

TEACHING WITH “HOW TO GET IN STEP” *In Tune's 2018 Guide to Marching Music and Equipment*



N Marching band is unlike any other musical activity students can take part in. Not every music student has the opportunity to participate in it in middle school and high school. As educators, you know that those who never have the opportunity, or turn it down if they do, are missing out on something special.

To the average person, “playing music” means playing in a band. Depending on your musical background, “a band” can mean a rock band, a concert band, a jazz quintet—to students, it likely means either playing in concert band in school or forming a band with friends outside of school. And while joining a group like marching band has

similarities to being a member of your school’s concert band, marching band creates an environment in which students become an essential part of their school community—and, depending on where you’re from, sometimes a part of their greater neighborhood or city.

Marching band takes musical education and places it in a context of a team. Much like in sports, members know that the “homework” that’s required to keep up is different from the homework that’s assigned in their regular classes—if they don’t prepare for a test and end up failing, the repercussions fall solely on them—but if in marching, they don’t prepare for a game and fall short on their part or steps, they’re letting not just the rest of the band down, but

also the community members who came out to watch. Marching takes the skills one develops from playing in a band—self-expression, group communication, and reliance on community on a micro scale—and merges it with the values of sports while further regimenting the activity in an almost militaristic fashion. And, especially because of the marching unit’s function alongside the football team and in front of the audience of the greater community, the demands placed on each supporting member are more real, structured, and shared.

And while at the end of the day, the worst scenario students might face is being cut from the band, the demands of marching band bear a stronger resemblance to those of the “real world” than many or most other school

JOHN MCDONNELL/THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES



activities. It's no wonder that marching band members find lifelong friends in one another. Read on for more ways on how to engage your students in "How to Get in Step."

APPREHENSION

One topic addressed in the article is the mixture of fears students may have at the prospect of pursuing marching. Addressing these feelings with students is key to getting the ball rolling on their interest, no matter the level to which they're experiencing them.

To students who may be intimidated by auditioning, speak to them about failure. What would it really mean if they did not succeed? The loss would essentially be temporary, and has the potential of offering a different and in some ways more valuable education than if they were to succeed. If they try and don't get in, they'll have learned a few things: That they had the courage to try; how much they're personally invested in joining; and, if they're attentive, what their shortcomings actually are. If they can observe their own shortcomings with an

awareness that they make up just a part of who they are on the whole, they have the very valuable opportunity of strengthening their weaknesses. On the other side of the coin, if they do get in, they gain an opportunity to steadily build confidence on the field while also remaining sensitive to how they can improve.

To the students who may be intimidated by the commitment and workload: Show them the rewards. By learning time management and work ethic, they have the opportunity to teach themselves a skill that will help them to stay balanced into adulthood. Students with poor time management may be afraid of focusing their energies on themselves, at the risk that the result may not reach the level they expect (or that they feel others might expect) of themselves—something that can be even harder for students who are used to being excessively praised. If they can grasp that this fear isn't based in reality, they can focus instead on the benefits of good time management—and find that putting effort into something they love will

only help their self-esteem by showing themselves that they're worth it.

CREATIVE OUTLET

You may know that marching music is a fascinating medium—and you can help your students to see that too. In our age of seemingly futuristic technology, how can an art based in centuries of tradition remain such an important part of our culture?

Marching bands adapt modern music, concepts, instruments, and equipment to their programs without even slightly abandoning what makes the performances so unique in the first place. Choreography with surreal synchronicity, physical demands juxtaposed with artistic ones; marching becomes a traditional palette through which both cutting edge and traditional artistic visions can be illustrated—all while offering band members a sense of shared purpose and the opportunity to excel. Consider organizing a field trip to the nearest Drum Corps International or Winter Guard International competition so students can get a taste of

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Tanglewood

Tanglewood Ukulele Learn to Play Bundle

Consider organizing a field trip to the nearest Drum Corps International or Winter Guard International competition so students can get a taste of what makes marching music so impressive.

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As mentioned in the article, marching has been more recently enhanced by developments in uniforms, equipment, and footwear. Corps constantly seek to push the boundaries of creativity, and advancements in technology only build up those possibilities. Sublimated printing allows teams greater flexibility in design, making it possible to print more detailed geometric patterns or simply quality graphic designs, while the ombre process can be used to create gradients on fabric. Expanding possibilities with visuals means expanding a key aspect of marching performances. Similarly, the Crossover shoe developed by Director's Showcase International is an example of improved technology that makes it easier for marchers to perform at their best.

MULTI-PURPOSE EXPERIENCE

Aside from some of the more surface benefits, at its foundation, marching experience lends itself to countless other careers in music (while cultivating skills that can be used throughout students' adult lives, as mentioned before). Whereas honing your performance ability on your instrument is a requirement in any musical endeavor, the skills enmeshed in marching make for an ongoing study in personal growth.

Self-awareness, self-confidence, work ethic, good sportsmanship, humility, and mentorship are all values that can be gained from participating in marching. Even if members don't end up pursuing a career in music, being expected to meet the physical and musical rigors of marching can allow students the opportunity to prove to themselves the height of their potential. That experience amounts to empirical validation of self-worth—providing a learned confidence that students can take with them through all other life pursuits, whether they end up in business, as educators, parents, politicians, civil servants, or freelance artists.

And in addition to personal gains, knowing good sportsmanship, humility, and mentorship teach them the benefits of sharing life's challenges—and the valuable skills of being able to both give and ask for help, put oneself

second for sake of the greater good, and give back to the younger generation who are just beginning the same education you might be finishing. More than more measurable, quantifiable things like test scores, economics, or competition results, these traits benefit communities of all shapes and sizes—from families to businesses to classrooms.

If students see it in that light, it may be a bit more clear to them as to why we've kept marching band around after all these years. **T**

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