

Selena Gomez

National Standards: Pr4, Re 7-9, Cn11

By maintaining a thriving music and acting career into adulthood, Selena Gomez has achieved what few former child stars have. Even more impressively, she has done so without succumbing to the typical pitfalls and controversies that plague so many young entertainers coming of age in the public eye. By speaking openly about her struggles with both physical and mental health, Gomez has become an icon and inspiration for young people everywhere.

Prepare

By a show of hands, ask the class how many of them are familiar with Selena Gomez. For those raising their hands, ask how they first encountered her. Compare how many students discovered her through her music vs. her acting career. Ask the class what they know about Gomez and whether they can think of any other former child stars or Disney personalities that went on to success as an adult. After discussing, read the article individually or as a class.

Key points in the article:

- Starting her acting career at just seven years old, Gomez has been an entertainer virtually her entire life. While her earliest success came on screen, music was always a throughline of her career. She contributed to soundtracks and formed her own band, Selena Gomez & The Scene. The success of her early musical output laid the foundation for her later career.
- With the momentum generated by singles like “Naturally” and “Who Says,” Gomez transitioned from Disney star to full-blown pop star. After signing to Interscope, she showcased a more mature sound and widened her fanbase to mainstream listeners. Around this time, she began taking on acting roles that broke from her Disney image, such as Harmony Korine’s *Sprink Breakers*.
- After retiring from touring in 2016, Gomez began focusing on her health, speaking openly about her lupus diagnosis that resulted in a kidney transplant in 2017. Gomez has also spoken candidly about her experience with mental health issues and advocated for issues like immigration, women’s rights, and racial justice. Her vulnerability and willingness to speak candidly has cemented her as an inspirational figure and one of pop music’s most relatable personalities.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Resilience:** the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness
- **Namesake:** a person or thing that has the same name as another
- **Credible:** able to be believed; convincing
- **Vulnerability:** the state of being exposed to the possibility of being harmed, either physically or emotionally
- **Advocacy:** the act or process of supporting a cause

Discuss

After reading the article, conduct a classroom discussion about Gomez's music and how it relates to her career and life overall. Play a few songs from different points in her discography (perhaps "Who Says" for her early work, "Come & Get It" or "Good For You" for her pop star transition, and "Lose You To Love Me" for recent work). While listening to each song, have students take notes. What is the overall vibe of the music? What instruments and sounds do they hear? What lyrical themes do they notice? After listening to each song, discuss how Gomez's music has evolved throughout her career. What changes do they notice at each stage? What similarities remain? How have Gomez's experiences and struggles affected her songwriting?

Q&A

1. Which children's show gave Gomez her first acting role?
2. Which autoimmune disease required Gomez to undergo a kidney transplant?
3. Which legendary Tejano singer is Gomez's namesake and musical inspiration?
4. Which song was Gomez's first number-one hit on the Billboard Hot 100 singles chart?
5. Which Rare Beauty-related initiative touts a goal of raising \$100 million dollars over ten years to provide mental health services for underserved communities?

Answers

1. *Barney & Friends*
2. Lupus
3. Selena Quintanilla-Pérez
4. "Lose You To Love Me"
5. Rare Impact Fund

Expand

For an additional assignment, have students research other former Disney stars that went on to musical success, such as Demi Lovato, Miley Cyrus, Olivia Rodrigo, Christina Aguilera, or The

Jonas Brothers. Have students include details about how they made the transition from Disney star to pop icon, significant songs from different stages in their catalogue, and finally, how their career trajectory compares to Selena Gomez. What similarities or differences can students identify in their career paths? This format of this assignment can be a research paper, classroom presentation, or group project.

Play Like You Mean It

National Standards: 1-9

With all of the technique and theory required to become a great musician, it can be easy to lose focus on the most important aspect of all: communicating emotion through music. Rather than robotically reciting chords or melodies with technical proficiency, a performer's ultimate job is to make the audience feel something. Just like learning an instrument, this takes focused practice! Share the following techniques with your class to deepen their performance skills and enhance their musicality in the most impactful way.

Prepare

There are no prerequisite theory or technical skills for this lesson, so it is applicable for musicians of any level. To prime the class for the abstract/emotional thinking required for the lesson, ask students to think of their favorite live performance they have ever seen. Have a few volunteers share their experiences with the class. Ask them what about the performance stood out. What moved them? Why did that artist's performance resonate with them emotionally? What about their stage presence or crowd interaction? Were there any unforgettable moments? After discussing, read the article individually or as a class.

Key points in the article:

- Outside of a few very specific situations, audiences do not show up to a concert to be impressed. Their ultimate goal, whether they know it or not, is to experience emotional catharsis- a shared communal exchange of emotion and energy. To deliver this experience, performers need more than just solid musicality. They need to truly express themselves.
- Though the concept of communicating emotion through performance sounds abstract, there are plenty of concrete ways for artists to enhance connection with the crowd. Eye contact, body language, verbal acknowledgement of the crowd, and many other simple concepts can yield huge dividends for performers.
- In the age of digital perfection, the reason audiences show up for live performances is the humanity of the experience- imperfections and all. No matter how great a recorded song sounds, nothing beats hearing it directly from the artist's mouth. Humans crave connection and communal experiences, so learning to communicate emotionally through a musical performance is the most important job of an artist.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Authenticity:** the quality of being real or true
- **Acknowledge:** recognize the existence, truth, or fact of
- **Subtle:** so delicate or precise as to be difficult to analyze or describe
- **Spontaneous:** happening or done in a natural, often sudden way
- **Contagious:** likely to spread to and affect others

Discuss

After reading, conduct a classroom discussion about the stage presence strategies listed in the article. By a show of hands, ask the class how many of them have performed for an audience (in a school ensemble, talent show, garage band, or any other scenario). For those that have, were they able to watch a video recording of the performance? What did they think when they saw themselves from the perspective of the audience? Did their memory of the performance match the way it looked/felt/sounded in the video?

Next, ask students if any of the tips in the article were new to them. Do any of the tips sound particularly exciting or daunting? How might they implement these strategies at future performances?

Q&A

1. According to the article, music is _____ in motion.
2. Which famous artist said “The audience and I are in it together. That’s where the magic is?”
3. What the one thing in music AI cannot do?
4. Where is the after-school performance training program Soundhouse located
5. Which artist referenced in the article was a master of serving the song and enhancing a performance with smirks and spins?

Answers

1. Emotion
2. Bruce Springsteen
3. Stand on stage and share a moment with a room full of people
4. Salt Lake City, Utah
5. Prince

Expand

Depending on the subject of your class and the abilities of the students, assignments related to the article can take several forms.

For advanced classes with performance experience:

Assemble a list of 5-10 songs, preferably simple songs that students will likely be familiar with. Provide chord charts, lyrics, or lead sheets for the songs. Split students into groups and allow each group to select one song from the list. Using whatever instruments the group can play, each group must arrange a cover of their chosen song to perform for the class. If there is no vocalist in the group, the melody can be played by an instrumentalist. The arrangement and style of the cover is completely up to the students.

Performances will not be judged by technical proficiency, and small mistakes are perfectly acceptable. The goal of this performance is to communicate emotionally with the audience through music. Encourage students to incorporate the tips from the article: make eye contact with the crowd, match the energy of the song with expressions and body language, walk onstage confidently, and create memorable moments in the performance.

After each performance, conduct a group discussion. Ask students in the audience how the performance resonated with them emotionally. Were there any moments that stood out in the performance? What did the performers do that drew you in?

For entry-level classes with limited/no performance experience:

Have students find video of a live performance that connects with them emotionally and present it to the class. After watching the video, presenters should outline what they believe makes the performance great. How does the performer connect with the crowd? Do their motions and expressions carry deep meaning/feeling? How does their stage presence match the energy of their song?

After each student presents their song, conduct a class discussion. Allow the class to share their experience of watching the performance and how they think the performer added emotional weight to the song.

How To Play James Brown’s “Living In America”

National Standards: 1-9

By the time he released “Living in America” for the *Rocky IV* soundtrack in 1985, James Brown had been bringing the funk to a global audience for over two decades. Even at this late stage of his career, the “Hardest Working Man in Show Business” had a few tricks up his sleeve. With a deceptively simple arrangement and a groove that will pack the dancefloor, “Living in America” is an excellent addition to any young ensemble’s repertoire. Time to get funky with Mr. Dynamite himself!

Prepare

Ask the class if they can name the creator of funk music. Chances are, if anyone has even a cursory knowledge of the genre, James Brown’s name will come up. Ask students to name a few stylistic hallmarks of funk; the answers will likely revolve around catchy basslines and energetic grooves. Expand upon that foundation and mention funk’s gospel influenced one-chord vamps, horns that often function as rhythmic punctuation rather than melodic instruments, and the role of bass as the lead instrument. Conduct a listening exercise with the class: play “Living in America” in its entirety and ask students to take notes on what they hear, including instruments in the arrangement, form of the song, dynamic movement, and anything else they notice about the record. Then, read the article.

Key points in the article:

- The genre of funk was created almost single-handedly by James Brown, and all the hallmarks of the style are apparent in “Living in America.” The bass and drum-driven groove punctuated with chord stabs and horn accents propels the song forward, and the catchy background vocals allow the lead vocalist to fill the space in between.
- The form of the song is fairly simple, with a verse-prechorus-chorus structure broken up by a bridge that presents the only change in chord progression in the song. The bridge is followed by a long breakdown section with gospel-inspired call and response vocals.
- “Living in America” is a testament to the hypnotic power of the groove, which can provide a real test of discipline for young musicians. While it may be tempting (for guitarists and drummers, especially) to fill in the space with licks and fills, doing so would stick out like a sore thumb and interrupt the momentum. As tempting as it is to show off your chops, having the crowd in the palm of your hand with an airtight arrangement feels even better.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Purveyor:** a person who purveys, provides, or supplies
- **Sparse:** of few and scattered elements; small in numbers or amount, often spread over a large area
- **Profound:** very great or intense
- **Punctuating:** something that contrasts or accentuates
- **Deceptive:** giving an appearance or impression different from the true one; misleading

Discuss

After reading the article, ask the class about the notes they took upon their initial listen of the song. What did they notice? Did their observations line up with the article's analysis of the song? What parts did they miss on first listen? Play the song again and have students listen analytically, now with a deeper knowledge of the critical elements of the song.

Next, discuss how your class might arrange the song for performance. Do students anticipate the song being difficult to learn as a live arrangement? Does your ensemble have the same instrumentation as the record, or will there have to be substitutions? Which elements of the song are the most critical, and which can be adapted to fit the size/style of your ensemble?

Q&A

1. Which section of "Living in America" is the only place where the chord structure changes?
2. What does "ostinato" mean in Italian?
3. What is the most important thing about playing this song?
4. Who was the first bassist to use the short-long-short-long articulation we hear in "Living In America?"
5. Funk music's long, one-chord vamps are a holdover from what style of music?

Answers

1. The bridge
2. Obstinate
3. To never let anything break the hypnotic power of the groove
4. Larry Graham of Sly and the Family Stone
5. Gospel

Expand (for ensembles)

After conducting the lesson, send students home with the assignment to learn their individual parts for the song. Adapt any parts as discussed in class in the previous section.

At the next meeting of the ensemble, begin with a quick listen of the song to get the sound in everyone's ears. Briefly review the form, chord structure, and important points from previous class discussions. Then tune up, plug in, and give "Living in America" a run-through. A good first attempt at the song can really boost an ensemble's confidence, so try to emphasize the importance of preparation beforehand.

Keep the energy up at the first rehearsal of the song and maintain a fun atmosphere- it will increase the odds of a successful first attempt. After each run-through of the song, have a quick discussion with the band. How did they think that went? What parts feel the best? What needs to change? Focus on those notes in the next playthrough. Repeat that process until the band is comfortable with the song and getting consistent results.

Once the general structure of the song is solid, focus in on the details and embellishments. Encourage the vocalist(s) to have fun! Funk is all about the attitude. What it lacks in melody, it makes up in style. If the singer is having fun, so is the crowd. The call-and-response in the bridge is a great opportunity to practice stage presence. It can be scary trying to get the crowd to participate (what if no one sings it back??), but if the singer brings the confidence, the crowd will always respond. Loosen up and channel Mr. Dynamite!

Best Music Schools

National Standards: 10-11

The world of music is always in flux, and that has a ripple effect for every career path whether in music business, education, performance, etc. As a result, the way that music colleges prepare their students is constantly evolving. So what should high school students interested in going to college for music be looking for when searching for the right school for them? And just as importantly, how can they acquire the necessary scholarships to make a degree financially manageable? These are the questions addressed in In Tune’s latest edition of “Best Music Schools.” Share these insights with your students and help them land a spot in their best-fit music program!

Prepare

To start the lesson, ask the class if anyone intends to study music in college. Have any of them begun the search for a music program, and if so, have they started the application process yet? Regardless of the answer, ask the class what they are looking for in a music program. What skills do they want to acquire in college, musical or otherwise? Likewise, how do students plan to pay for college? Are they aware of any options that could lower the amount of loans they need to take out? Have they started researching scholarships or grants?

Key points in the article:

- Due to seismic shifts in the music industry, music schools are reconsidering what skills should be considered essential for their students. A new list of core competencies has emerged as a result- an interdisciplinary foundation for any musician hoping to make a career for themselves. The way that different programs foster these abilities in their students varies, but they all acknowledge the need for self-sufficiency in a variety of disciplines.
- Deciding on the best music program for an individual’s needs is difficult, but schools assume that students may change direction once enrolled and are also addressing the continuing evolution of the music industries. Their offerings are now far more flexible, and their programs’ content is far more interdisciplinary than in years past.
- An incredible array of scholarships exists for college-bound musicians, and students would do well to apply to as many as they can. It represents a large time investment, but the hours spent working on applications are nothing compared to the money saved in student loans.

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Prescribed:** set by a rule or order
- **Seismic:** of enormous proportions or effect
- **Conundrum:** a confusing and difficult problem or question
- **Acumen:** the ability to make good judgments and quick decisions, typically in a particular domain
- **Trepidation:** a feeling of fear or agitation about something that may happen

Discuss

After reading the article, ask students if they learned anything that surprised them. Were their expectations of what a college music education entails different from the reality outlined by the article? Discuss the “new core competencies” section of the article with students. Were students aware of the interdisciplinary base of skills required to make a living in any sector of the music world?

Ask students to write down each category of new core competencies listed in the article and assess their own current abilities in those areas. In which areas do they feel prepared or accomplished, and which areas do they need to bolster? After writing their individual answers, have students share their assessments with the class.

Q&A

1. What are the new core competencies for college-bound musicians?
2. Scholarships represent financial _____ that don't require repayment.
3. How far in advance should students request letters of recommendation?
4. Music business programs focus on the commercial and administrative aspects of the music industry, covering areas like _____, _____, _____, and _____.
5. What type of scholarships are offered directly by colleges and universities to attract talented students to their programs?

Answers

1. Musical Excellence, Tech Know-How, Business and Marketing Skills, Collaboration and Communication, Adaptability and Lifelong Learning
2. Gifts
3. At least one month before deadlines
4. Artist management, music publishing and licensing, marketing, live performance
5. Institutional Scholarships

Expand

For a research assignment, have students make a list of five music scholarships not listed in the article. For each one, write down the amount of scholarship money available, category of scholarship (merit-based, need-based, private, institutional, government, or identity-based), application requirements, and deadlines. After listing the required information for each scholarship, add up the total amount of scholarship money available from their selected options. Have students bring their findings to class and compare. As a bonus, make a list of every scholarship discovered by the class on the whiteboard and add up the total amount of scholarship funds available. Students will be amazed at the amount of financial support available to them!