind
and you’ll be out of ideas pretty soon.
So let's spend the afternoon
in a cold hot air balloon.
Leave your jacket behind
Lean out and touch the treetops over town.
I can’t wait to kiss the ground wherever we touch back down.

I'll be out of my mind
and you’ll be out of ideas pretty soon.
So let’s spend the afternoon
in a cold hot air balloon.
Leave your jacket behind
Lean out and touch the treetops over town.
I can’t wait to kiss the ground wherever we touch back down.
High-Definition Existence (6 PM)

light creates the images we see,
but at six o’clock in the spring
it goes so magnificently far
as to imbue each picture with a radiance
as if that tree
that mountain
that house
becomes a star trapped on Earth—
it’s not merely being illuminated,
it’s the one doing the illuminating.
the light is not reflecting off of it,
the light is piercing it,
permeating its appearance,
and pulsating through it,
and out of it.
from it.

it acts as a window or a cloud
not just throwing the light back,
but keeping it.
swallowing it without extinguishing it
and allowing it to engulf every molecule of its entire being.
it becomes the light.
the surface the light reveals
pales in comparison
to the impossibly spectacular divinity
that blazes from where the light transcends surfaces.

when the Sun hits the trees
at six o’clock in the spring,
the sky becomes a flood light.
leaves become light bulbs
branches become torches,
shining like moons
igniting reality.

isn’t it funny
that the video games we like the best
are the ones that look the most like real life?
we’re so focused on creating better graphics on our televisions,
that we forget
that we already live
in High-Definition Existence.
High Definition Existence: Response Question

What is something you notice about every day life, that maybe most people don’t? As in, what is something you wish people appreciated more? Describe something in life that seems like a little thing, but to you, is actually pretty significant. *(Try to see if you can connect any of this to your theme words.)*

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**Adventure Time – Season 1, Ep. 23: “Rainy Day Daydream”**
created by Pendleton Ward on Cartoon Network

**Things to think about:**
- Can you enjoy life living only in imagination – only creation, only art?
- Can you enjoy life living only in reality – no embellishments, no escapes?
  Using imagination not to escape from reality, but to reveal its beauty.
Appendix C

Public Session 2 Materials

Poster

“The Recital Liberated: Where Art ends and Life begins” — session 3:

**Intuition**

*connecting to the cosmic flow of universal truth,*

*the idea that there is something more*

Jake Russo
Room 117, Music Building 1
Friday, November 6th at 7 PM
Lesson Plan

The following portion of the document that I’ve enclosed in [[double brackets]] is the lesson plan I used to guide my moderation of this session:

[[“bell-ringer”: three words activity

Glorious

My three words are: intuition/inspiration (simply knowing what’s right, how we get ideas), faith (trusting that intuition), potential (everything that could happen), action (making a choice, based in trust)/purpose (what it all means), trust

faith (not religious, but just trusting what you know/feel to be right), doubt (in what’s established), agency (to decided which is right), dreams, action, ideas

Is It Just Me?

Writing activity: “Describe a “spiritual” experience you’ve had that made you believe there’s something more to life, or that there’s something else out there. Be it a recurring aspect of life, a memory, or just a feeling—describe what makes you believe in what you believe in, whether it’s a god(dess), a force, or just some big unexplainable Thing.

Or conversely, describe something about life that makes you think there isn’t anything else—nothing more than the concrete parts of life we can clearly observe or measure in some way, the stuff we know for sure.”

so what you just read is my answer, what are yours?

[don’t let this go too long]
(an exercise in probing what we already trust, what we already believe, the moments from our own lives where intuition has happened and been relevant. Like bringing up prior knowledge/experience)

So… why intuition?

condensed version: spirituality isn’t provable, it’s something we feel that we just know, trusting our gut – our intuition. And I think we’re so attached to these moments because if there is something else, then it give us more reassurance that all of this actually means something. And if we are reassured that life in general has a purpose, it helps us believe that each of our individual lives have purposes too, and gives us courage to try to discover what that purpose is – trusting our intuitive ideas about our future to lead us down the road to creating it

**Heroes**

0:00 – 2:35 – 6:45
-peter and symone and nathan
-suresh
11:05 – 13:00 (2 mins)
-peter dreams of flying
17:53 – 20:26 (2.5 mins)
-peter & nathan, getting mom out of the police station
28:33 – 32:36 (4 mins)
-peter and nathan offering him a job, then peter catching mohinder’s cab
39:27 – 40:00 (.5 mins)
-peter getting symone’s call
44:12 – 44:46 (.5 mins)
-peter and symone getting to Isaac, peter seeing isaac’s painting
48:42 – end (52:45) (4 mins)
-off the building we go

little more than 20 minutes total

so first go through and explain some of the plot elements:
-Mohinder is the son of a geneticist, and is one himself, continuing his father’s research on tracking down people with a certain genetic marker that his father believed meant they had special abilities

-Isaac, Peter, Nathan, and their mom all have abilities

-Isaac does indeed paint the future (though can’t control it)

-Nathan is actually the one who can fly; it’s discovered later that Peter is an empathy, meaning he sort of absorbs and takes on other people’s powers

Peter knows Nathan doesn’t care because he denies what Peter’s intuition knows to be true – all the flying stuff, feelings of specialness.

Peter’s in touch with his imagination, his abilities, childlike dreams and desires, angela (Peter’s mom)’s cynicism, love and selflessness are overrated, or unwise or impractical, at odds with Peter’s heart and trust in both himself and his gut. That, and Nathan’s admonishing “grow up,” are sort of tests of Peter’s faith.

Peter’s crisis moment after those tests, wanting to “stop living for other people, no idea what i’m supposed to do” – but much to the chagrin of Angela and Nathan, he falls back on what he feels is right, his most fundamental core beliefs about himself, leading him to trust it enough to jump off a building – it’s time for him to be someone

Now I’m not saying we should all be jumping off of buildings in the name of trusting our guts. But we can figuratively “take that leap” in other ways.

Now tying trust in intuition to using it to truly trust our gut and trust ourselves and know what we want and make decisions about where we want to go based on what we know we want or need or have to do, what we perhaps believe we are destined for.
so as one final example of trusting fate, faith, spirituality, whatever way we experience the push of intuition to lead us in the right direction, here’s astonishing (explain premise, she’s about to leave for new york?? to be a writer and leave her life behind to do something new and exciting and also risky and riddled with the potential for failure.) and I think this is just a great example of that idea of trusting what we feel, what we believe, even if it doesn’t automatically move us in the exact right direction, that intuitive knowledge about ourselves and what we want is what gives us the courage to try. So here is Sutton foster singing astonishing from little women.

Ask to again think of three words to describe music, lyrics, and message, comparing to original theme words – seeing if those still apply/coming up with new ones if inspired to do so

Astonishing]
Attendee Packet

The following item is the physical guiding packet for this session.

The Recital Liberated: Where Art ends and Life begins
by Jake Russo

Session 2: Intuition
connecting to the cosmic flow of universal truth
the idea that there is something more
“Glorious”
by Muse

Rose-tinted view
And satellites that compromise the truth
I wanted more
With the cuts and the bruises
Touch my face
A hopeless embrace

Faith, it drives me away
But it turns me on
Like a strangers love
It rockets through the universe
It fuels the lies, it feeds the curse
We, too, could be glorious

I need to believe
But I still want more
With the cuts and the bruises
Don’t close the door
On what you adore

Faith, it drives me away
But it turns me on
Like a strangers love
It rockets through the universe
It fuels the lies, it feeds the curse
We, too, could be glorious
Is It Just Me?

it is raining, like so many times before in my life.
I open the windows
so the storm winds can air out my room, and my heart.

there are so many times
that I feel like I’m living in a world
that only makes sense until I try to tell someone about it.
does the rain smell as good to you as it does to me?
does the sun shine as brightly as I think it does?
the sky is a painting that is alive but I’m not sure if anyone else sees it move.

I watch a storm that has just passed over me
recede—or maybe just continue—to the East.
I wonder if the thunder and lightning are waking people up
getting them to realize things they haven’t before.

I feel like I’m always dreaming,
I don’t just mean that I have lofty goals
or that I’m always wishing and hoping;
I feel like I am constantly experiencing a world that is dazzling and radiant
in a way that would only make sense if I were asleep.
and sometimes I feel like no one is in the dream with me
—not to say that I am alone,
but it’s almost like how sometimes, when you’re dreaming
and you try to scream but can’t
or you do, but no one hears it;
it’s not that there’s no one there, or that they’re not listening—
because they hear me when I make small talk—
but they don’t hear me when I scream.

the clouds start to break
and a patch of blue appears in the shape of...
two letters, a cross, a star,
a butterfly, a brain, a shark,
a dragon breathing fire at an airplane

is it just me...
or do rain and thunderstorms
feel significant somehow?
like the markers of...change.
I’m not talking about changes in humidity or temperature
I’m talking about changes in the world
not the kind you can see,
and maybe not even the kind you can feel.
but the kind that creep into your brain and heart bit by bit:
the kind we cannot stop.

I don’t know why
but I’ve always felt
that rain is synonymous with change
something new
and always something better.
it is certainly refreshing,
and there is its obvious association with growth,
the way it makes the natural world grow,
but I always feel it in my heart too,
that growth.

this is what I’m talking about
this is one of the kinds of things I think about
is this vision of rain
part of my eternal dream?
am I the only one who hears the Earth-Music?
do other people think about things in a way that is unexplainable
but still seems to make sense?
sometimes it feels more like knowing than thinking;
that’s how vivid the dream is.

I feel like I’m supposed to be able to fly
but I’ve forgotten how.
it’s not that I can’t,
it’s more like I can’t quite remember.

is it just me...
or sometimes,
does it feel like the sky really is the limit?...
I want to claw my way through that blue fog
and reach my dreams
that soar above even the limit of the sky
I shoot for the stars
but my dreams are like nebulae
beyond even the stars
I have to go further

because I get the feeling
that when I arrive
I will look around, and find
that it is not just me.
Is It Just Me?: Response Prompt

Describe a “spiritual” experience you’ve had that made you believe there’s something more to life, or that there’s something else out there. Be it a recurring aspect of life, a memory, or just a feeling—describe what makes you believe in what you believe in, whether it’s a god(dess), a force, or just some big unexplainable Thing.

Or conversely, describe something about life that makes you think there isn’t anything else—nothing more than the concrete parts of life we can clearly observe or measure in some way, the stuff we know for sure.

Selected Scenes from Heroes – Season 1, Ep. 1: “Genesis”
created by Tim Kring on NBC

Things to think about:
- Peter’s “spiritual moments”
  - dreams of flying
  - “connection” to Nathan
- Tests of Peter’s faith
  - his mother’s cynicism
  - his brother’s admonishing “Grow up.”
- Coincidences (or not?) that effectively confirm Peter’s beliefs
  - catching Mohinder’s cab
  - seeing Isaac’s painting
- Peter’s subsequent crisis of identity, falling back on his most fundamental core beliefs to guide the way (trusting what he feels is right, and the lengths to which he goes to prove/test his faith)
"Astonishing" from *Little Women*
music by Jason Howland, lyrics by Mindi Dickstein

JO:
Who is he?
Who is he with his marry me?
With his ring and his marry me,
the nerve, the gall.

This is not,
Not what was meant to be.
How could he ruin it all
With those two words?

I thought I knew him
Thought that he knew me
When did it change?
What did I miss?

A kiss,
When I thought all along,
That we were meant to find frontiers,
How could I be so wrong?

And I need,
How I need my sisters here
If I can’t share my dreams
What were they for?

I thought our promise
Meant that we would never change
and never part.
I thought together,
We’d amaze the world.
How can I live my dreams or even start
when everything has come apart.

I thought home was all I’d ever want
My attic all I’d ever need.
Now nothing feels the way it was before
And I don’t know how to proceed.
I only know I’m meant for something more
I’ve got to know if I can be
Astonishing
There's a life
That I am meant to lead
A life like nothing I have known
I can feel it
And it's far from here
I've got to find it on my own

Even now I feel it's heat upon my skin.
A life of passion that pulls me from within,
A life that I am aching to begin.
There must be somewhere I can be
Astonishing
Astonishing

I'll find my way
I'll find it far away
I'll find it in unexpected and unknown
I'll find my life in my own way
Today

Here I go
And there's no turning back
My great adventure has begun
I may be small
But I've got giant plans
To shine as brightly as the sun

I will blaze until I find my time and place
I will be fearless,
Surrendering modesty and grace
I will not disappear without a trace
I'll shout and start a riot
Be anything but quiet
Christopher Columbus
I'll be Astonishing
Astonishing
Astonishing
At Last
Appendix D

Video Recordings

To supplement this document, I have uploaded a partial recording of the second session of the Recital Liberated (themed “Imagination”), consisting of the first two artworks and corresponding activities, to the Schreyer Honors College Electronic Honors Theses archive at https://honors.libraries.psu.edu/search/.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


College Board SAT (2012). College-Bound Seniors: Total Group Profile Report. (See table 18.)


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EDUCATION

B.M.E. (Bachelor of Music Education), Honors in Music Education
The Pennsylvania State University – University Park, PA
Schreyer Honors College
  • Senior Thesis: “The Recital Liberated: Where Art Ends and Life Begins”

STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Williamsport Area School District Jan. – May 2015
Williamsport, PA 17701

Williamsport Area Middle School
7th and 8th Grade General Music, Choir, and Musical
  • Built collaborative learning environments in which a general population of students could explore musical concepts
  • Lead individualized and group instruction on playing techniques of guitar, world percussion, and Orff instruments
  • Engaged students in discussions of the ways music can evoke emotional response, studying the different impact of contrasting styles of music (e.g. film scores)
  • Fostered student appreciation for significant historic and modern performers and composers, via interactive demonstrations of the musicians' life, works, and achievements
  • Coached individual cast members of Seussical, Jr. on the vocal and acting techniques of successful stage performance
  • Rehearsed sectionals of male choir members on the techniques of vocal sound production and effective ensemble singing

Lycoming Valley Intermediate School
4th, 5th, and 6th Grade Bands and Instrumental Lessons
  • Lead individualized and small-group explorations of beginning and intermediate musical concepts on all instruments (woodwinds, brass, and percussion)
  • Guided large group instrumental ensembles in the endeavor of preparing musical performances as a cohesive unit, building the skills of thinking as one in concepts of time, sound, and expression
  • Ensembles rehearsed:
    o 4th Grade Concert Band
    o 5th Grade Concert Band
    o 6th Grade Concert Band
    o 5th Grade Jazz Band
    o 6th Grade Jazz Band
    o 5th and 6th Grade Percussion Ensemble
Professional Organizations

**Member of:**
- National Association for Music Education
- Pennsylvania Music Educators Association
- Pennsylvania State Educators Association
- North American Saxophone Alliance

Performing Experience

**Member of the following ensembles while at Penn State:**
- Symphonic Wind Ensemble – Spring 2014–Fall 2015 (4 semesters)
- Symphonic Band – Fall 2012–Fall 2013 (3 sem.)
- Marching Blue Band – Fall 2012–Fall 2013 (2 seasons)
- Glee Club – Spring 2014–Fall 2014 (2 sem.)
- Graduate Saxophone Quartet – Fall 2014–Spring 2015 (2 sem.)
- Saxophone Ensemble – Fall 2012–Fall 2015 (7 sem.)

**Solo/Joint Performances and Projects at Penn State:**
- Recorded 2 solo saxophone pieces and 1 self-arranged saxophone quartet with Bob Klotz (Sound Engineer), David Stambler (Producer), Agatha Wang (Collaborative Pianist), and Jacob Bernat (Additional Saxophones), Fall 2015
- “The Recital Liberated” (3 separate events), Fall 2015
- Junior Saxophone Recital, Spring 2015
- Joint Sophomore Saxophone Recital with Danna Cheung, Spring 2014

**Additional Performances at Penn State:**
- MOSAIC 2015, with the Symphonic Wind Ensemble
- MOSAIC 2014, with the Symphonic Wind Ensemble, the Penn State Glee Club, and the Penn State Saxophone Quartet
- MOSAIC 2013, with the Penn State Marching Blue Band
- The President’s Concert 2014, with the Symphonic Wind Ensemble at the Kimmel Center, Verizon Hall, Philadelphia, PA
- The President’s Concert 2013, with the Symphonic Wind Ensemble at the Lincoln Center, Alice Tully Hall, New York City, NY
- Featured Performer on the Faculty Recital of Dr. David Stambler, Spring 2015

Honors and Awards

- Dean’s List all semesters
- Jury Recognition Recital, Fall 2015
- Jury Honors Recital, Spring 2014
- Schreyer Honors College Academic Excellence Scholarship
- **Publication:** Research Poster at PMEA 2016 Conference, “Beyond Traditional Reflective Practice: Alternative Approaches to Learning” (Clements, Ellenberger, Russo, Waltmyer)

Language Proficiency

- Conversational in **Spanish**