

All-State: Level Up Your Orchestra: Gamification in the Orchestra Classroom.

presented by Jessica Stephens — reported by Faith Farr

Jessica Stephens presented a lively, fast-paced presentation showing how to present orchestral assignments as “levels” in a game format, such as Quest or Fortnite. “Gamification” is taking the assignments and assessments you usually do but setting levels and stages of accomplishment that will be suitable for the less advanced students, challenging for the more advanced students, and intriguing to everyone.

Why Gamification?

Gamification meets your students where they are—both in terms of technical ability and learning style. You can easily differentiate your instruction for ability and instrument diversity and extend your orchestra teaching beyond your room and designated class time. Gamification meaningfully integrates technology into your orchestra classroom. You will foster a community of independent learners.

What is Gamification?

Gamification is infusing video and computer game elements into your class to engage and motivate students. You present “Quest Maps” not “assignments.” Gamification promotes self-paced learning. Students can have multiple attempts, and you can provide additional levels to challenge more advanced students.

Steps to Gamification

- Pick a class or grade level and key assessments or units.
- List the skills or skill sets encompassed in the grade or class you chose in pedagogical order. Break things down into individual skills. Skills and their assessment become “Quests.”
- Decide how students will show mastery of the skills and how you will evaluate their work. For instance a Quest based on the D Major scale might include showing correct body posture, left hand shape, bow hold, string crossing, tone and intonation.
- Assign points to each Quest and decide on how many levels, and how many points are needed for each level. Create digital or

printed badges for levels. Points should reflect the work involved in the Quest. Levels should be based on point earned. Levels 1 and 2 should require a low number of XP (experience) points.

- Create a brief, but thorough, description of each Quest. Create a narrative to help students stay engaged. For instance, a Quest theme might be “to train future orchestra heroes in the art of beautiful bow hold.”

- Create reference and instructional video/recordings that present your topic, such as videos demonstrating the D Major Scale. Utilize colleagues, MuEd majors at your local university or high school students to be demonstrators in your videos. Find existing resources such as the String Technique channel on YouTube.

- Curate your reference materials on a platform such as FlipGrid, Google Sites or YouTube. Use a source that does not require students to download the videos, as the cost of internet use for some families may depend on the amount of downloads.

- Create the Quest map, or Quest list—the “Quests” and the order in which your students should complete them.

- Compile all Quests and links into one place such as Google Classroom, Google Sites, SeeSaw, Canvas or Showbie.

- Roll out to your students. Set your expectations that allow students to work at their own pace—so grade once a week. Send badges of achievement. Add side Quests.

- Ask your students to reflect on their learning, and reflect on what worked and what did not work from the teacher perspective.

On Quest days (Jessica does this once a week in her classroom) — everyone works independently. Her expectations on how students will solve an urgent problem are: first ask another student; then check the reference recording; then ask the teacher. Another expectation is: don’t change your Quest on Quest day! Controlled chaos is normal on Quest day, but definitely no roaming around the room!

If you aren’t super familiar with games

like Quest or Fortnite, a simple checklist will work instead of a Fortnite Map. Or get a teen student to help you set up the games. Or just draw squares linked by a line to make a path that leads to the final goal. Students should initial the square when they get the skill done.

In discussion at the end of the sessions, a private teacher suggested creating a “game” for a solo that included technical achievements (e.g. bow hold, ringing notes) as well as performance achievements such as notes and rhythms. Another teacher realized a composition assignment could be presented as a “game” that allowed students to work at their own pace.

Free Resources for digital Gamification:

For content management: Google Classroom, SeeSaw <https://web.seesaw.me>, Showbie <https://www.showbie.com>, or Google Sites

To create reference materials for students: FlipGrid <https://info.flipgrid.com>, Quizlet <https://quizlet.com> or Flippity.net <https://www.flippity.net>

To store reference materials for students all in one place: Google Classroom, FlipGrid, Google Sites or Google Drive

To create Quest Maps: Google Slides, Canva <https://www.canva.com> or ThingLink <https://www.thinglink.com>

To create Quests for non-playing skills: Flippity.net, Google Slides, or Google Forms.

To maintain an Interactive Leaderboard: Google Slides or Google Sheets

To create digital Badges: Google Slides, Canva or AliceKeeler.com (Search Badge Maker) <https://alicekeeler.com>

Apps and websites for student to use to create: the apple app ChatterPix, Thinglink, iMovie, or Canva

Jessica R. Stephens is Orchestra Director at Capps Middle School in suburban Oklahoma City. She is happy to help setting up your gamification! cello.stephens@gmail.com. Faith Farr has been editor of this magazine since 1996. †