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Harness the Power of Music to Usher in the Holiday Season

As the holiday season draws near, it is a time for reflection, celebration and connection. For music educators, this period presents a unique opportunity to embrace and celebrate the rich tapestry of cultures surrounding us. The holidays are not only about festive decorations and seasonal sales, but also they are a chance to foster inclusivity, promote understanding and enrich our students' educational experiences through the universal language of music.

December typically brings different religious observances celebrated by many. However, if at the end of the day we embrace the basic concept of "peace and goodwill to all" the magic of the holidays will fulfill a much-needed global awakening. As musicians and music educators, most of us have participated in a multitude of holiday performances and have witnessed firsthand the power of music at holiday celebrations. Understanding other cultural holidays offers the opportunity to be appreciative and respectful of other cultural perspectives that will ultimately help us broaden our own. What better time to accomplish that goal than during the holidays!

While the commercial aspects of the month can be overwhelming, December also presents a chance to celebrate the cultural diversity of the people around us. It is an opportunity to foster inclusivity while we encourage our students to share their celebrations with one another. Our students can rationalize and learn what we share in common, rather than what separates us.

Traditions build bonds

Mid-school year coincides with a concert season, and there is always much work to accomplish. However, it is not optional to ignore the holiday season. Traditions are an important component in building a strong bond between family, friends and community. They give us a sense of belonging and a way to express what is important to us, connecting us to our history and helping us celebrate previous generations, the present day, and our future. This is an opportunity to embrace the occasion and pay attention to cultural diversity, family nuances and traditions, indifference, and acceptance and compassion.

There is much to be said about the "gift of giving." Offering a gift shows love, appreciation and respect. I have a friend who is always finding tokens (big and small, mostly small) to give to others. He lives to feel the warmth and appreciation expressed by the recipients, and we are all blessed to embrace his love and generosity. The gift is not nearly as significant as the act of giving. There are many ways to give, and they don't have to be material.

Generosity is contagious and the holiday season is a time when many cultures come together to celebrate shared values of peace, goodwill, and unity. Here are some considerations to help music educators welcome the holiday season:

- **Embracing the spirit of the season:** While religious observances play a significant role for many, the essence of the season extends beyond any single tradition. As music educators, we

have the power to amplify these themes in our classrooms by highlighting the diversity and commonalities that make this time of year special for everyone.

- **The role of music in celebrating diversity:** Music has an extraordinary ability to bridge gaps between cultures and individuals. As educators, we have a platform to explore and honor the various traditions our students and their families celebrate. Rather than focusing solely on traditional holiday tunes that may only reflect one perspective, consider incorporating a broader range of musical styles and songs that represent different cultural celebrations.
- **Mix up the music:** Create a diverse holiday playlist including music from different cultures and traditions. This not only introduces students to new sounds, but also demonstrates respect for various customs.
- **Question of the week:** Start each week with a culturally themed question related to the holiday season. This encourages students to think critically about different traditions and fosters a sense of curiosity and respect.
- **Diversity discussions:** Use music as a springboard for discussions about cultural diversity. Share stories about the origins of different holiday songs and the cultural practices they represent.

Fostering inclusivity and connection

- **Encourage sharing:** Invite students to share their favorite holiday songs or traditions. This not only validates their personal experiences but also enriches the learning environment for everyone.
- **Celebrate common values:** Focus on the universal themes of peace and goodwill that transcend cultural boundaries. Highlighting these common values can help unify students and promote a sense of belonging.
- **Generosity beyond the material:** As educators, we should model and encourage acts of kindness and generosity that reflect the true spirit of the season.
- **The gift of giving:** Teach students about the joy of giving, whether through sharing music, volunteering, or other acts of kindness. Highlight how giving, in its many forms, can make a meaningful impact.

Personal connections

Foster a supportive and compassionate classroom environment. Small acts of kindness, personalized gestures, and genuine interactions can make a positive difference in students' lives. The wonderful holiday season offers music educators a special opportunity to enrich their students' lives through the gift of music. As we navigate the festive season, let us remember that the true magic of the holidays lies in our shared humanity and the joy we bring to each other through our music and actions.

Happy holidays to you and your family, and may your season be filled with love, music, peace, and goodwill to all! ||