MUSIC FUNDAMENTALS:
What are ENSEMBLE SKILLS?

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

ENGAGE students

DISCUSS. “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?”

EXPLORE sounds

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.”

SHOW. “Here are four ways musicians give cues so that they play well together.”

(Briefly explain and demonstrate each techniques for students.)

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

WATCH. Instruct students to watch for eye contact and body movement in this video featuring a string quartet. (3:30 min.)

PRACTICE. Place students into small groups 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 group refine their cueing technique. Complete the activity by asking each group to perform for the class. Give feedback regarding cueing.

EXTEND learning

Choose one or more performances to watch. Notice and discuss ensemble skills.

- Lux String Quartet performing music by Gyorgy Ligeti (5 min.)
- Mill City String Quartet performing music by Samuel Coleridge Taylor (4 min.)
- Imani Winds performing music by Valerie Coleman (3 min.)
- Mill City String Quartet performing music by DBR (3:30 min.)

✓ Follow along with this lesson online! www.classnotes.org
✓ Broken link? Need help adapting a lesson? Contact Katie Condon, education specialist