

# Dvořák: Symphony No. 9 “From the New World”

## Lesson Plan

### Overview

Students will analyze Antonin Dvořák’s New World Symphony and connect it to broader interdisciplinary questions of historical context and creation of music.

### Standards

#### *Novice General Music*

- B.CN.1 Relate musical ideas and works with personal, societal, cultural, historical, and daily life contexts, including diverse and marginalized groups.
- B.CN.1.2 Identify how the creation and performance of music is supported by concepts from other content areas.
- B.CN.2.1 Describe how various individuals contribute to the creation, production, design, and marketing of music.

#### *Novice Vocal and Instrumental Music*

- N.CN.1 Relate musical ideas and works with personal, societal, cultural, historical, and daily life contexts, including diverse and marginalized groups.
- N.CN.1.2 Explain how concepts from other content areas can inspire the development of musical ideas
- N.CN.2.2 Compare how various innovative tools and ideas have been used in a variety of musical works.

### Procedure

1. Warmup: ask, “where do you hear music in everyday life?”
  - a. Note that student responses will raise questions of what counts as music, authorship, etc. Consider limiting digressions to preserve discussion time later.
2. Introduce to students: “Dvořák’s New World Symphony ‘wove American roots music into his vast symphonic canvas.’ To learn more, you [students] will read about the creation and impact of this work and then apply the same way of thinking to the world around you.”
3. Read the short article here. Note this can be an 8-minute “listen” from the radio story, but with pausing for conversation halfway (after “a kind of song without words scored for the English horn”) and at end, will conservatively take 25 minutes.
4. Student handout includes the following questions. Potential answers can be found in a teacher’s guide below.
  - a. What different voices or perspectives are included in this article?
  - b. (For example: the composer, historians, musicians, or music critics.)

## Dvořák: Symphony No. 9 “From the New World”

### Lesson Plan

- c. How do these different opinions work together to help you understand the New World Symphony? Do some opinions agree with each other, add new ideas, or explain the music in different ways? Hint: The article shares more than one person’s point of view—pay attention to who is speaking and what they are saying.
  - d. What are the most important ideas or messages the author is trying to share about the New World Symphony? Write one or two main points in your own words.
  - e. After reading and learning about the New World Symphony, what do you notice when you listen that you might not have noticed before? (Think about instruments, melodies, rhythms, mood, or cultural influences.
  - f. How does learning about the New World Symphony change the way you think about other music you hear—at school, at home, or in movies and games? Does it help you listen more carefully or notice new details?
  - g. How does the article show what has stayed the same and what has changed in America since the country was founded (250 years ago)?
5. Listening: The class will stream the North Carolina Symphony’s performance of the New World Symphony.
  6. When introducing the attached viewing guide, explain
  7. The Program Notes from the NC Symphony in the left column. Depending on the level of your students and prior learning, you might want to note different points of emphasis. After going through program notes, play one movement at a time and pause the video to go over notes and discuss the handout with your students.
  8. Read together and define any terms students might be unsure of and are developmentally appropriate for your students, such as:
    - a. Movement I
      - i. Tempo markings: Allegro molto, Largo, motif, and Pastoral.
      - ii. Pastoral: A composition representing rural, or country life. Play this example from Beethoven's Symphony No. 6
    - b. Movement II
      - i. Authentic, synthesized, salient
    - c. Movement III
      - i. The Song of Hiawatha: “Longfellow used rhythmic poetry to convey various Native American myths to a popular audience. Primarily, the epic poem highlights the stories of the Ojibwe people of the Lake Superior region. Its main focuses are the adventures of a fictional Ojibwe hero, Hiawatha, his gifts to his people, and his tragic love story with a Dakota woman, Minnehaha.” - National Park Service

## Dvořák: Symphony No. 9 “From the New World”

### *Lesson Plan*

- d. Movement IV
  - i. Glints
- 9. Your expectations for “appropriate vocabulary” for the middle column, tying to specific lessons and concepts the class has previously discussed. Model a few examples on the board for students, pausing after the opening motif of the first movement.
- 10. Examples of appropriate notes and questions for the right column. Sentence stems will support students and can be modified as needed. Examples include:
  - a. One thing that stood out to me was...
  - b. Two instruments that played together were ... which was interesting to me because...
  - c. One question I’m left with is ...
- 11. Invite students to share their writing after each movement concludes.

### **Closure: Class Discussion**

- 1. After students share their specific observations and questions, discuss:
  - a. How does knowing the story of this piece’s creation change your experience of listening?
  - b. What are some specific ways you heard the piece illustrate how “Dvořák wove American roots music into his vast symphonic canvas.”
  - c. What do you think the composer’s assistant, Harry Burleigh, would think about this piece?
  - d. What “music” from everyday life might we listen more carefully to?
    - i. potential extension: John Cage’s 4’33”

## Dvořák: Symphony No. 9 “From the New World”

### *Lesson Plan*

#### **Potential Extensions:**

1. What music do you hear around you that people seem “blind to”?
2. “Dvořák,” the article says, “recognized a rich tradition sitting under his nose, one that most American composers seemed blind to. He wove American roots music into his vast symphonic canvas.” In this context, what does being “blind to” something mean?
3. For elementary students - record one small piece of “music” that is ignored. Be prepared to share what makes the music, where it is usually heard, why many are “blind to” it, and why it stands out to you?
4. For middle and high school students - transcribe 1-4 bars of “music” that is ignored. Be prepared to share what makes the music, where it is usually heard, why many are “blind to” it, and why it stands out to you? A student could, using compositional or sampling software, compose variations on the theme they’ve identified.

#### **History Extension:** On race and music in American history

1. Rob Kapilow’s *Listening For America* describes “a pattern that would repeat itself throughout the century, in which nearly every popular style of music originating from the black community-- ragtime, jazz, blues, bebop, swing, rock and roll, and rap-- would initially be condemned by whites who feared it would corrupt their children, only to be embraced, appropriated, and ultimately assimilated into the mainstream.”

Evaluate the extent to which *New World Symphony* fits in this pattern, using examples from the text.

# Dvořák: Symphony No. 9 “From the New World”

## *Lesson Plan*

### Sources

Huizenga, T. (2018, November 24). “How The “New World” Symphony Introduced American Music To Itself.” NPR.org.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2018/11/24/669557133/dvorak-new-world-symphony-american-anthem>

Kapilow, R. (2019). Listening for America: inside the great American songbook from Gershwin to Sondheim. Liveright Publishing Corporation.

Program for “Dvořák: New World Symphony” at Meymandi Concert Hall, Raleigh. North Carolina Symphony, 2025. <https://ncsymphony.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2526-FF01-NEW-WORLD-print-file.pdf>

OnMusic Dictionary. (n.d.). OnMusic Dictionary. <https://dictionary.onmusic.org/>

Merriam-Webster. (2026). Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>