FROM PRODUCT TO PRODUCTION:
USING GARAGEBAND SOFTWARE
TO ENHANCE STUDENT WRITING

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Using GarageBand software to enhance student writing

You can use GarageBand with almost any piece of student writing: narrative, biography, short fiction, poetry and even documentary work.

This is a hands-on, brains-on way to engage students with their own writing, while integrating the arts (music) and technology do deepen the listener’s understanding of the piece.

**RESEARCH BASE**
The literature on reading aloud indicates a positive result when children read aloud with others. Reading aloud is found to enhance a student’s vocabulary, to familiarize students with language patterns and sentence structure, to help students develop listening skills and increased attention spans, and to build children’s curiosity in reading.

*Examination of the Relation of Children Reading Aloud to Others and Reading Proficiency (2000)*

**1. Start simple**
Don’t feel like students need to have an hour-long book-on-tape as a first project. Start with something manageable, that students can complete in only two or three class periods.

**2. Remember your objectives**
While lessons that focus primarily on musical elements can be (and are) great lessons, if the primary focus of the lesson is a writing exercise, that must always remain at the fore of the project. Adding music and sound elements are meant to deepen the understanding of the writing piece, not fill in the holes of less-than-decent writing.

**3. Vocabulary and concepts**
This work uses the concepts of EDITING, TRANSITIONS, UNDERSCORING, SOUND EFFECTS, MOOD and even FLUENCY to add to student writing.

**4. Use writing and planning**
This process works best when the children are recorded reading a piece of writing — whether their own or a pre-existing piece — especially with younger students. This is not to say that older students couldn’t work with extemporaneous speaking and interviews, say, in documentary work. However, then the focus becomes much more on editing for content and takes a much longer amount of time.
SAMPLE PROJECT
Once the final draft in complete the following schedule has worked for a class of 20-30 students with a shorter piece of writing:

Day 1 (90 min):
Record all students reading their pieces individually.

Day 2 (90 min):
Teach a mini lesson in how to use the software, focusing on what all the program can do, editing and allowing time for students simply just to play and explore – keeping in mind which discoveries they make might apply to their piece of writing. By the end of this first ‘work day’, students should have their beginning transition in place.

Day 3 (90 min):
This final day is for completing all work on the project. Students should have a transition between their title and the body of work, two examples of underscoring and/or sound effects and an “outro” which completes the piece.

“As well as engaging the students in their writing, using Garage Band created an awareness in my ESL students of their reading abilities. After listening to themselves reading, they started to notice their need for improvement in pronunciation and fluency. Telling the students these things all year long was nothing in comparison to them hearing it for themselves.”
— Middle school ESL teacher.

“This is definitely a ‘value-added’ kind of arts integration for a classroom lesson. It teaches that communication can be even deeper than the words on a page.”
— Parent educator
Getting Started (and Other Useful GarageBand Tips)

• Sample Project requirements:
  an Intro — speaking the title of the piece, followed by the author’s name; a
  Transition — of music/sound FX to get the listener into the piece of writing;
  Underscoring — music that sets the mood or the emotion under the voice;
  Sound FX — to create a bigger sense of reality;
  and an Outro — to transition the listener out of the written piece and back into the
  real world.

• You can start new files using the screen or “control-N”; new tracks can be added
  using the “+” button in the bottom left corner, by typing “control-shift-N” or by
  selecting “new track” from the menu at the top of the screen

• When recording voices, it helps to un-check (turn-off) the metronome sound, by
  clicking under “Control” at the top of the screen. The metronome is used more
  for recording live instruments so that they can match the tempo (or the beat).

• When editing — especially fine detailed editing — it helps to un-check (turn off)
  the “Snap to Grid” function under the Control menu at the top of the screen.

• Don’t forget the helpful Zoom sliders at the bottom left of the main window and
  the bottom left of the Edit window. They allow for more precise control of editing
  and make it easier to find your way around a longer recording.

• Additional Sound FX can be found online and on Sound FX CDs.

• All of the music in the GarageBand program is copyright-free, so if you are
  planning to post projects online, you don’t have to worry about copyright
  violations. It’s a different story if students are importing copyrighted music into
  their projects. This is a good way to teach about respecting copyright — and
  creative work by artists of all types — in the real world.

• There are two places to look to check whether the microphone is recording: the
  computer’s System Preferences OR GarageBand’s program Preferences. Both
  places, you’re looking under the “audio” and “input” settings.

• The best way to help students is to make a sample project yourself, so that
  you understand the processes involved — the explicit AND the implicit.

• You can use the microphone that’s built into your computer, however it doesn’t
  yield a very professional sound. Microphones that are powered by the USB port
  on your computer are a great way to put the mic right up to a student’s mouth to
  get the best possible sound right from the start.

• Be careful editing... Join together small bits of sound into a longer track so they
  don’t get mixed up; do this after you know they’re where you want them.
  Likewise, you can “split tracks” or slice them apart with your “laser” — the
  playhead — to create “air”; it sometimes helps to give the listener a break from
  constant sound — with voices and music. Don’t be afraid to change up the music
  every now and then.

• Less is more. It can also be laziness.
Critical Response

**Essential Questions**

- How do we perceive deeply?
- What is the value of deferring judgment? Of taking a descriptive (objective) stance?
- How do we learn about others’ perspectives?
- How do we use the arts to surface hidden assumptions, hidden bias, and critical questions?
- How do we create a safe environment for all voices to come forward and be honored?

**Critical Response Protocol**

1. **What do you notice?**
   (Describe, without judgment, what you see/hear)

2. **What does it remind you of?**

3. **How does it make you feel?**

4. **What questions does it make you ask?**

5. **What do you learn?**
   (about the artist’s intent)