What are ENSEMBLE SKILLS?

**Age Range:** K–6

**Learning Objective:** Students will demonstrate ensemble skills through performance. Students will utilize multiple rehearsal strategies to refine performance.

**ENGAGE**

ASK. “When musicians play together, how do they start at the same time? How can they be sure to play at the same speed, or tempo, so that they can stay together? (Listen to students’ responses. If they answer that this is the job of the conductor, acknowledge that this is correct, but then ask further.) “What if it’s a small group that doesn’t have a conductor?”

**EXPLAIN & EXPLORE**

EXPLAIN. “When musicians play together but don’t have a conductor to lead them, they must give signals, or cues, so that they start together and stay together through a performance. It’s a way of communication and working together.”

DEMONSTRATE. “Here are four main ways that musicians play together with good ensemble skills.” (Briefly explain and demonstrate each technique for students.)

1. Eye Contact
2. Head nod and/or body movement
3. Sharp in-breath, or inhale
4. Constant listening

WATCH. “In this video, notice how the musicians use eye contact and body movement. What else do you observe?”

PRACTICE. Group students into quartets and ask them to choose a favorite classroom piece to perform. They may choose to sing, play on classroom instruments, or both. Remind them that they must be able to start together on their own. Circulate among the groups during rehearsal time and help each quartet refine their cueing technique. Complete the activity by asking each group to perform for the class. Give feedback regarding cueing.

**EXTEND**

Watch, listen, and notice ensemble skills in one or more of the following performances:

- [Lux String Quartet](#) performing music by Gyorgy Ligeti
- [Mill City String Quartet](#) performing music by Samuel Coleridge Taylor
- [Imani Winds](#) performing music by Valerie Coleman
- [Mill City String Quartet](#) performing music by DBR

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