

RAD directions:

- 1. Read and mark the text**
- 2. Go to Classroom and respond in the RAD document.**
- 3. Be ready to discuss by deadline.**

Music and How it Affects our Emotions

By Cricket Media, adapted by Newsela staff
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Imagine a scene in a movie: A young girl on her own in a dark mansion climbs a creaking staircase. Shadows flicker like ghosts on the wall behind her. If you were the movie director, what music would you choose to go with this scene?

Now think about the music you would use for this scene: A lost puppy is reunited with his owner, a little boy. The boy starts to cry with happiness.

Would you choose the same piece of music for both scenes? Probably not, because different types of music convey different types of emotion. What works for a lost puppy story would seem silly for a scary movie.

Music Can Change Your Heart Rate

Emotions are more than just something we feel — they have an effect on the body, too. Studies have shown that listening to music changes our pulse, our breathing and even our body temperature. For example, dance music beats increase your heart rate. No wonder people listen to fast music to exercise and slow songs to relax. But even more important than what's happening to the body is what's happening in the brain.

We experience music temporally, which means music comes alive second by second as you listen to it. Press play on your iPhone and a song develops in time. There is usually some kind of build up in the song before it fades away and ends. As this is happening your brain is tracking the music. It is listening to the song in the moment, but also predicting what's going to come next.

Expectations Create An Emotional Response

These predictions are based on our natural ability to learn the rules of our culture's music. Just as babies learn to speak the language of their parents, they also learn the "grammar" of the songs that surround them: which notes sound "right," how melodies rise and fall, and the way rhythms should be constructed. Songwriters use this understanding to make you feel emotions when you hear their music.

Dr. Alexandra Lamont is an expert in music psychology, the study of how people perceive and respond to music. Lamont says that it is people's expectations about music that create an emotional response.

"It has to do with where we think the music is going next and if it goes where we expect it to or not — like when a beat finally gets dropped in after a lot of build-ups," Lamont says.

High Notes Signal Excitement

Music is also able to express certain emotions directly. Experiments have shown that listeners can easily identify the emotional character of a piece of music. They can do it even if they hear just a few seconds of music (think of the first few notes of the theme from "Jaws").

A single high note can send the feeling of excitement, while a low note can send a feeling of doom. Slow songs signal reflective emotions, while fast songs imply fun and excitement. The loudness matters, as does how sudden or unexpected a sound is. The type of instrument is also important. Heavy metal musicians use distorted guitars to create their sound.

The Best Rock Stars Make Us Feel Their Emotions

The musical performance is key, too. When the best rock stars perform, we can feel their pain, sadness and joy. Parts of our brain have evolved to echo the emotions we see in others. We feel empathy, meaning we share their feelings. Many psychologists believe this same part of the brain is active when we watch musicians perform. One experiment showed that even with the sound turned down, people could accurately judge the emotion a performer wanted to express just by watching his or her body movements. Research has shown that more than 50 percent of all communication is nonverbal, or unspoken. The best rock stars know this. They portray the emotion of a song with their bodies, too.

Preferences Are Shaped In The Womb

But we don't all like the same music. What's sad for one listener might be uplifting for another. The reason is partly to do with the musical language we grow up with. Say your parents love listening to rhythm and blues at home. You may be more likely to listen to it, too — and you may prefer it to other genres.

Some researchers have suggested that our musical preferences are being shaped while we're still in our mother's womb. As we get older, our taste is more determined by the people we hang out with. Your musical identity tends to get cemented in early adulthood.

The same song might drag up different memories for different people. Lamont says that some responses to songs "can vary even for the same person from day to day, depending on what frame of mind we're in and what we're doing at the time." The same sounds may enter our ears. But what we hear and feel depends entirely on us.

Just like in a movie, being human means that we all have a soundtrack to our lives. The songs you choose to be part of your life make you unique.

Go to Google Classroom and open the document associated with this RAD. You will need to write a 300-500 word specific response to the article. Possible response topics might include the following, but you do NOT have to answer any/all of these questions:

- How does music impact you? Discuss
- Did something in the article surprise you? Discuss.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a "move" made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.
- What isn't in this article? Discuss.