Music History and Appreciation **Fall 2026**

Instructor: Mr. Sean Gower
Classroom: Music Room, FA3
Email: sgower@spxkc.org
Phone: 816-453-3450 ext. 415

Availability: 7:30 am (Mon, Tues, Wed, Fri), 8:20am (Thurs), after school, and during study halls. Students and parents: please do not hesitate to reach out to me!

Course Description

What makes great music? What is artistry, and how can a deeper understanding of artistry across musical styles help us to live deeper, more reflective lives?

This course introduces students to great music across genres with a focus on classical, jazz, rock, and hip hop. We will study the artistry of famous composers like Mozart and Beethoven as well as contemporary icons like the Beatles, Taylor Swift, and Kendrick Lamar. Across these examples, we will attain insight into how great music expands our knowledge of the world, our creativity, our relationships with others, and our faith.

Course Objectives

- To reflect critically on what makes certain kinds of musical pieces or styles "artistic"
- To understand the values and characteristics that define different periods of music history
- To consider how the music we listen to affects us emotionally, psychologically and philosophically
- To move beyond simplistic descriptions of music ("I like it," "I don't like it")
- To learn to converse with others about art, beauty, and culture

Required Materials (bring to all classes)

Spiral Notebook with 5 dividers, used only for this class
Lined Loose Leaf Paper
Pencils/Pens
Red Pen

Grades/Assignments

Assessment Type	Frequency	Points each	Semester points	% of grade
Participation and Engagement	Weekly	5	90	~12%
Music Listening Worksheets	Weekly	5	90	~12%
Weekly Quiz and Homework Check	Weekly	8	144	~18%
Notebook Organization / Music History Portfolio	Periodic	5	30	~4%

Unit Tests with Essay Paragraph	6	50	300	39%
Final Exam	1	~115	115	15%

*Homework will consist mainly of reading and listening assignments, tested in class.
*All numbers are provisional and subject to change.

Total Semester Points: ~769

Comment on A-Level Work

An A is awarded to work that demonstrates high achievement, thoughtfulness, ambition, and maturity. Students who consistently produce A-level work develop their own ideas rather than rushing, review course materials regularly, remain organized and prepared, ask questions, and contribute substantively to class discussions.

Classroom Expectations

1. **Restroom breaks:** Use the restroom before class whenever possible. Except in emergencies or for an approved accommodation, students should not leave during lecture, class discussion, or focused listening. Ask during independent work or arrive early.

2. **Engagement:** Students must remain awake, upright, and engaged during class. A student who is ill or needs assistance should speak with me privately.

3. **Class materials:** Personal materials unrelated to this class (purses, etc.) must remain in the designated area unless otherwise directed.

4. **Focused listening:** The room will be silent during music listening so that everyone can hear, think, and form an independent response.

5. **Make-up work:** After an absence, a student needs to speak with me within two days of returning about a plan for make-up work. I generally allow one week maximum for make-up work. Do not ask about make-up work during the class lecture.

Academic Integrity and AI Use
All submitted work must represent the student's own thinking and writing. Students may not present language or ideas generated by another student, a website, or an AI tool as their own.

I encourage students to use AI (ChatGPT, Claude) to practice using musical terms. You might listen to a song, consider how you would describe a musical feature like the melody, and then ask ChatGPT, "Analyze the melody in X song for me." Compare your response to the AI response. Do not, however, use AI for any written assignment in this class.

Rubrics for Success in this Class

Binder Checks / Music History Portfolio

"An organized space leads to an organized mind."

Student binders should be organized with dividers into the following sections:

1. Unit Notes / Powerpoint Notes
2. Essential Concept Sheets
3. Listening Worksheets
4. Quizzes/Tests
5. Extra Paper

Binder Check / Portfolio Rubric

5/5	Binder is organized with all papers in proper sections and does not have loose papers.
3/5	Binder is partially organized but has some papers misfiled or missing.
0/5	Binder is unorganized and/or significant amount of papers are lost.

Listening Worksheets Rubric

- Worksheets usually require 4-sentence responses for each question. Students must write complete sentences with proper grammar and capitalization.
- **A sentence only counts if it adds a real idea.** (Repeating information, "That is all," or "I don't know what else to say" do not count as sentences.)

5/5	Complete, serious effort; meets or exceeds required sentence length; discusses at least one specific musical or lyrical detail.
4/5	All responses are complete but are somewhat general or thin.
3/5	One response is incomplete, but others are complete.
2/5	Multiple responses are minimal or rushed; and/or lacks complete sentences or capitalization.
0-1/5	Not turned in, unserious, or contains many fake filler sentences.

Participation and Engagement Rubric

5/5	On task, respectful, and always prepared. Offers at least one substantive comment or question in class discussions each week.
3/5	Needs reminders to stay on task; and/or class contribution is limited.
0-1/5	Disruptive, disrespectful, or off task; and/or class contribution is nonexistent.

Short-Essay Paragraph Rubric

Recommended structure for your paragraph:

1. Topic sentence answers the question (1 sentence)
2. Example 1: name a detail in a song/piece + explanation (2-3 sentences)
3. Example 2: name a detail in a song/piece + explanation (2-3 sentences)
4. Example 3: name a detail in a song/piece + explanation (2-3 sentences)
5. Final sentence: what your paragraph shows about a unit theme, essential concept, or bigger question (1 sentence)

An A-level response will include these parts and will include 10 sentences or more.

A	Awarded to students whose work shows academic maturity and ambition. The work would inspire conversation with people passionate about this subject matter. The student worked hard and succeeded in making his/her thoughts personal, memorable, and compelling. **Technical components:** • The topic sentence answers the question in a way that is unique and personal, suggesting the writer would be an interesting person to converse with on this topic. • Provides three well-chosen examples that develop the writer's viewpoint significantly • Each example describes a specific detail from a song/piece (often 1 sentence to describe), and explanation that enriches the point the writer wishes to make (1-2 sentences or more). • Sentence structure is creative and varied. • Shows creative word choice and uses correct capitalization, grammar, and punctuation. Avoids "text talk." • A concluding sentence rounds out by connecting the paragraph to a unit theme, an essential concept, or a bigger question of interest. This sentence answers the question "so what?" • Contains at least 10 sentences that are all substantive.
B	Awarded for work that is passable and exhibits an acceptable knowledge of the subject matter. The work is neither excellent nor terrible. It is not lacking in any way, but neither is there a brilliance to the work that merits praise. **Technical components:** • Topic sentence answers the essay question but is basic, non-specific, or unoriginal. (Q: What makes this a great song? A: This is a great song, and in this paragraph I will tell you why.) • The writer provides 2-3 examples to support the topic sentence. The examples are adequate but may not be the best-chosen examples.

	• The writer explains the examples, but the explanation could be more extensive or more thoughtful. It does not bring the reader to say, "Wow! You just opened my eyes to see your claim in a whole new way! Now I see how and why you are thinking that way!" • A concluding sentence is present but it merely repeats something stated earlier. It does not turn the reader in a new and interesting direction. • Contains 8-10 sentences.
C	Awarded for work that was a partial success. The work exhibited basic knowledge but was deficient in some manner and did not fully answer the question. **Technical components:** • A topic sentence is missing, unclear, or basic. • The writer provides 2-3 examples but passes over them in a manner that appears hasty, rushed, or undeveloped. • The examples may be either unspecific or lack explanation, or it is not clear how the examples add up to a larger point. • The paragraph contains small factual inaccuracies or confusions. • The writer may have some sentences that are unclear and cause the reader to say, "what exactly do you mean by this?" • May contain errors in capitalization, grammar, and punctuation. • Contains at least 7 sentences.
D/E	Given to work that does not meet minimum standards for submission. There is not much evidence that the student understood the submission or made an honest, valiant effort to meet the requirements of the assignment.

Reading Strategies

- The most effective reading strategy for all non-fiction reading is to read multiple times.
    - First, do a quick scan: notice if there are sections, bolded words, titles, dates. This gives you a kind of roadmap.
    - Second, do a full reading. Make occasional little notes about your own thoughts. Circle or highlight one or two interesting points (do not overdo this).
    - Third, do a quick scan to review the ground you've covered. This maps the whole reading clearly in your mind.
- After reading, make a few notes.
    - In 1-2 sentences, describe the main point the author is trying to make.
    - What is one piece of evidence he/she uses? Do you find that evidence convincing for making the point?
    - What is one thing you found interesting? (What was its impact on you, what was a term you found useful for understanding the world, or what was a realization you had?)