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[Music, the Holocaust and Social Justice](#)

May 22nd, 2006 by [jabramo](#)

Please [listen](#) to this powerful segment on NPR's Morning edition on Music and the Holocaust. From the NPR site: "During World War II, hundreds of prisoners in the [Terezin concentration camp](#) in Czechoslovakia performed [Verdi's requiem](#) as a way to passively defy their Nazi captors. On Sunday, American musicians performed the same requiem in the former Nazi camp as a tribute to the victims and survivors of Terezin."

It is powerful segment because some survivors talk about how music was as important as water and food during this difficult time. It is also powerful because it shows how the use of music can be a powerful political statement.

Also, Famously, [Oliver Messiaen](#) while a prisoner of war in a German Camp during WWII, wrote his [Quartet for the End of Time](#) for himself and other inmates to perform.

What use does this segment and Messiaen's work have in our classroom? How can music teach us about the holocaust, the power of music and Social Justice? And how does experience these things through music differ than "just talking about it?"

4 Responses to "Music, the Holocaust and Social Justice"

1. *on 22 May 2006 at 11:58 am* [Jonathan Savage](#)

The BBC together with the Auschwitz-Birkenau music have recently released a superb film of music recorded in and around the Auschwitz concentration camp. This film was broadcast on BBC television some time ago and received much critical acclaim. It has subsequently won many awards. In my opinion, it is one of the most moving pieces of film you are every likely to see. You can find out more information [here](#).

2. *on 22 May 2006 at 3:28 pm* [etobias](#)

Some provocative questions! I was thinking about your question "How does experiencing these things through music differ than just talking about it" - and it made me think about how tragic situations can demonstrate how there are so many different ways of experiencing things and how the arts offer a very different way of fathoming something difficult to think about than "just talking about it".

One way of fathoming the holocaust is by thinking about the numbers of people murdered. Students in schools have used paperclips to do this and a museum is working on fathoming the numbers through the use of butterflies <http://hmf.org/minisite/butterfly/index.html>

The arts offer a very different way of fathoming the holocaust- whether through poetry or song.

The book "I Never Saw Another Butterfly" http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0805210156/ref=pd_bxgy_text_b/002-0826442-1988807?%5Fencoding=UTF8 includes poetry and drawings by children who were victims of Terezin.

Having our students try to express their thoughts about and fathom the holocaust through the creation of music could be very powerful. It would be very possible to have students set the poems in "I never Saw another Butterfly" to their own original music,(This has actually been done already and recorded - <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/50021>)or create their

own completely original music without text.

The strong emotions that students would have to confront, express and discuss could certainly be framed through a social justice lens. As teachers we would have to figure out how we would negotiate the discomfort of our students but I could see this being a potentially life changing experience for some students.

Here's another resource for music of the holocaust

<http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/arts/music.htm>

3. on 22 May 2006 at 6:41 pm [_jabramo](#)

Great comments Evan. Have you, or anyone else reading this, ever done anything in their music classroom with the Holocaust? I would be curious to hear about some student reactions to this.

4. on 23 May 2006 at 8:56 am [_etobias](#)

I haven't addressed the Holocaust directly but did use an excerpt from the "Diary of Anne Frank" as a main component in an interdisciplinary lesson I did last year looking at unifying factors in music, literature and painting

<http://musiced.net/willowgrove/music/6thgrade/interdisciplinary1.htm>

As far as other tragedies, last year I had my fifth graders set original poems that had been written by 2nd graders about the Tsunami in South East Asia to their own music. It was a goal for them to express the feelings and emotions of the poems which were emotionally charged due to the subject matter. You can hear two of them

http://musiced.net/willowgrove/music/5thgrade/artsong_comps.htm

I am curious how other music teachers approach the holocaust or other tragic situations through music. I have wanted to address Sept. 11th but have not yet since I haven't figured out a way to approach it yet though I have some music in mind for when I eventually figure out how to approach it.

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