

General Activities

Discuss with students what makes American music “sound American.” Elements of this discussion should include that our country is younger than European countries, and our composers’ music had a tendency at first to imitate the European styles they were accustomed to hearing. It took awhile for American music to develop a truly “American” sound. Ask students what they think contributes to this sound. Lead them to name elements that are found nowhere else, such as jazz, cowboy songs, Appalachian folk music, Native American, and African-American music. They might also notice the “wide-open spaces” sound found in Aaron Copland’s music. Try contrasting this by playing music that doesn’t sound American... Brahms’ Hungarian Dances, Capriccio Espagnole, etc.

Use patriotic songs to learn conducting patterns. The Star Spangled Banner works well for 3/4, America the Beautiful for 4/4 and You’re a Grand Old Flag for 2/4. (All these songs have upbeats, however.) let them take turns conducting the class as they sing these songs.

Time signature	Number of beats per measure	Beat pattern
$\frac{3}{4}$	3	
$\frac{4}{4}$	4	
$\frac{2}{4}$	2	
$\frac{6}{8}$	6	