

INSPIRED BY AMERICA
EDUCATION OUTREACH LESSON PLAN

I. Leadership in America and Chamber Music

What is a leader? What are fundamental characteristics that make a leader more or less effective than other leaders? How are the leaders in this particular film inspired by America? What are different types of leaders? This site focuses on the theme of leadership in the context of American History related to the *Inspired by America* film, spotlighting certain leadership skills and tools mentioned in the film, and how they can be demonstrated and reflected in the Cypress Quartet's methods of playing music, as well as the music itself.

Older, or more experienced music students may want to focus more on trends in chamber music and look at composers as American "leaders" in the chamber music world. For example, chamber music's roots began in Europe, just as those of the United States. The music made its way over to this continent, but not without influence and inspiration from the circumstances, people, cultures, and events of the time. Music's role in culture indicates a cultural shift that occurred between colonization, pioneering, the industrial revolution, and the United States' growing presence in the world through many wars.

Leaders, leadership characteristics, and music

One of America's leaders, George Washington, showed various strong leadership skills which are highlighted in the film: though he led the country in war successfully, he stepped down from office for the benefit of the country when he could have continued on for a third term. He also led the country in during war, using his assured style of moving forward with plans from which his followers easily took their cues, and the ability to "bring" people with him in his decisions, whether or not they agreed. Much in the same way, each player in the Cypress String Quartet acts as a leader at different times. As a leader, each musician must be sure of his or her timing, clearly communicate start and stop cues and other expressions in the music. In fact, one way for the instruments to convey energy and strength in music is short, energetic notes moving quickly underneath a strong, loud, powerful melody, much like voices of a crowd in support of their leader's strong voice.

Another indication of the effective leadership of Washington and others was his strong listening skills and leading in response to the voices of the people. Leaders represent and lead groups comprised of many different voices with often times very differing opinions about certain issues. In fact, the more voices in the group are of one opinion, the more anyone with something different to say stands out. Washington and other leaders were challenged to hear the many ranges of voices, and often the contrast between them was very pronounced in this way. Another American leader, Abraham Lincoln, listened to both the opinions for and against slavery during his role as America's leader. He needed to know when to ask for one group's opinion versus the other and how to mediate them. He needed in fact, to choose between them, to highlight one opinion at one time versus the other at a more suitable time.

Just as the United States was formed thanks in large part to leaders and their listening skills and various responses, the leaders within the quartet must listen to the other voices to be able to lead them well. How does a leader have an effective conversation with his or her constituents? He or she listens and responds accordingly. The same is true with how a string quartet interacts within their pieces. In fact, each musician is a leader multiple times and often simultaneously during pieces. To be able to perform a polished, finished piece well, the musicians, each acting as a leader in their own way, need to know when to back off, play more quietly, follow the other instruments' cues and expression, and when to be stronger again. Leaders need to work with other leaders effectively, and this is how the Cypress String Quartet plays their music.

There are ways to highlight different voices in music, just as people's differing opinions become more pronounced as they become more different. The musicians in the quartet must be able to balance their sounds to allow certain of them to be heard and different times, similar to how Lincoln had to mediate opinions. For example, there are times in music when all the instruments will play the same style of note, while just one instrument will play a drastically different note. The musicians, hearing the different note, will each make use of their leadership by allowing the contrasting note to be heard, and may either quiet down to let it be heard, or interact with the note in a way that creates some tension, etc.

Below are a list of various words and phrases related to strengths in leadership skills and group characteristics, as mentioned in *Inspired by America*:

- Leadership in war: strength in leading large groups of people, "bringing them to see your point."
- Knowing when to step back
- Strategy/vision/planning/troubleshooting
- Listening and observation as skills in leading and building.
- Nature of a group's collective voice: many voices as one comprehensive sound. Includes dissonance and disagreement, which together make the sound (or conversation) more interesting. Contrast brings out certain parts.
- Strength, presence, ability to attract people to your cause
- Balancing a leader's faults with his or her abilities
- Innovation
- Discovery
- Morality
- Large picture vision
- Perspective

Before the performance of *Inspired by America*, explore with students their ideas of leadership in the context of American history. Explore together not only excerpts of the Quartet's music, but any kind of classical music to familiarize yourself with different types of voices in the music. Take several times to listen to the excerpt. Without trying to think too much about the music, try to observe it. What do you notice? What do others around you notice? What puzzles you about what you hear, and why? What connections can you make between the information above and what you hear? When you see the Cypress Quartet perform, what types of leadership skills that you have learned about do you *see* that you might not have *heard*? Do you notice more ways of leading that you didn't think of before?

II. How does history/culture affect the concept of leadership in America? And how do American chamber music composers fit into the picture of American History?

As we see over and over in our current events, history plays a part in how we act in the present. For example, think about how the colonists' experience of trying to gain independence from the British led to the Revolutionary War, Fourth of July celebrations, the appreciation of freedom, and the way our government was formed as a democracy. How does this history possibly relate to the United States' involvement today in foreign policy? What kind of leaders does the United States decide to represent it in the world as a result of its involvement in world politics? What are the negatives and positives of certain types of leadership in these contexts? Even further, how do different parts of the United States government function like quartet members each using leadership?

With a general timeline of US History as a backdrop, compare the composers highlighted in *Inspired by America*, their general background, and the context of their lifetimes in how their music sounds next to each other. In fact, how do American composers' music differ from older and present day European composers' music?

Samuel Barber

Adagio for Strings

American composer Samuel [Barber](#) (1910-1981) originally composed his "Adagio for Strings" as the second movement of his First String Quartet, Op. 11 in 1936. Two years later, at the request of the legendary conductor Arturo Toscanini, Barber rewrote the work for string orchestra. The premiere of this version was broadcast from New York on November 5, 1938 to millions of listeners across America. Written when the composer was just 26, it is Barber's most popular work and is also one of the most popular and recognizable works of the twentieth century. The piece is often considered the "unofficial American anthem of mourning" and was performed at the funerals of two American presidents: Roosevelt and Kennedy.

Charles Ives

String Quartet No. 1

American composer Charles [Ives](#) (1874-1954) is considered one of the first great composers of American classical music. His music was largely ignored during his lifetime, and only began to gain recognition when he stopped composing in 1925. Ives was the son of an Army bandmaster who taught him enthusiasm and curiosity about sound. Ives began composing by the age of 12, and by 14 he was the youngest church organist in Connecticut.

Charles Ives' First String Quartet was written in 1896 when the composer was a 21-year old student at Yale. The piece has two nicknames: "A Revival Meeting" and "From the Salvation Army" and is based on traditional hymns.

Movement 1 is a fugue, with two hymns being quoted as subject and countersubject ("Missionary Hymn" and "Coronation"). Movement 2 is in ternary form (A-B-A) and quotes two more hymns: "Beulah Land" and "Shining Shore."

Antonín Dvořák**Quartet in F, Op. 96 (“American”)**

Czech composer Antonín [Dvořák](#) (1841-1904) wrote his Op. 96 String Quartet in June of 1893, while he and his family were on vacation in the Czech community of Spillville, Iowa. Dvořák was in the U.S. as director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York. The first work he wrote in Spillville was the “New World” Symphony, where he used elements from Native American and African-American melodies from folk songs. In the case of the “American” Quartet, Dvořák said that he was sending a ‘musical postcard’ to his native land, including “impressions and greetings from the New World.” In this way, Dvořák was truly “inspired by America.”

Charles Tomlinson Griffes**Two Sketches Based on Native American Themes**

American composer Charles Tomlinson [Griffes](#) (1884-1920) was considered one of the most gifted composers of his generation. His “Two Sketches Based on Native American Themes” was written in 1919, the year before his death. In his first of two sketches, Griffes bases the music on a “Farewell Song of the Chippewa Indians” and instructs the players to create effects that sound “like Indian drums.” The second sketch is his impression of a Native American dance.

Jennifer Higdon**Impressions**

American composer Jennifer [Higdon](#) (1962-) wrote her fourth string quartet, titled “Impressions,” for the Cypress String Quartet in 2003, as part of the “Call & Response” series. “Impressions” was written as a response to the quartets of Debussy and Ravel. The second movement, “Quiet Art,” is about the solitude in which artists work, and the passion and consistency that help to create a work of art. Jennifer Higdon teaches at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, and is one of the most sought-after composers of our time.

Dan Coleman**quartetto ricercare**

American composer Dan [Coleman](#) (1972-) composed his String Quartet No. 1: “quartetto ricercare” in 1999 for the Cypress String Quartet, as part of the “Call & Response” series. The piece was written in response to Mozart’s Quartet K. 464 and Beethoven’s Quartet, Op. 18 No. 5. Mr. Coleman states, “I took my cue from Mozart and Beethoven, and wrote a series of variations. But in my quartet the ‘theme’ upon which these variations are based is never explicitly stated. The ricercare movements of Baroque music are wandering preludes that introduce more stable material. The ricercare of this piece’s title refers to the fact that the theme is being discovered over time.” Dan Coleman resides in Tucson, Arizona, where he is in his fifth season as composer-in-residence of the Tucson Symphony.

Benjamin Lees**Quartet No. 5**

American composer Benjamin [Lees](#) (1924-) composed his Quartet No. 5 for the Cypress String Quartet in 2002, as part of the “Call & Response” series. The Quartet was written as a response to Shostakovich’s Quartet No. 11 and Britten’s Quartet No. 3. The third movement is titled, “Quick, quiet” and is like a gossamer thread. The fourth movement, “Explosive,” is driven and energetic. Benjamin Lees was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2003 and resides in Palm Springs, California.

Elena Ruehr

Quartet No. 4, and Red, for solo violin

American composer Elena [Ruehr](#) (1963-) composed her Quartet No. 4 for the Cypress String Quartet in 2004, as part of the “Call & Response” series. The Quartet was written as a response to Mozart’s “Dissonant” Quartet, K. 465 and Beethoven’s Quartet, Op. 59, no. 3. The second movement, “Aria” begins with an extended duet between the cello and viola. Elena Ruehr composed “Red, for solo violin” for Cypress violinist, Cecily Ward, in 2006. “Apple” is the second movement of the piece. Ms. Ward premiered “Red” in Port Townsend, Washington at the Centrum Summer Chamber Music Festival. Elena Ruehr teaches at M.I.T., and has been composer-in-residence with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project since 2000.

III. What music would you decide to put in transitions between each scene of the film?

What music from the CD excerpts do you think would be a good match for moving from one scene to another in the film based on the text? Use your knowledge of each of the composers and their pieces from this site to decide, as well as the sound of the music. As with artistic expressions, there is no “right or wrong” but you must provide reasons for why you made your decisions.

Another possible activity here is to match certain leaders listed above with the music they feel fits his leadership style, giving explanations for why they matched them.

1. Benjamin Franklin, “man of action”

How to understand the paradox of Benjamin Franklin? This wise philosopher, sensitive to God without falling prey to religious dogma and naïveté? The revered sage who yet made shrewd business deals, handled lightning, tilted with foreign kings and ministers, pioneered new science and technologies, forged all kinds of associations for business and civic protection, all the while cutting a figure with women and savoring the delights and refinements of the flesh and the persona. Wise, canny, clever, dangerous, brilliant, ingenious, spiritual, artistic, charismatic, famous and silent Benjamin Franklin. Our King Solomon? Our Merlin? Our American symbol of the man alive in two worlds—the world of the spirit and the world of matter. Does one really trust Franklin?

2. Abraham Lincoln, “the original face”

To see things with one's own eyes means to see things from deep within one's own consciousness, one's own self, one's own I. It does not mean simply to have idiosyncratic opinions and reactions to which one holds fast regardless of what the community believes. The American ideal of individualism thus links to the ancient, timeless vision of personhood—that consciousness in a man or woman which is independent of both culture and biology. The Zen Buddhists speak of this as one's "original face." I suggest that for Americans this great idea is represented by the face of Lincoln.

3. *Thomas Jefferson, “the individual in community”*

Who was Thomas Jefferson, this tall, vibrant, yet abnormally shy man with the flaming red hair—principal creator of the Declaration of Independence, drafter of the Bill of Rights, master of the sciences and arts of his time; architect and builder of the great house, Monticello, archaeologist, shrewd political tactician and diplomat; at one and the same slaveowner and visionary philosopher of freedom and equality; gifted craftsman, scientific gardener and farmer, pioneering inventor, mathematician and, of course—third president of the United States of America? .

None of the Founding Fathers sought more diligently to establish the relationship between the communal and the individual ideal of self-government—the notion, namely, that in the life of the individual as well as the community, direction must ultimately come from within. . .

4. *George Washington, “the hero stepping back”*

[His] leadership during the Revolutionary War . . . is characterized not so much by brilliant maneuvers, but by his incredible capacity to persist in the face of uncertainties, agonizing betrayals, frustrations and prolonged desperate physical demands that would have stopped almost any other man. And not only to persist, but to persist with an air of profound calm and, as is continually remarked by his contemporaries, a grace and majesty of the body.

After two terms in office, Washington did not have to step down from the presidency. He could easily have won a third term. But step down he did, an act of selflessness which many say almost single-handedly preserved the essence of the American republic—the idea that our leaders are freely chosen by and answerable to the people.

5. *Frederick Douglass, “bringer of the question”*

Frederick Douglass was what the ancient wisdom would call "the bringer of the question." To listen to him and to be awakened in one's heart and mind to the depths of the crime of slavery is, inwardly, suddenly to stop, suddenly to come to an inner silence—even while outwardly one rightly senses the call to help, to act, make things right in the civic and social sphere. But the bringer of the question does something else as well. He carries a force that acts in a completely interior direction: he brings us to the silence of remorse—a remorse completely beyond any plans of action, completely beyond any possibility of doing something. And yet, in that condition of the encounter with conscience, something beyond ourselves can appear that, were it to be more enduring, could transform the life of humanity. For without the experience of genuine remorse, and without the intentional effort to return again and again to that experience, injustice and barbarism only change their name and form, but not their substance. So wisdom teaches and so history shows. America cannot be the hope of the world until it returns to learn that lesson.

IV. Jazz vs. Contemporary Classical String Quartet

There are several pieces by Charles [Mingus](#) in this film's soundtrack. From Watts, California, Charles Mingus' earliest musical influences came from the church-- choir and group singing-- and from jazz predecessors such as Duke Ellington. He studied the double bass and music composition, and eventually during the 40's, he toured with bands like Louis Armstrong, Kid Ory and Lionel Hampton. Once he was in New York, he played with Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Bud Powell, Art Tatum and Duke Ellington himself. One of the few bassists to do so, Mingus quickly developed as a leader of musicians. He was also an accomplished pianist who could have made a career playing that instrument. By the mid-50's he had formed his own publishing and recording companies to protect and document his growing repertoire of original music. He also founded the "Jazz Workshop," a group which enabled young composers to have their new works performed in concert and on recordings. Mingus soon found himself at the forefront of the avant-garde. His recordings bear witness to the extraordinarily creative body of work that followed. (for more details and information on Mingus' life and music, visit www.mingusmingusmingus.com)

Given the information in his bio and his music, what are some of the ways that his music is different from the chamber music (quartet's music)? How is it similar? How are feelings or emotions inspired by Mingus's music different than those inspired by the chamber music? How are the ways the music is played similar or different? Knowing what you know about leadership tools and a quartet's use of them, how do ideas of leadership come into play with a jazz group's performance?