

All-State: Getting to Tier II— What I told the kids the judges were thinking!

presented by Deb Sittko — reported by Denise McLellan

In this presentation the areas of intonation, tone and bowing, rhythm, ensemble, and musical expression were discussed in relation to what the judges are listening for and how to approach them with the students. Strategies Deb Sittko uses in all the categories address the assumption that the students know nothing. A teacher must not just tell them what they are, but teach them every single aspect of the concepts.

Intonation

Deb stressed listening and matching. Students need to be given the skill of playing it in tune. To teach the student that it is not about you personally, but about the note, helps them not to be afraid. It takes patience and honesty. Teachers need to encourage students, “This is not easy but you will get it,” as they practice the aspects of playing in tune. Show them what it sounds like when it is wrong. Understanding whole and half steps and scale construction is important. Teach the terms tonic, dominant and leading tone. The judge will be thinking, “Is the sound absolutely clear?”

Tone and Bowing

Assume students do not know what you mean.

Teach basic positions to create great sound. Teach parts of the bow, placement on the string, weight, and speed. When the director says, “Use more bow,” it means, “Move your bow faster—a lot faster.” The judge is thinking, “Is the sound rich and full? Is it a beautiful



Deb Sittko

sound? Or is it wispy or muddy? Do they *all* play bowing absolutely together?”

Rhythm

Assume no one counts, teach them, and make them count. Write a rhythm on the board each week. Pluck and count out issues, air bow, and play. The judge is asking,

“Are they together, rushing, subdividing?”

Ensemble

Teach the students the function of their part. Give visual cues. Let students become a part of artistic decisions. The judge is thinking, “Can I hear melody? Is it balanced?”

Expression

Assume students will never make audible contrast without being pushed. Students will not shape a phrase unless you work on it. Other parts need to support phrasing. They need vocabulary to assess. Practice dynamics on scales. The judge will ask, “Does this sound like music, or just a bunch of notes?”

Other Factors

Spend a lot of time searching for literature to fit your group. You must love what you select. Along with the other factors of uniform, stage protocol, attention, and focus the judge will be thinking, “Do they look like they care?”

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