

Writing a Topic of Work

(Music in Context)

Read the SSABSA Stage 2 Music Curriculum Statement, to see the options open to you. You must choose two of the set topics, so it is recommended that you choose from differing styles and periods where possible. This is to provide a balance and create interest, as well as an ‘understanding and appreciation of music in its historical and contemporary social and cultural contexts, through research, critical analysis, and practice’. (SSABSA Stage 2 Music Curriculum Statement)

The curriculum statement says:

Section 1: (Core) Topics

This section consists of two parts, as listed below. From Part A students must study **two** core topics.

This section develops students’ knowledge of music in its historical and cultural context.

By studying individual works and their composers, listening to music, analysing, and discussing, students acquire an awareness and appreciation of music.

Part A: Core Topics

Each topic comprises the study of one or more set works in historical and cultural context, and an analysis of the work or works using a score, transcription, or chart.

Students are required to communicate their knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of musical style in writing.

The study of the set works requires students to:

- discuss music in its stylistic, historical, and cultural context;
- examine the following compositional and stylistic aspects: melody, harmony/tonality, rhythm/metre, timbre/dynamics, texture, form;
- use appropriate musical terminology;
- identify key compositional features;
- read musical scores/transcriptions/charts.

Assessment

Students undertake a *2-hour external examination* in which they analyse the two works studied for the core topics. They are required to write *two essays*. Students may bring scores, transcriptions, or charts to the examination to help them in their essays.

This assessment component is designed to assess all the learning outcomes. It is weighted at 40%

Criteria for Judging Performance

The student’s performance in the examination will be judged by the extent to which he or she demonstrates:

skills

To what extent does the student demonstrate skills in reading and analysing scores or charts?

knowledge

To what extent does the student appreciate the historical and cultural context of the music?

To what extent does the student use musical terminology appropriately?

How well does the student interpret the score or chart?

effectiveness

How clear and logical are the student’s responses to music?

Deciding on Your Topics

See Appendix 1 for a list of the set topics.

There are a few reasons why particular topics are chosen:

- you have favourites that you’d like to do
- the students choose (democratically) what they’ll study based on interest

- the resources you have at your disposal may have to dictate what you choose if you have a small budget

Those schools which still have resources in them from the old Analytical Studies, and even older History and Literature course, are in a good position to commence their preparation. Look to see what is lurking at the back of a long-forgotten cupboard. You may be pleasantly surprised!

Obtaining Resources

It is recommended that you have:

- all relevant recordings – preferably a copy for each student so that they can listen to the works at home (check for and obtain copyright permission where applicable)
- relevant scores/charts for each student
- student access to musical reference material (musical dictionaries, encyclopaedia, specialist books) where possible

Writing the Topic

There are a number of things to consider when studying a set work. Firstly, note what the topic title is and work from there. You will need to consider:

- the composer – life, works, times in which they lived, cultural/historical influences on the work
- the cultural, social and historical influences which abounded at the time the work was written
- the genre of the work – its construction and how this set work fits in to the pattern, style and development of the genre
- the stylistic features of the period that the work was written in, and what of these features can be found in the work
- an analysis of the work, including form, tonality, melody, rhythm/metre, instrumentation, harmony, texture, dynamics,
- compositional devices and features in use not covered above

How?

Your students are unlikely to be very experienced in studying a musical work, so will need all the guidance that you can provide. You can:

- aurally analyse the work before using a score
- prepare a series of notes (preferably handouts) for the students to expand upon (a summary, even in dot points, that outline the above)
- during class time fill out the notes to something more substantial (students to be constantly taking notes themselves and annotating their scores in pencil)
- provide a variety of musical references so that the students learn to use correct musical terminology
- set the students assignments which require them to research an aspect of your notes

The analysis

If you are in doubt about how to analyse the work, see the handout *De-mystifying Musical Analysis*. There are also some excellent publications available, including the Annie O. Warburton series *Analyses of Musical Classics*; Roger Kamien's *Music, An Appreciation*; and Machlis and Forney's *The Enjoyment of Music*, each of which contain enough of an analysis of some individual works to get you started on a more detailed one.

You can:

- listen to the work numerous times without a score to get the feel of it, identifying its main thematic material, and noting the instrumentation
- listen again, using a score, and lightly annotate the score to point out interesting features of the music
- initially prepare a basic outline of the structure of the work, including form; key structure; and melodic, rhythmic and harmonic development
- use class lessons to listen and follow the score, noting extra things as you study the work
- discuss the work as a class – students will pick up something new with each hearing
- use aural examples to illustrate the analytical and historical points you want to make, using examples from other works as well as the set works
- use aural examples from the set work to increase student's knowledge and skills in identifying compositional and stylistic features
- direct students in annotating their scores (in pencil) so that the structure of the work is always visible and obvious as they follow the score.

There are times when knowing the purpose for the work being studied can guide you in the analysis. Are there particular thematic motifs that refer specifically to a mood, person or event? Decide how the composer achieved the goal in writing the work – what compositional devices did he/she employ in doing this? Consider how effective these have been. Are they characteristic of the composer's individual style, or of the stylistic period in which they were written?

Finally...

Use the sample exam questions written by Aldis Sils and found on the SSABSA website (also in Appendix 2 at the end of these notes) to guide you in your preparation. They may also trigger other points you might want the students to consider.

Some Discussion Points

The following discussion points were prepared by Aldis Sils and is in the Support Materials on the SSABSA website – musc-ti-012.

To discuss music in its stylistic, historical, and cultural context, consider:

- Composed when? Date; Period of Music; Period in History
- Composed why? Commission; Personal edification; Earn a living
- Composed for whom? e.g. Commission; Dedication; Tradition; Self or other; specific performers; specific purpose; Contract

- Composition versus arrangement. Is any music borrowed or adapted?
- Was it published immediately or later? Why? By whom?
- How was it composed? e.g. collaborative; at Piano; Improvised.
- How was it originally performed? First performance? First recording?
- What purpose was it meant to serve? e.g. entertainment; listening; dancing; background; ceremonial or religious.
- Changes in context. Has its purpose changed over time?
e.g. Stage musical song to jazz standard; Ceremonial to Entertainment
- Musical Context: compare to other works of the time; same and other composers.
- Is it remarkable? How?

Preparing for Examination Essays

The following information was prepared by Aldis Sils and appears in Support Materials musc-ti-012.

- Markers will be looking for a depth of knowledge.
- Each essay should have at least 30 salient points that are explained, and supported with musical or factual examples.
- Of the 30 points, not more than 10 should be non-musical facts.
- Biographical details are important only in so far as they relate directly to the music being studied.

e.g. When discussing ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’, it is not as important to know John Lennon’s marital history, as the fact that he had a small son who inspired the title when he wrote it.

- *Candidates should identify examples in the music that illustrate points they are discussing.*

Some Types of Essays.

- Comparative
- Discussion

So...

Now you are armed with a starter kit. Preparing for the set topics will be a very rewarding experience as you discover what the composer has done in achieving his/her aims. You will delight in passing on this new knowledge to your students, in turn giving them a new appreciation of the finer points of music.

Enjoy your new areas of study!

Prepared by Lesley Duncan, 2006

Appendix 1

Topics from which to choose:

Topic 1: Bach: Music and Patronage

Set Work: Bach, JS – ‘Brandenburg Concerto No 5’.

Topic 2: Beethoven: Music Finds It’s Voice

Set Work: Beethoven –Symphony No 6. Op.68, ‘Pastoral’, Movements 1 and 3.

Topic 3: Stravinsky and Diaghilev

Set Work: Stravinsky – Petrouchka – First Tableaux

Topic 4: Australian Indigenous and Art Musics: Tradition Meets Innovation

Set Works: Sculthorpe – Requiem (with Obligato Didgeridoo)
Koehne – Inflight Entertainment
Yothu Yindi: Treaty Now

Topic 5: The Blues: Of Sadness and Joy

Set Works: Robert Johnson – ‘Sweet Home Chicago’
Muddy Waters – ‘Hoochie Coochie Man’
John Lee Hooker – ‘Boom Boom’
Eric Clapton – ‘I’m Tore Down’
B.B. King – ‘Why I Sing the Blues’ (On the *Best of B.B. King* MCA records)

Topic 6: Duke Ellington: Pianist, Composer, and Band Leader

Set Works: Ko Ko
East St Louis Toodle Oo
Take it Easy

Topic 7: Miles Davis: Jazz Comes of Age

Set Works: Now is the Time
So What
Petits Machins [Little Stuff]

Topic 8: The Beatles: Soundtrack of a Generation

Set Work: The Beatles – Songs from *Sergeant Pepper Lonely Heart’s Club Band*
Within You, Without You
A Day in the Life
Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds
She’s Leaving Home
When I’m Sixty-Four

Appendix 2

Sample exam questions

Materials Prepared by Aldis Sils

Copyright SSABSA - <http://www.ssabsa.sa.edu.au/support/arts/musc/musc-menu.htm> [musc-ti-011]

Topic 1: Bach: Music and Patronage

Set Work

Bach, JS – ‘Brandenburg Concerto No 5’.

With reference to Brandenburg Concerto No 5 explain the role of patronage in Bach’s musical output during his time at Cöthen.

Why was Prince Leopold happy to have Bach as his Kappellmeister? Refer to Brandenburg Concerto No 5.

What is a *concerto grosso* and why did Bach write the majority of his at Cöthen?

Topic 2: Beethoven: Music Finds It’s Voice

Set Work

Beethoven –Symphony No 6. Op.68, ‘Pastoral’, Movements 1 and 3.

Why is Beethoven’s 6th Symphony called the Pastoral. Answer with reference to the music and notions of Romantic philosophy.

How has Beethoven used the orchestra to express his Romantic ideas in Symphony No.6.?

How does Beethoven reconcile the demands of Classical form with the equal demands of Romantic emotion?

Topic 3: Stravinsky and Diaghilev: The Shock of the New

Set Work

Stravinsky – Petrouchka – First Tableaux

Describe the compositional techniques, musical devices, and instrumentation Stravinsky uses to portray the story of the Ballet Petrouchka.

How did Diaghilev’s commissions from Stravinsky influence the development of orchestral music?

‘Late 19th and early 20th century Russian composers are noted for their expressive use of orchestral colour.’

With reference to his ballet Petrouchka explain how the music of Stravinsky exemplifies this statement.

Topic 4: Australian Indigenous and Art Musics: Tradition Meets Innovation

Set Works

Sculthorpe – Requiem (with Obbligato Didgeridoo)

Koehne – Inflight Entertainment

Yothu Yindi: Treaty Now

Describe the different ways in which Sculthorpe and Yothu Yindi integrate indigenous music into Western traditions.

Compare the compositional techniques and musical influences demonstrated in the set works by Koehne and Sculthorpe.

What contrasting aspects of Australian culture are evident in the set works?

Topic 5: The Blues: Of Sadness and Joy

Set Works

Robert Johnson – ‘Sweet Home Chicago’

Muddy Waters – ‘Hoochie Coochie Man’

John Lee Hooker – ‘Boom Boom’

Eric Clapton – ‘I’m Tore Down’

B.B. King – ‘Why I Sing the Blues’ (On the Best of B.B. King MCA records)

Compare the conception and performance of the set works.

How does the set music demonstrate the development of the Blues as a musical style and influence.

What aspects of Blues music enable it to transcend its cultural roots?

Topic 6: Duke Ellington: Pianist, Composer, and Band Leader

Set Works

Ko Ko

East St Louis Toodle Oo

Take it Easy

Why is Duke Ellington important in the development of Jazz?

How is the jazz style of the 1st half of the 20th Century exemplified by the music of Duke Ellington?

How were the compositional styles of Duke Ellington influenced by the venues in which he performed and the people he performed with?

Discuss Duke Ellington as Pianist, Composer, and Band Leader with reference to the set works.

Topic 7: Miles Davis: Jazz Comes of Age

Set Works

Now's the Time

So What (*M. Davis*)

Petits Machins [Little Stuff]

Why is Miles Davis important in the development of Jazz?

Explain the stylistic differences in the works of Miles Davis you have studied.

'*Miles Davis took on Bebop and made it his own*'. Discuss this statement with reference to the set works.

Topic 8: The Beatles: Soundtrack of a Generation

Set Work

Beatles – Sergeant Pepper Lonely Heart's Club Band

Within You, Without You

A Day in the Life

Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds

She's Leaving Home

When I'm Sixty-Four

Discuss why *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band* was such a ground breaking album. Give examples from the set works to support your answer.

Discuss how the musical output of the Beatles were influenced by the people around them and the society they lived in.

Describe some of the many musical influences that can be heard in the album *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band*.

Why were the songs of the album *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band*, as heard on the album, never performed live in concert?