

Ottawa University Continuing Education

Course: ???

Soundtrack to My Classroom

Instructor: Tamara Sinkler

Location: On-line

Dates: Fall 2026

Credit hours: 3

Course Description

This course explores the power of music as an educational tool to engage students, build community, and support learning across content areas. Teachers will discover practical strategies for integrating music into daily instruction— through background music, analyzing lyrics, or student-created songs. Participants will examine how music supports emotional reflection, memory retention, and creativity, and how it can help with inclusion and cultural awareness in diverse classrooms. Through hands-on activities, lesson planning, and reflection, educators will gain ideas using music to enhance classroom climate and academic success. No musical experience is needed.

Course Objectives

At the end of the course, participants will be able to:

- Create a realistic plan as to how to use different kinds of music across the curriculum in several content areas.
- Apply many new and creative ideas using different kinds of music in the classroom.
- Understand ways to incorporate music to develop alternative projects for students with Individual Education Plans.
- Create and assess how to meet curriculum guidelines and set clear objectives to set up success for a variety of students using creative alternatives.
- Identify the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of using music in education.
- Incorporate music purposefully into lesson plans to support student engagement and retention.
- Use music to promote classroom management, transitions, and positive routines.
- Explore multicultural music as a tool for inclusion and cultural appreciation.

Methods of Instruction

This course will be conducted on-line and will utilize discussion boards, student postings,

reflection papers, reading assignments and portfolio projects. The class will be looking at some of the new, inventive children's literature and discussing it on-line. Students will be expected to engage in all discussions and group activities, and complete and post all assignments by the due dates.

Textbook/Materials

Learning Management System: Internet access, connection to Canvas learning management system portal.

Course Content Outline:

Week One

Setting the Mood and Management Hacks

- Please introduce yourself in the discussion thread labeled Introduction. Who are you, what content area/s do you teach and what is your educational background?

- Read the article below and react in module one. What are your thoughts on this article? Did you learn anything new? What did you think of the ideas in this article? Do you currently use music in your classroom? If so, how? Share any other thoughts you have on the article.

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/using-music-support-deeper-learning/>

- Use background music to influence the atmosphere and focus level in your room:

Address each of the ideas below. Do you think each one is a good idea? Why or why not? Have you used any of these ideas? Would you like to start using any of them?

List two songs you think would be great to play as students arrive in your room and explain why.

Morning or entry music – Play upbeat or calm tunes as students arrive to set a positive tone.

Focus/study time – Lo-fi, classical, instrumental, or nature sounds can improve concentration.

Transitions – Use short songs or sound effects to signal when it's time to switch tasks or clean up.

End-of-class cue – A consistent “exit song” can help students pack up calmly.

Time management – Use songs to limit activities (e.g., “You have until the song ends to finish your notes”).

Week Two

Enhancing Learning

- React in the discussion thread. In the high school I teach in, we would have minute music for the minute bell before you are tardy to class. In the last year, we have stopped doing it. Some teachers loved the music and thought it prompted kids to get to class. Others thought it was just distracting. What are your thoughts on this? Do you do anything like this at your school? Would it work well at your school?

- Lesson plan ideas. Take a look.

Content songs – Find or create songs related to your subject (e.g., the “Photosynthesis Song,” grammar raps, math jingles).

Language Arts

Lesson: “Song Lyrics as Poetry” (Middle/High School) Objective:

Analyze figurative language and themes in song lyrics.

Activity:

- Play a clean, school-appropriate song (e.g., “Count on Me” by Bruno Mars or “Fight Song” by Rachel Platten).
- Have students annotate lyrics for similes, metaphors, imagery, and theme.
- Compare the lyrics to a traditional poem with a similar theme.
- Students write their own short poem inspired by a favorite song.
- Mnemonic melodies – Set vocabulary or key facts to familiar tunes.

History/Social Studies

Lesson: “Music Through the Decades” (Middle/High School) Objective: Explore how music reflects social and political change.

Activity:

- Students research major events and pick one representative song.
- Present how the song’s lyrics and sound reflect that time period.
- Create a “Soundtrack of History” timeline for the classroom wall.

Math

Lesson: “Rhythm Fractions” (Elementary/Middle School) Objective: Connect musical rhythms to fractions and patterns.

Activity:

- Demonstrate how whole notes, half notes, quarter notes, and eighth notes represent fractions.
- Clap out different note combinations to equal one whole measure.
- Use percussion instruments or classroom objects to perform their composition.
- Rhythm for recall – Use clapping or chanting patterns to help students remember sequences or processes.

Science

Lesson: “The Science of Sound” (Elementary/Middle School)

Objective: Investigate sound waves and vibration.

Activity:

- Use rubber bands, bottles, or tuning forks to explore pitch and vibration.
- Discuss how instruments produce sound.
- Play different genres of music and analyze frequency/pitch.
- Students design their own “instrument” using recycled materials.

Foreign Language

Lesson: “Learn a Language Through Music” (Middle/High School) Objective:

Practice vocabulary, pronunciation, and cultural understanding.

Activity:

- Choose a popular song in the target language.
- Provide the lyrics with blanks and have students fill in as they listen.
- Students translate a verse or write a new one in the target language.

Early Childhood / Elementary

Lesson: “Learning Through Song”

Objective: Reinforce basic skills (alphabet, counting, days of the week, etc.) through

singing.

Activity:

- Let students create their own song to teach a topic to the class.
- Use familiar tunes to teach concepts (“Skip Counting Song,” “Planet Song,” etc.).

Explain how you could use at least two of the activities explained above. You can tweak them a bit to fit your content area or age level but explain how you could use two of them.

- Create two lesson plans or activities for your classroom with music. You may use any of the ideas above, one you have discovered, or one you already know about. These two lessons with music should be content related to what you teach. Make sure you have at least one objective and clearly explain each activity in detail. They can be related or build on each other within a unit. Please upload your lessons into Week Two.

- <https://etmonline.org/podcast/>

Choose two episodes to listen to from this podcast. Which did you choose and why? What did you learn? How did music impact education in each podcast you listened to? Was this useful? Did they provide any new ideas for you?

Week Three

Building Classroom Culture Use

Music for Classroom Community Building

Create shared experiences that connect students.

- **Theme songs:** Choose a class anthem that represents your values (“*Count on Me*” by Bruno Mars for teamwork).
- **Music and identity projects:** Have students create a short “soundtrack of me” playlist (3–5 songs that describe who they are).
- **Birthday or celebration songs:** Play a special tune for birthdays or achievements — it adds joy and ritual.
- **Brain breaks:** Add short dance or sing-along breaks — perfect for re-energizing long class periods. This can even be done with older students.
- **Global music week:** Feature songs from different cultures and languages, chosen by students.
- **Collaborative playlists:** Build a class playlist together for studying, celebrating, or motivation.

- Complete the theme song and music and identity project yourself. This means you are choosing the music for each reflecting on yourself. So, you will have one song for the theme and explain why and at least three songs for the identity part and explain why.

- <https://thehighlyeffectiveteacher.com/6-ways-to-build-a-positive-classroom-culture/>

Watch the video and read through this link(article). Respond to all six techniques. Discuss each one and decide if it is important and why. Be sure to address all six.

- Create two of your own activities or lessons that have to do with building community in your classroom. They must have an aspect of music in each activity. Please explain each one in detail, so that someone else could repeat the activity.

- In the discussion thread, choose one of your top all-time favorite songs. Why is it one of your favorites and what does it mean to you? What is the meaning of the song? Briefly explain. Do you relate it to a certain time in your life?

Week Four

Creative Expression

Objective: Encourage self-expression and reflection.

Background music: Playing calm lo-fi, classical, or instrumental tracks during independent work time can help students focus.

- Students should be doing some form of writing in every class. In the discussion thread, share what you teach and three writing activities you do in your class that you deem important. Explain each activity in detail. Could you incorporate any music with any of these assignments?

- Please complete the two activities below using your own songs. Complete both parts.

Activities for students:

- Students create a playlist of 3–5 songs that represent different moods or moments in their lives.

- Students Write a short reflection for each song — why it matters and how it makes them feel.

- A reflection essay. - You will be writing a one-page reflection essay on your personal philosophy on music and learning. This is your opinion. Where do you think music belongs in schools or does it? Where can it enhance learning? Where can it be a distraction? You need to find two articles that support some of the things you are saying for your music philosophy in schools. You should have the link to both articles

and highlight the important aspects. The topic could be how and why music supports learning but if you have another opinion that works too.

Week Five

Social Emotional Wellness

- What is your understanding of Social Emotional Learning and Deep Equity? Have you been using these terms in your school? If so, how? As a staff, do you feel like you make students feel comfortable in your school and classroom setting regardless of race or gender? Do you do any Social Emotional activities in your classroom? If so, please share. This should all be shared under Week Five for the discussion post.

Use Music for Social-Emotional Learning

Goal: Build empathy, reflection, and emotional literacy.

- Mood check-ins: Play short instrumental clips (calm, energetic, sad, etc.) and have students describe how it makes them feel. Create a list of ten songs you would use here and why. This might be an activity in Seminar or in a creative setting.
- Emotion playlists: Create playlists for focus, relaxation, or motivation and discuss when to use them. You will have three songs for when students should focus, three to relax to and three to motivate. You should list the song, why you chose it and when you will use it.
- Lyric reflections: Create a list of songs with powerful lyrics (e.g., “*Rise Up*” by Andra Day) to spark discussion about perseverance or kindness. Find ten songs and explain why they would be useful in this situation. This would be another activity that would be good in a seminar class.

Week Six

Final Research and Project

Final Discussion Post: You will go to module six for your final discussion. What was helpful in this course? What new idea did you find that you think you will use? What was your favorite picture book that you looked at? What could be a useful picture book for your classroom?

Final Project

Requirements:

Create this document, so that it is ready to use in the classroom. Make sure it has all the

directions and necessary requirements.

Music-Integrated Lesson Plan (Classroom-Ready)

What it is:

Design a full a mini-unit that uses music as a core teaching tool (not just background).

Include:

- Grade level & subject
- 4 to 5 learning objectives
- How music is used (listening, movement, lyric analysis, rhythm, instruments, creation) • 4 Student activities • Assessment:

At least one rubric, one exit ticket and one reflection should be part of the unit. This is along with the 4 student activities.

Examples:

- Using rhythm patterns to teach fractions
- Song lyrics to analyze figurative language
- Music + movement for SEL or classroom climate
- Deep Equity and SEL focused project: students share cultural background through music
- Students write a song to explain a science concept
- Rap or chant to summarize a historical event
- Soundtrack that represents a book's mood/theme

Course Requirements:

Course Requirements

Points

Hours

Reading and Reaction to
Articles

9 = 20 pts 180 total

4 hours

Response to Discussion Board

6 = 10 pts. 60 total

6 hours

Research / Essay Topics

1 = 30 pts. 30 total

13 hours

Reading picture books

Activities/ Lesson Plans from picture books

3 = 20 pts. = 60 total

15 hours

Final Research and project

150 total

7 hours

Total

480 points

45 hours

Assessments:

Discussions

DISCUSSION BOARD EXPECTATIONS: The discussion board is a crucial part of this class. Not only will you be asked to respond to questions about each module, but you will also need to read and respond to others to fully benefit from this learning experience.

Each module will include a discussion or reflection on the assigned reading and/or an assignment over the weekly topic. The learner will articulate what they have learned/plan to achieve, related to the specific focus.

Discussion questions/thread will appear in each module and will include questions about the weekly content. Students will be expected to post one original response and reply to at least 2 peers if applicable.

Prior to beginning the course please email me the email you prefer to use for your

Canvas account so that I may add you to the class.

Course Grades: This course is SATISFACTORY and UNSATISFACTORY. In order to receive credit for the course, students must complete all modules, discussion boards, written reflections in accordance to satisfactory requirements.

Rubrics:

Participation Rubric:

You will receive a participation grade for each module. The scoring is as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 3 | You participated in all components of the module. (S) |
| 2 | You participated in most components of the module. (S) |
| 1 | You participated in some components of |
| the module. (U) | 0 You did not participate |
| in the module. (U) | |

The sum of your participation grades will be included as a final pass/fail grade.

Discussion Thread Rubric

Initial Posting Above standards

This excellent posting reflected that the student read and understood the assigned material, referring specifically to assigned reading or related research. The posting has a clear purpose: to inform, persuade, or raise an interesting question. It may also provoke conversation or offer an opposing view of the devil's advocate. When appropriate, the posting refers to outside sources in supporting its arguments. Post is made early in the assignment period, giving fellow group members plenty of time to reply.

Initial Posting Below Standards

This posting does not reflect that the student did or understood the reading. This posting could have been made without the student doing any reading or research at all. The posting has no apparent purpose other than meeting the assignment requirement. It does not move the conversation forward or offer a reasoned opposing opinion. The posting fails to make appropriate reference to outside materials in supporting any arguments.

There are one or more proofing errors. Post is made at the last minute or late.

Replies Above Standard

Replies are substantive and reflect that the student read and thought about the assigned reading and additional sources posted by the person they are replying to. The reply moves the conversation forward or makes a reply to a question asked in response to their own posting. Replies are made over several days rather than crammed into due dates.

Replies Below Standard

Replies lack substance and do not reflect any reading or thought about the reading or additional sources. The reply does not move the conversation forward or answer a question presented. Postings are made late on the day the assignment is due so that it is difficult for others to respond.

Rubric for Reactions and Article Responses

	1 point	3 points	5 points
	Minimal	Proficient	Exemplary
Intellectual – Knowledge and thoughts			
No comments on prior knowledge and interests. Not related to experiences or textual references.			
Describes prior knowledge and interests in specific terms; relates topic to text.			
Outlines prior knowledge, impressions and misconceptions . Uses relevant skills, courses knowledge and specifics in text.			
Importance/ Significance			
Describes some ideas of the importance to the topic			
Describes importance to immediate and extended groups.			

Describes local and wider importance. Some explanation of why the topic is important to the immediate group.

Clear ideas/ additional information

Identifies additional sources but does not specifically discuss.

Refers to other sources and integrates some into paper.

Consulted other sources and integrates the information in the reaction paper.

Writing

Disorganize

d
thoughts.

Neat and organized thoughts.

Error free with clearly organized thoughts.

Rubric for all Projects and Activities

	1 point	3 points	5 points
	Minimal	Proficient	Exemplary
Accuracy of the	content		

Demonstrates content

(factual)

knowledge and understanding of material and activities for the proper book choices. Barely touches on the correct content with the books. Addresses some

of the appropriate content of the books. The

participant shows understanding of the presented

ideas. Several key concepts or main ideas are identified and addressed. Addresses the appropriate content. Shows exemplary understanding of the

presented

ideas. All key concepts or main ideas are identified and addressed.

Knowledge of content

Is able to integrate specific

knowledge in the activities and final project created.

Minimal Although making an attempt, the participant:

(1) poorly synthesizes material, (2) makes inappropriate connections to other topics, (3) does not correctly apply knowledge.

Proficient

When

appropriate, the participant can:

(1) synthesize material, (2) make appropriate connections to other topics, (3) correctly apply

knowledge		
appropriate, the	When	Exemplary
and concisely: (1) synthesize material, (2) make brilliant/unusual connections to other	participant can easily	
apply knowledge.	topics, (3) correctly	
Communication		
Communicate	tes	
objectives and requirement	s.	
Minimal		
Ideas wandering and repetitive. Poor or weak ability to express thoughts. Objectives and requirements unclear.		
Proficient		
The assignment is mostly concise and focused. Examples provide some detail.		
Material is fairly well organized. Objectives and requirements are fairly easy to understand.		Exemplary
The assignment is concise and focused. Examples are detailed. Material is well organized. Objectives and requirements very clear.		

Instructor Contact Information:

Instructor:

Tamara Sinkler

Telephone:

913-226-0244

E-mail:

Tsinkler913@gmail.com

Availability:

Please feel free to contact me by phone or email. We can arrange for an extended phone conversation at a mutually convenient time if needed.

Instructor Bio:

Tamara Sinkler has a Master's of Science in Education from The University of Kansas and a Master's of Science in Library Media from Pittsburgh University. Her background is teaching high school English and English and writing at a junior college. She has designed and developed continuing education courses for several universities involving special education, reading in the content area, young adult and children's literature, measuring outcomes and STEM Literacy. She is an instructor online for Ottawa University. She also currently runs the Teacher Education Program at a high school in Shawnee Mission School District.

Competency Assessment:

You will have several opportunities to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the principles taught in this course. The primary means of evaluating your work will be through practical application of the material. In the event that you have difficulty completing any of the assignments for this course, please contact me immediately. My email address and telephone number are listed on this syllabus. Please remember that instructors do not randomly assign grades. Students earn their grades and everyone has the same opportunity to earn a good grade.

Important Policies:

All course-specific policies for this course are spelled out here in this syllabus. However, additional university policies are located in the Policies folder in the Info & Policies section of Blackboard. You are responsible for reading and understanding all of these policies. All of them are important. Failure to understand or abide by them could have negative consequences for your experience in this course.

Editorial Format for Written Papers:

All written assignments are to follow the APA writing style guidelines for grammar, spelling, and punctuation. This online course includes information regarding the APA style under "Writing and Research Resources" in the **Resource Room** on the course menu in Blackboard.

Academic Integrity:

Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated at any level on any assignment. The reality of

cyberspace has made academic dishonesty even more tempting for some, but be advised that technology can and will be used to help uncover those engaging in deception. If you ever have a question about the legitimacy of a source or a procedure you are considering using, ask your instructor. As the University Academic Council approved on May 29, 2003, *“The penalty for plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty will be failure in the course in which the academic dishonesty occurred. Students who commit academic dishonesty can be dismissed from the university by the provost/director.”*

Please refer to **Academic Honesty** in the **Info & Policies** section of the online course menu for important information about Ottawa University’s policies regarding plagiarism and cheating, including examples and explanations of these issues.

Academic dishonesty also includes turning in work submitted for a grade in another course. For example, it would be considered academic dishonesty to turn in a paper that you wrote for English 101 as if you had written it for Philosophy 202. In addition, turning in a paper that you constructed by simply cutting and pasting sections from a paper you wrote previously, is also considered academic dishonesty. Although the consequences of plagiarism and/or academic dishonesty may vary, depending on the nature of the violation, the Ottawa University Student Handbook states, “The penalty for plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty will be failure in the course in which the academic dishonesty occurred” (p. 35).

Student Handbook

Please refer to your student handbook for all university regulations. The **Resource Room** on the course menu in Blackboard contains information about where to find the student handbook online for your campus.

Please see Info & Policies in Blackboard for additional university policies

