

## The Joy of Teaching K-12 Session Questions

### Classroom management/administration

1. What do you do when your administrators won't support any behavior consequences in your classroom, but won't discipline students who are sent to the office, either?

Chris--Make sure you have clear, concise rules for your room. I have no more than five: Respect others, don't touch equipment that doesn't belong to you, etc. very general rules. You must also have consequences spelled out. When I was younger I gave 1 warning, and then they had to write "paragraphs." They are awful...takes the kids at least one page of handwritten work. Much more effective than sentences. The next offense they had to write the paragraphs and I called the parent. The final step was a trip to the office. If your admin won't support you then try to avoid that final step. For elementary usually just removing the student from the group on that second offense (standing in corner away from the group and where they can't be seen by the other students but you can still see them) will do the trick. Your choice on when they get to rejoin the group. Be proactive. Go to your principal and tell them what you are struggling with and ask for suggestions. Also talk to the classroom teacher and see what strategies they use with that particular student.

Jen--When my administration and I disagree on consequences (this doesn't happen very often) I do what my administrators prescribe. After that, I make sure that the problem gets solved before it gets to the administrator's office. I provide my own discipline that follows the handbook. Unless it is absolutely necessary I do not send kids to the office. I want them to respect me and my rules and consequences, not just the administration.

2. How do you deal with classroom management problems/behavior problems of individual students? If a student refuses to do music every year what do you do?

Chris--See the question above for behavior issues. As far as the student refusing...I usually just say something like "man...you are going to miss out on some fun stuff!" and then make sure to do a musical game at the end. If they don't do all you ask during the lesson they don't get to play the game. They quickly realize they have to comply with what you want to get to have the "fun" time.

Jen--Wow! It is so important to make music important to the kids. Make it relatable. Find a way to make it applicable to those kids that you have the most problems with. If you have buy in from those kids, it will really encourage others to join in.

3. How much support do you get from your administration and community?

Chris--TONS!!! But it wasn't always that way. Small steps. When the parents, admin, and community start seeing the students' success the support will come. At the same time, make sure the community KNOWS about the successes. No

one is going to do your advocacy for you. Keep those successes in the minds of everyone.

Jen-My administration is fantastic. I never neglect this relationship. You need to foster and take care to make sure they are informed. Make them an important piece of your program. Always thank them in the program. Write them a thank you note. Make it clear how much you appreciate them.

4. How do you help students with special needs?

Chris--visit with the classroom and special ed teacher and find out what the student is capable of and what strategies to use in your own room.

Jen-This is a case-by-case question. I go to IEP meetings. I am in contact with the SPED director and teachers so that I can provide as much as I can for each student. Be patient.

## Band

1. How do you keep all students engaged and not lost or bored?

Chris--Be a ball of energy, even when you don't feel like it! You truly are an actor. Make sure you have a rehearsal plan. I write mine on the board so the students know exactly which pieces we are working on and what measures. This allows percussion to only set up equipment they actually need. I have also done "sectionals" where each group goes to a corner and the older students run a few measures. This gives them more ownership in the program and helps with their leadership skills, and gives you a chance to work with a few individuals without the others just sitting. Set a timer for 5 or 10 minutes. You would be surprised what can be accomplished during that short amount of time.

Jen-Plan ahead. Know exactly what you are doing when those students walk into the classroom and know exactly what you want them to learn. Keep the activities varied and interesting. Don't talk so much! The kids should be participants in the class, not lectured to. If something doesn't work, go with the flow. Your sense of humor can get you through and provide a level of fun for those kids to keep them from getting bored.

Do you take your small ensembles to state large group contest? How do you prepare them for sightreading?

Chris--By small ensemble do you mean small band? I did not take my full band for several years. I waited until I had 18 kids with pretty decent instrumentation. If you want to take a group to "large" ensemble go to a "middle" school festival where they can get some feedback and get used to the process before you take them to the state large ensemble contest. For sightreading you MUST teach a counting system and use it consistently all the time. Students that learn by rote CAN NOT READ. Yes, it's much faster to just sing the part but they will never learn to read on their own. Teach a counting system and practice every day. Isolate rhythms from their music on the board and write in the counting and clap and count as a group, then transfer to the music.

Those without the pattern in their music clap and count what is on the board while the others play the music. I also have used Rhythm Masters which is free and available and I just purchased Sightreading Factory (\$35 for a year) and it has been a great help.

On a side note, encourage every kid you've got to go solo/ensemble contest. This is BY FAR the best way to build your program. It is a lot of work on your part but the time spend with them working solos and ensembles will greatly improve their playing/singing.

Jen-I do take my kids to contest. It's a great way to build a sense of pride and ownership in a program, however I did not start taking them until about the 4th year. It takes time to build that into the program. It is stressful and I would not recommend a first year K-12 teacher to take a band to contest, but it is something to build towards. I have however always participated in district solo/ensemble contest. The students love to prepare solos and ensembles and it's a great way to build some of those basics.

2. What is the best way to teach instruments for beginning middle school musicians?

Chris--The same way you teach your beginners! If you mean time, I've taught kids on recess, before school, after school, and as a class for high school. Be creative!

Jen-I agree with Chris, you are going to treat these kids the same as your elementary beginners.

3. Best contest option for 7-12 with only 4 members with limited instrumentation?

Chris--See question 2 above. For only 4 members find a local contest you can take them to. You can have them do a quartet that you've arranged. You can have them do

a

duet and put two on a part. "Middle school" festivals are not like District and State where you have to have a certain instrumentation.

Jen-Solo/Ensemble work only and when they succeed make it a big deal! This is a great way to build a program.

4. How do you choose literature?

Chris--Play to your strengths! This year my woodwinds are strong and my brass players are weak, so I'm choosing something with difficult ww and easy brass! I have not used them but I hear the flex-arrangements have some good options. There are some great literature suggestions in our Dropbox folder. Email me for an invite if you need that resource.

Jen-I try to decide exactly what I am teaching and then I listen, listen, listen to music until I find music that will fit my instrumentation. I ALWAYS have to re-write parts for other instruments. It's just what happens when you have zero trombones! I talk with colleagues to see what worked for them and why. I take notes when I hear the junior high district band, conference band, or any other ensemble play.

5. How do you keep a mature atmosphere with a 7-12 band?

Chris--Good luck with that one! Seriously it depends on the band. You are going to have to put up with a certain amount of immaturity. They are middle school, after all. The older kids will help, once they buy in. Again, it gets easier the older and longer you do this. Don't expect them to focus for too long without a break. They just CAN'T.

Work intensely for 7-10 minutes, then change pieces, get off the podium, make them stretch, tell a bad joke, then get back to work.

Jen--There's a time and place for a mature atmosphere, and those older kids have to be able to help set the tone. If they can't, you have to lay the law down a lot. When they are trained to know when it's time to get down to brass tacks students are capable. Set high expectations and let them know what is acceptable, and what is not. They will help each other as the program builds.

#### Building the programs

1. How do you build your programs?

Chris--Success will build the program. Once they start having success they other kids will want to be a part of the band! Trips also help. :- ) We went to Six Flags every year until I got the courage to take the band to Florida. Success and trips. Yep, that will do it!

Jen--Yes! I agree with Chris. Success, parent communication, administration support, trips. Staying there. You have to invest the time if you want to build a program. Have a long-term goal for your program. Let the whole school know what it is. Find ways to make your program important.

#### Choir

1. As a vocal major high likely is it that I will teach K-12 at some point in my career?

Chris--I can't really answer that. However, why not be prepared? My last student teacher was a vocal major but requested to student teach in a K-12 so she would have the experience in case that was her job.

2. Can you give some ideas how to use guitar instead of piano with a choral ensemble?

Chris--I am not a guitar expert but, I've had kids accompany my choir before. Usually they can do it on their own without much guidance from you!

3. Which is harder, elementary, middle school, or high school choir?

Chris--The correct answer is all of them. :- ) Seriously. They all have their issues. For me though, recruitment for the high school is probably the hardest and the thing I struggle most with.

#### Curriculum

1. How do you write your curriculum for elementary to make it easier on yourself next year?

Chris--At our school we have to turn in our plan books at the end of the year. At the beginning of the next year I always ask for mine back so I can reuse those lessons that were successful and redo the ones that were not.

Jen--I keep all of my lesson plans in google calendar so I can easily copy and move them for the next year.

2. Where do you find songs that align with the standards?

Chris--I do internet searches for the specific standard I'm trying to teach. If I'm trying to teach "sol-mi" to Kindergarten I search for sol-mi Kindergarten songs. Then keep a list

of songs that work well in your room for that specific standard.

Jen-I do the same as Chris. I go to conferences (like MMEA!) to talk with elementary teachers that know more than I do!

3. How often do students learn a new song?

Chris--Depends on the age, the purpose and the difficulty of the song. Songs that will be performed for others obviously are done more frequently than those used for teaching a concept. Again, it depends on what I want them to learn.

Jen-I try to teach a new song every other lesson or so with elementary.

4. How long did it take you to get your present curriculum?

Chris--I'll let you know. :- ) Seriously, though I am always revising as I find things I want to differently. It took about 4 years to get a good rotation of songs and activities. Keep in mind I had NOTHING to start with.

Jen-12 years. It is an evolving document. Every curriculum starts with a few basic ideas, and after you have taught a little you can fill in the blank parts. It is a lot of work!

5. My lessons are really disjointed. How do I connect them?

Chris--Are you talking about transitioning between activities or complete lessons? Email me ([csprague@bradleyville.k12.mo.us](mailto:csprague@bradleyville.k12.mo.us)) and explain what you are asking so I can give you better answer.

Jen-This is really a situational problem, but I would say try to connect them by finding elements in common (repertoire, concept, theme).

## Time management

1. How do you choose which groups to "take away" from if you have to cut things due to not having enough time? Do you allot your time equally or towards high school? How do you decide what is most important/prioritize?

Chris--It all comes down to those priorities. First you must get through the day with good plans for the elementary general music classes. You should OVER plan for those classes. Once daily plans are in place I usually prioritize by performances. If the choir has a performance before the band then I spend time planning for choir first, then move to the next group. Sometimes, however, since band is what I'm most comfortable with it gets the shortest amount of planning time. Plan for what you are most uncomfortable with first, as you can "fly by the seat of your pants" if you have to with what you are most comfortable whether that is band or choir. Not having a detailed plan is never good, but let's face it, there are times that is going to happen. It WILL take LOTS of time at the beginning of your career, but gets easier and easier the longer you teach.

Jen-Prioritize your time like you prioritize your program. What is the most important to the community? To your students? To you? How can you achieve the most with the

smallest input of energy? That's something to think about when you have zero amount of time!

2. How can you do well at festivals when you teach all levels/How do you manage doing K-12 all at the same time?

Chris--See above about prioritizing. I began with solos and ensembles, and didn't focus on the large ensembles until I had some experienced players that could help lead the younger students. As far as managing...there are days when I don't. Today is one of those days. My 3rd grade students watched a musical while I made lesson plans for a sub and made practice cd's for All-District contest. Do I like doing that? No, but since I start with practices at 7 a.m. and my drive is 45 minutes that is what happens sometimes. None of us like to show videos but sometimes you can't help it. If your school doesn't allow videos then invest in a Music Bingo game. Grades 3 and up can run the game themselves while you get some work done.

Jen-I build my program on solos/ensembles and band contests. It's a big deal at my school for kids to go to contest, because I make a big deal out of it! I do some before and after school work with kids on their solos and ensembles. I use a lot of the same solo repertoire for different students throughout the years so it doesn't take as long for me to learn it.

3. How can you be good at all the levels?

Chris--Keep teaching all the levels. Seriously. It's just like mastering an instrument or training your voice. The more you practice the better you get. For some reason we have patience with students when they are learning but we expect ourselves to know everything from day one! Stop beating yourself up. Your undergraduate training doesn't prepare you for K-12, so just keep showing up and doing your best. I struggled so much those first couple of years with the guilt of not being totally prepared for every class. I

told one of my colleagues (a seasoned teacher of over 30 years) that I felt like I was about 75% of what a teacher should be in all my classes. She looked at me and said, "Your 75% is better than most people's 100%, so quit worrying!" I have never forgotten that advice.

Jen-Well you have to be a continuous learner. You can't give up when it gets tough and you have to really care about the kids. If you do really care, the work will come naturally. It's easy to work hard to decide what's best for the education of a kindergartener when they run up and give you a big hug after class. They really care about you! Your responsibility to them is a great one, and it is daunting to think of the spectrum you are teaching. Just do your best and never forget that you are the only source of music education for these kids, and they deserve the best!

#### General music

1. What are some good procedures for general music classes? (PK-2, 3-6)

Chris--Seating charts are a must! I assign seats at the beginning of the year and never change unless a problem arises. These let me check attendance quickly and help with assessment. Also, in my room I seat the rest of the classes in accordance

with the band set-up, so I'm not constantly moving chairs. For example, if my first row in band has 10 chairs then the first row of % music will have 10 chairs in the front row. As with all your classes establish your rules and keep them generic. One of my rules is "Come to class prepared." For choir that means pencils and choir folders. For band it means instruments, pencils and music. For general music it means pencils and notebooks. Make generic rules that can apply to all your classes.

Jen-I sing attendance every day for my elementary classes. Students are assigned a seat at the very beginning of the year, and they are taught how to come into the music classroom. When a student comes into your room don't assume that they know anything that you haven't taught them yet. 7 and 8 grade have binders and pencils that are assigned a place. Once you set these procedures up it will save you time and headache in the long run.

2. What are some ideas for middle school appreciation classes?

Chris--I split the time between singing and music history. Since I was uncomfortable with changing voices I used to avoid singing in the junior high classes until I realized that I was ruining my chance to recruit for high school choir. I went to every choir clinic I could find and called vocal teachers to learn how to teach those junior high boys. Since I have a

mix of band and non-band kids in those classes I use that opportunity to teach some music history. I am going to steal Jen's idea of bucket drumming, though!

Jen-I love teaching middle school! They are really searching for acceptance and an outlet for all that awkward, and music is perfect for that! I teach music history, composition, musical careers, art comparison, jazz, bucket drumming, and guitar during this time. Keep the units on the short side. Find something that they can find interest in and make them feel like they belong.

3. What is your best piece of advice for teaching 6th grade general music?

Chris--Jen's idea of bucket drumming! I'm stealing that! I am also exploring ukuleles. Mine still enjoy play parties (folk dances) and singing games.

Jen-Be patient, kind, and firm. Those kids are testing boundaries like crazy and if you let them they will walk all over you. Be consistent in your expectations for behavior and plan ways for them to have fun.

## Scheduling

1. How do I get my 6th grade beginning band back into the program?

Chris--ASK!!! Have a plan when you do ask. When I first started at Bradleyville beginning band students had to come in on their recess! That was the first change I asked for...an actual class for the beginners. The next year I asked to split 5th and 6th graders explaining how you couldn't have two different ability levels in the same class. I split one hour so I could have the 5th and 6th separated. If that is your situation pair a beginner with an older student and have the older ones help teach the younger ones.

Jen-Where did it go? what are the circumstances in which it disappeared? You are going to have to address the issues that caused the 6th grade band to be non-existent before

you can really count on them being back. Is is a recruitment issue? Scheduling?  
Administration expectation? All of these scenarios will have a different plan of attack.

2. I have 5% combined. Next year I'll have two ability levels rather than one. Do I need to separate them next year?

Chris--Yes. Very hard to teach beginners and second year students in the same class.

Jen-If you can then you should.

#### Miscellaneous

1. Which age takes the most work?

Chris--All of them! But if you are referring to actual planning I spend more time on my elementary classes than the others. You have to be changing activities every few minutes so it takes more planning than for the other classes.

Jen-It used to be elementary for me because I had no background in it, but now I spend more time on my secondary bands.

2. How do you fix a broken program?

Chris--Patience, quality teaching with quality music. Showing the students you TRULY care about them as people. They will be drawn to you and success will follow.

Jen-Depends on how it was broken. You have to build genuine trust and relationships with parents, administration, and community members. You can do that by investing extra time, helping students reach their goals, and celebrating them publically. There are lots of ways to build a program, but I would start with building on small success.

3. What is the most difficult challenge that comes with teaching K-12?

Chris--Time management, both professionally and personally..

Jen-I agree, time management is a huge challenge. Another thing that people don't see for a K-12 type of school is that teachers wear multiple hats. For instance, I'm the senior class sponsor, Building leadership team member, professional development director, calendar committee chair, and a few other things I'm forgetting...Know when to say no when it comes to extra duties in a small school.

4. How do you stay sane/What are ways to prevent burnout when you teach all levels with little support?

Chris--Give yourself a break--you were hired to do this job for a reason

\*Ask for help/delegate--assign tasks to students and parents who are willing to help

\*Network!--pick the brains of successful teachers. Never be afraid to ask questions!

\*Take a "sick" day--once a semester take a mental health day and do something for yourself

\*Find your "thing"--Something that gives you joy and do it at least once a week.

\*Deliberately plan ways to have fun every day

\*Memory file--Keep a file of all the notes, pictures of gifts, all of those things that the kids give you. Look at this on the days where you just want to quit.

5. What is the most rewarding thing about teaching K-12?

Chris--Watching those students that came in my room as five-year-olds walk across the graduation stage knowing I had those thirteen years to shape the adults they've become. There is nothing more rewarding.

Jen-Yes! Having an important part in the education of a student, all the way through their public school career, is an amazing responsibility and joy.