

Artists and the Canyon

Duration

Part 1: 40-50 minute lesson

Part 2: 40-50 minute art project

The two lessons can be effectively combined into one.

Location

Classroom

Key Vocabulary

Improvisation, composition, Ferde Grofe

Trunk Materials

CD Grand Canyon Suite, laminated poster of Grand Canyon, photos of Grand Canyon, The Grandeur of Grand Canyon PowerPoint

Additional Materials and Equipment Not Supplied

11"x14" or 8 ½"x11" paper for each student

colored pencils, crayons, or markers

CD player, computer, LCD projector, screen

If you wish, Arizona Highways magazines purchased from a local used bookstore.

Enduring Understanding (Big Idea)

Throughout history people arriving at Grand Canyon are awestruck by the enormous vistas before them. Trying to describe the magnificence of the canyon and one's reaction to it is not easy. Artists of all media have attempted to capture the grandeur in words, music, photography or on canvas.

Essential Questions

1. Listening to Ferde Grofe's Grand Canyon Suite, what is the role of specific places such as Grand Canyon in shaping music?
2. What draws artists to the canyon?
3. How does their work affect the naturalness of the park? (Higher level question which may require prompting.)

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Identify Grand Canyon Suite and its composer, Ferde Grofe.
2. Discover their own feelings while listening to the music alone and then listening to the music while viewing pictures of the canyon.
3. Create an “artistic” piece celebrating the canyon.

Instructor Background

Ferde Grofe was born in New York City in 1892. As a child, Grofe and his family moved to Los Angeles. Both of his parents were musicians and he received early musical training. Believing they had a sufficient number of musicians in the family, Grofe’s parents encouraged him to try other professions. After brief stints as a bank clerk, printer, and bookbinder, Grofe decided his calling was in the musical field. As a teenager, Grofe studied composition with a variety of teachers. Grofe first heard jazz while playing piano in nightclubs. Eventually he was able to use his talent for arranging music to organize improvisational jazz numbers. Grofe has been called the “father of jazz instrumentation”.

In 1926, on his last extended visit to Arizona, Grofe suddenly had the urge to put his feelings about Grand Canyon and its splendor into music. Grofe explained, “I saw color, but I heard it, too.” His most famous piece, Grand Canyon Suite, has been described as a classical-jazz piece. He divided the piece into five parts, titled “Sunrise”, “Painted Desert”, “On the Trail”, “Sunset”, and “Cloudburst”.

Grofe once described his first experience at the canyon as “sunrise with chirping birds and nature coming to life”. When he couldn’t find words to explain his feelings, he turned to music. He used woodwinds to create bird sounds, trumpets to imitate chirping crickets, coconut shells for burro hooves clomping down a trail, and thundersheets for cloudbursts. He finished the first movement, “Sunrise” in 1929. The world premiere of Grand Canyon Suite occurred on November 22, 1931 in Chicago. Musically acclaimed, orchestras around the world have performed the composition. In his later years, Grofe taught at the Julliard School of Music. He died in 1972.

Suggested Procedures

1. Play a part of Grand Canyon Suite without telling students what they are hearing. Ask them to describe what they picture as they listen. Have them jot down their ideas in words or draw a sketch to go with the music.
2. Explain that this piece was written by musical composer Ferde Grofe in 1931 in an attempt to express his experience of the canyon. Ask your students to explain other ways artists might express their emotions about the canyon (paintings, photos, poems, stories, movies, etc.). As we interact with these artistic expressions, we come away with our own sense of the canyon.
3. Play more of Grand Canyon Suite while showing the PowerPoint “The Grandeur of Grand Canyon”. If PowerPoint is not available to you, share pictures of the canyon

from the trunk or direct attention to the laminated poster of the canyon. Ask students to express new feelings they have about the canyon. If you've made a Grand Canyon word wall, continue to add new descriptive words to the wall.

4. The art portion of this lesson may be done in a variety of ways. If resources are limited and you wish, have students make their own drawing of the canyon based on a poster or picture displayed in the classroom. If you have pictures of the canyon available, perhaps from old Arizona Highways magazines, cut these pictures in half and glue one half to art paper or white card stock (one per student).

5. Using colored pencils, markers, or crayons, ask students to look carefully at the detail and colors and finish the other half of the picture. Or, if producing their own work from a picture in the classroom, complete their drawing (see example in trunk).

Evaluations (Assessments)

Either discuss or ask students to write:

1. How they would choose to share **their feelings** about the canyon (that is, what media would they use?).
2. With whom would they share their work?
3. If choosing music, what style would they choose? What instruments?
4. If choosing art, what media? Sculpture? Oil paints? Watercolors?
5. If choosing photography, would they photograph humans? Scenes?
6. What time of year would they like to visit the canyon? What time of year would they like to present the canyon in their artwork?

Extension Activities

- Ask students to write poetry about the canyon. Haikus work well. This is a great opportunity to use the Grand Canyon Word Wall if you've created one.
- Have students research the art of Thomas Moran and how his art affected the development of the canyon.
- If you have other art materials available, enable students to use these media to create representations of the canyon.

Tech Notes

The PowerPoint The Grandeur of Grand Canyon correlates with this lesson and may be shown as students create their art. There is also a DVD of Grand Canyon Suite that may be available at your local library should you wish to use this media with your students. A copy is also available for purchase through the Grand Canyon Association.

Standards

Arizona Social Studies Standards

S1:C3 Grade 4—P01; S1:C1 Grade 5--P04; Grade 6--P07

Arizona Writing Standards

S3: C2 Grade 4--PO2; Grade 5--PO2; Grade 6--PO2