

Grade 12 Informational/Expository Writing Prompt — "Music"

Using evidence from the passages, write a 2-3 paragraph explanation for your school board in which you explain the importance of retaining music education in your district. Your explanation must be based on ideas, concepts, and information from the "Music" text set.

Manage your time carefully so you can

- Plan your explanation
- Write your explanation
- Revise and edit your explanation

Be sure to

- Use evidence from both sources
- Do not over rely on one source
- Type your answer in a new Word document

During yearly budget cycles, teachers, parents, and music advocates hold their collective breaths hoping cuts will not come down on their programs. Board of Education members aren't necessarily "music haters," and community members don't want to see music leave the school curriculum; however, the cuts keep on coming year after year.

Why Learn to Play Music?

Music education is a path to life-long learning and knowledge of self and culture. It supports healthy social development and the quality of a young person's life. It prepares young people for success in the 21st-century workplace.

Studies show that music can trigger the brain to release chemicals that distract the body from pain. Cognitive and neural benefits of musical experience continue throughout the lifespan, from childhood through senior adulthood. They counteract some of the negative effects of aging, such as memory and hearing difficulties in older adults.

Everyday listening skills are stronger in musically-trained children than in those without music training. Significantly, listening skills are closely tied to the ability to perceive speech in a noisy background, pay attention, and keep sounds in memory.

In a 2009 study, researchers used an MRI to study the brains of 31 six-year-old children, before and after they took lessons on a musical instrument for 15 months. They found that the music students' brains grew larger in the areas that control fine motor skills and hearing—and that students' abilities in both those areas also improved.

Children who study a musical instrument are more likely to excel in all of their studies, work better in teams, have enhanced critical thinking skills, stay in school, and pursue further education. Perseverance is developed and strengthened through music education. Perseverance supports better study habits and self-esteem.

As they make music together, children learn to work as a team while they each contribute to the song in their own way. At the same time, music helps children learn that together they can make something larger than the sum of its parts.

More benefits of music for children include learning cooperation, sharing, compromise, creativity, and concentration. These skills become invaluable as children enter school, face new challenges, and begin to form new friendships and develop social skills.

"Why Learn to Play Music?" NAMM Foundation. 2014. Web. Edited for classroom use, October 2016.

This Is How Music Can Change Your Brain

By Melissa Locker

There's little doubt that learning to play a musical instrument is great for developing brains.

Science has shown that when children learn to play music, their brains begin to hear and process sounds that they couldn't otherwise hear. This helps them develop "neurophysiological distinction" between certain sounds that can aid in literacy, which can translate into improved academic results for

A new study from Northwestern University revealed that in order to fully reap the cognitive benefits of a music class, kids can't just sit there and let the sound of music wash over them. They have to be actively engaged in the music and participate in the class. "Even in a group of highly motivated students, small variations in music engagement — attendance and class participation — predicted the strength of neural processing after music training," said Nina Kraus, director of Northwestern's Auditory Neuroscience Laboratory.

Additionally, the study showed that students who played instruments in class had more improved neural processing than the children who attended the music appreciation group. "We like to say that 'making music matters,'" said Kraus. "Because it is only through the active generation and manipulation of sound that music can rewire the brain."

Kraus, whose research appeared today in *Frontiers in Psychology*, continued: "Our results support the importance of active experience and meaningful engagement with sound to stimulate changes in the brain." Active participation and meaningful engagement translate into children being highly involved in their musical training—these are the kids who had good attendance, who paid close attention in class, "and were the most on-task during their lesson," said Kraus.

To find these results, Kraus's team went straight to the source, hooking up strategically placed electrode wires on the students' heads to capture the brain's responses.

Kraus's team at Northwestern has teamed up with The Harmony Project, a community music program serving low-income children in Los Angeles, after Harmony's founder approached Kraus to provide scientific evidence behind the program's success with students.

According to The Harmony Project's website, since 2008, 93 percent of Harmony Project seniors have gone on to college, despite a dropout rate of 50 percent or more in their neighborhoods. It's a pretty impressive achievement and the Northwestern team designed a study to explore those striking numbers. That research, published in September in the *Journal of Neuroscience*, showed direct evidence that music training has a biological effect on children's developing nervous systems.

"We don't see these kinds of biological changes in people who are just listening to music, who are not playing an instrument," said Kraus. "I like to give the analogy that you're not going to become physically fit just by watching sports." It's important to engage with the sound in order to reap the benefits and see changes in the central nervous system.

Locker, Melissa. "This Is How Music Can Change Your Brain." Time. 16 December 2014. Web, Edited for classroom use, October 2016.

What's the Right Age to Begin Music Lessons? By Dr. Robert A. Cutietta

We've all heard the stories of famed musical prodigies, from Mozart writing his first symphony at the age of eight to Stevie Wonder signing with Motown at 11. Whether it's the church preschool choir or an elementary school band concert, it seems as if parents must immerse their children in music lessons from birth if they want them to succeed. In a way, they're right.

That being said, parents often hear complaints from other parents that influence them to postpone music lessons until their child is older: "My parents forced me to play an instrument when I was young. ... I hated it then and still hate it now." In order to avoid this negative attitude, parents opt to delay music lessons until their child is older and can choose their own instrument, if they even want to play. They too are right.

These statements may seem contradictory. In reality, the issue is how you define music lessons. There is a growing body of research that indicates a "window of opportunity" from birth to age nine for developing a musical sensibility within children. During this time, the mental structures and mechanisms associated with processing and understanding music are in the prime stages of development. It is important to expose children in this age range to music.

The question then is what is the goal of music lessons for young children? Very young children can learn to develop meaningful relationships with music. If this is your goal, then the "lessons" can and should start soon after birth. You should help your child focus on the music with simple movement activities such as musical games, swaying or dancing while holding the baby, or singing or playing an instrument for the child.

Once the child is around age three, it may be time for more formalized "lessons." Again, the goal is not to learn to play an instrument but to further develop skills like identifying a beat in music, identifying melody, or identifying instruments.

By age five, most children have built a foundation that has prepared them for formalized music lessons. The goal of the lessons is not to become a great performer on the instrument but to further the understanding of music. Piano and violin are the two most common instruments played at this age, but others have tried the recorder, guitar, or ukulele with success.

By age 10, the child will have a variety of musical skills. They'll also have the physical strength to try a different, bigger instrument, such as a brass or large string instrument. These require a higher level of strength and stamina. The goal of lessons appropriately transitions from gaining experience with music to improving performance ability.

Musical experience at an early age is extremely important in a child's developmental process. Like riding a bike or learning a language, these skills can be learned later in life, but they will never be "natural" in the way that is so important for fluid musical performance.

Cutieta, Dr, Robert A. "What's the Right Age to Begin Music Lessons?" PBS Parents. 2013. Web. Edited for classroom use, October 2016.