



# THE SOLOIST

Educational Resource Guide

Orchestrate Change In Your Community

# THE SOLOIST

## Educational Resource Guide



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## About *The Soloist* Educational Campaign

*The Soloist* Educational Campaign focuses on the three main themes presented in the feature film, *The Soloist*: the tragedy of homelessness, the complexities of mental illness, and the power of music.

*The Soloist* Educational Campaign is a service learning campaign, presented in three main components: modular lesson plans for educators, user-friendly resources for students, and ready-to-implement ideas for related community service.

*The Soloist* Educational Campaign depends on the feature film *The Soloist* as a point of departure to inspire young people and the adults who care about them to learn more about these important social issues, and then take the learning to the street – making a difference.

## About the Film

In April 2005, *Los Angeles Times* columnist Steve Lopez kicked off a riveting series of feature articles about Nathaniel Anthony Ayers, an astonishingly talented, yet utterly lost street musician Lopez had happened upon pushing his shopping cart and playing, with astonishing virtuosity, a two-stringed violin on the hard-knock streets of Skid Row. Very shortly thereafter, Lopez’s stories became a phenomenon unto themselves.

As Lopez began to dig into Ayers’ past as a Juilliard prodigy of great promise, and set out on his own challenging quest to bring dignity to Ayers’ current life on the street, the articles continued to draw a vast readership. Rife with emotion and eye-opening in their raw reality, the stories of Lopez’s unusual encounters with Ayers captured the city’s imagination. Ayers himself, with his whimsical belief that Beethoven must be the leader of Los Angeles, his unwavering commitment to art and personal freedom in spite of his circumstances, and his steely knowledge of how to survive the dangers of the streets – was an irresistible true-life character.

However, his story seemed to be about so much more than just a man down on his luck. It was about the secret, yet transcendent dreams that exist even at the American margins; it was about crossing the gulf between the privileged and the outcast; and, perhaps most intriguingly, it was about the often perilous task of trying to change a friend’s life, and how such a quest can lead paradoxically to exhilarating revelations about one’s own.

From the director of the Academy Award®-nominated “Atonement,” Joe Wright, and starring Oscar® winner Jamie Foxx and Oscar® nominee Robert Downey Jr., comes this poignant and ultimately soaring tale. It is based on an incredible true story of a disenchanting journalist’s transformative odyssey through the hidden streets of Los Angeles, where he discovers and builds a most unlikely friendship with a man from those same streets, bonding through the redemptive power of music.

## 10 Ways You Can Make A Difference.... ...in the areas of homelessness and mental illness

- 1. Educate yourself and others about homelessness and mental illness.** Read – and then share – the Fact Sheets included in this Guide. The first step in making a change is gaining knowledge – and sharing that knowledge with others.
- 2. See a movie.** Organize a group to go see *The Soloist* and have a discussion afterwards. The Soloist is an entertaining film that illustrates how complex the issues of homelessness and mental illness can be. Go see the film, and then use the discussion questions in this Guide to organize an informed conversation afterwards.
- 3. Don't Be a Bystander.** When you hear someone using a slur or perpetrating a myth about mental illness, say something. Psychiatric disorders are legitimate physical illnesses, just like any other illness such as heart disease, diabetes, or asthma. Do your part to remove the stigma, shame, and fear that is often associated with mental illness.
- 4. Prepare and/or serve a meal.** Find a local shelter, food bank or soup kitchen and volunteer your time. Provide a home-cooked meal to homeless individuals who need it most.
- 5. Tutor or mentor a child.** Children are often most deeply affected by both homelessness and mental illness. Take the time to mentor, tutor, and support a child who is homeless, or a child who is struggling in school due to mental illness.
- 6. Do your part to “Write” Policy Wrongs.** Identify a public policy or piece of legislature that you either want to support or defeat in the areas of mental health initiatives or homelessness and start a petition. Or, organize a letter-writing campaign to your governmental representatives.
- 7. Collect and Donate.** If you have a dress or suit that you never wear, consider donating them to the homeless. In order to find and keep a job, people experiencing homelessness need work-appropriate clothing and shoes. Other items that you can donate: blankets, toys, canned food, and personal hygiene products (such as shampoo, soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste, hair brushes, and deodorant).
- 8. Host an event.** Invite a local expert on mental health or on homelessness to come speak at your school. Find a local non-profit that might want to co-host, or provide information and resources on the subject.
- 9. Just Have Cake.** For your next birthday or holiday celebration, forgo the gifts and ask that your friends and family make donations to a non-profit that works in the areas of homelessness or mental illness. You'll be amazed at how much of a difference you can make.
- 10. Pass it Forward.** Xerox this list and give it to a friend!

## How to Use the Film *The Soloist*

The following guidelines can be used by classroom and community educators in a variety of contexts — from an independent study assignment to a formal classroom setting or an evening program or workshop — to foster crucial dialogue about the issues surrounding homelessness and mental illness in America, and how individuals — through education, awareness, and simple actions — can make a positive difference.

## Pre-Viewing Suggestions for *The Soloist*

These suggestions can be used when viewing the film. They also can be used as a group activity after individuals have seen the film independently in theatres.

1. Before viewing or assigning the viewing of *The Soloist*, watch the film yourself and create a list of the film's main points for post-viewing discussion. These points might include, among others:
  - The many and varied homeless demographics, such as people who are both experiencing homelessness and are suffering from severe mental illness or addictions, veterans experiencing homelessness, families experiencing homelessness, people experiencing temporary homelessness, people who are chronically homeless, runaway youth, etc.
  - The positive impact of journalism (and the economically challenged genre of newspaper writing)
  - The complex nature of friendships
  - Mental illness and its effects on the individuals who are experiencing the illness as well as their friends and family
  - Support services for those experiencing homelessness — both governmentally funded and privately funded
  - Public access to music and music education
  - The challenges and stresses of working with a population experiencing homelessness or mental illness
2. Before the group views the film, provide a brief introduction. Refer to the section *About the Film* in this Guide for a general description. Then, outline the three primary focus areas of the film:
  - The issue of homelessness — on an interpersonal level and a public policy level
  - The issue of mental illness — on an interpersonal level and a public policy level
  - Music — as a mode of interpersonal communication, emotional release, and connection with the world
3. Suggest that the group think about the following ISSUES while viewing the film:
  - Preconceived notions of what a “homeless person” is
  - Preconceived notions of what a “mentally ill” person is
  - Hurdles facing public assistance to those experiencing homelessness
  - Hurdles facing public assistance to those suffering from mental illness
  - Hurdles facing the family and friends of those who are mentally ill
  - Hurdles facing individuals who work with people who are homeless or mentally ill
  - What it is really like to suffer from mental illness
  - What it is really like to experience homelessness
4. Distribute index cards to the group and ask viewers to write thoughts, feelings, and questions that come to mind while they watch the film. Let them know that you will not be collecting the cards, but that the cards are for their own use to help them remember what they were thinking during the viewing of the film.



5. Before viewing the film, use some or all of the following questions as a way of encouraging the viewers to use their knowledge, personal skills, and assessments of the issues surrounding homelessness and mental illness as a basis for problem solving and taking action.
  - What are your own preconceptions about homelessness? About mental illness?
  - What do you see as today's most urgent crisis regarding homelessness and/or mental illness?
  - How does our society treat these issues — politically, fiscally, and conceptually?
  - Where have you gotten information about homelessness/mental illness?
  - Do you think the mainstream media presents these issues clearly and accurately?
  - What has your involvement in these issues been on a personal level?
  - In assessing your skills as an advocate for something you care about, what do you see as your strengths?

### Post-viewing Extensions for *The Soloist*

Post-viewing extensions can support the development of an active learning community where people share ideas, expertise, and prompt ongoing inquiry. Use some of the following ideas to extend the learning of *The Soloist*:

1. Lead a post-viewing discussion about the film. Use some or all of the questions contained in the *Questions for Further Discussion* section of this Guide.
2. Encourage members of the group to share one issue or item that they wrote on their index card while they were watching *The Soloist*. Use these as prompts for a whole-group dialogue.
3. Mediate a discussion using the following prompt as a point of departure: “as a result of your having seen this film, what, if any, specific actions do you think you will take in the areas of homelessness and/or mental illness?” Refer members of the group to the *10 Ways You Can Make a Difference* section of this Guide for ideas.
4. Write the list of ISSUES from the Pre-Viewing Guidelines on chart paper. Then, on a separate piece of chart paper, write the word ACTIONS. Conduct a discussion where you elicit a list of ideas from the group for actions that individuals can take to homelessness and mental illness in their community.
5. Conduct an action plan activity by dividing the whole group into small groups using the following categories. Then, give each small group chart paper and markers and have them brainstorm and chart action plan ideas to share with the whole group. Allow 15–20 minutes for small group discussion and 5–10 minutes for each small group to present its ideas.
  - Public Policy: Homelessness
  - Public Policy: Mental Illness
  - Education: Homelessness
  - Education: Mental Illness
  - Music and the Homeless
  - Music and the Mentally Ill

***The Soloist:*  
Questions for  
Further  
Discussion**

Use these questions to guide a post-viewing discussion, as essay prompts, or to explore the themes and issues that the film raises in more depth.

In the scene when Steve first meets Nathaniel, how does it appear that Steve's preconceived notions about homeless individuals or mentally ill individuals are affecting his expectations of Nathaniel?

When Nathaniel tells Steve "I've had a few setbacks," Steve's response is "Me, too." What is the symbolic importance of this dialogue? What parallels can you draw between Nathaniel's isolated life on the streets and Steve's emotionally insulated life?

Why does the filmmaker use a montage of seemingly unrelated visual images when Nathaniel is playing, or listening to, music? What is the purpose — symbolically and literally — of these images?

How does Nathaniel's mental illness affect his friendship with Steve? How has Nathaniel's mental illness affected his relationships in the past (family, classmates, teachers, etc.)? Why is this significant?

Why is Beethoven used as a recurring symbol throughout the film? What symbolic relevance does Beethoven, specifically, have in the context of Nathaniel's life story?

At one point, Steve tells Nathaniel "I want to write a column about...how a guy like you winds up on the street." This seemingly simple premise launches Steve on a long journey. What makes that statement, which at first glance seems so simple, actually so very complex?

What did music mean — literally and figuratively — to Nathaniel as a young boy in Cleveland? What did it mean to Nathaniel as a young adult at Julliard? What did it mean to Nathaniel, the homeless and mentally ill man that we meet in this film?

Steve Lopez's columns touched many of his readers, and moved them to offer Nathaniel instruments, music supplies, lessons, and more. Why do you think this story had such an impact on so many people?

How did Steve's attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles change over the course of the film? How did his attitudes towards people suffering from mental illness change over the course of the film? What caused these changes to take place?

In this film, homelessness and mental illness are often explored on two different, almost parallel, tracks: the personal level — as illustrated by Steve and Nathaniel's friendship, and on a policy level, in terms of non-profits, politicians, budget allotments, and the like. What do you see as the relationship and the disconnect between these two areas?

What is the significance of Nathaniel's outburst later in the film when he attacks Steve, saying "I don't need you, I don't need Los Angeles, I despise this stinking city, I despise you!"? What does this represent within the structure of Steve and Nathaniel's friendship? How does this experience affect Steve, and how does Steve change his behavior afterwards?

## Classroom Module: Humanizing Homelessness

### About This Activity:

Participant Media provides this activity about **Humanizing Homelessness** to help young people understand the problem of homelessness from a personal perspective. Issues relating to policy, economics, and perception are all explored. This activity is geared towards students aged 12–16 but can be modified for use with other age groups.

### Curriculum Connections:

This activity fits in perfectly with lessons that address curriculum standards in language arts, conflict resolution and mediation, behavioral studies, civics, social studies, economics, and health.

### Activity Preparation:

- Prepare copies of *Student Handouts* for distribution

### Key Words and Phrases:

Homeless, urban, mentally ill, connotation, figurative, symbolic, intangible, preconception, legislation, hate crime

### Rationale:

The purpose of this activity is for students to consider the importance of the concept “home” and then apply that personal understanding to an exploration of homelessness in America. Specifically, the lesson encourages students to identify and understand some of the causes of homelessness in America, as well as the consequences of the homeless problem.

### Student Objectives:

- Students will explore their own biases surrounding homelessness
- Students will learn about some of the legislation that addresses homelessness in America
- Students will explore the importance of the concept of “Home”
- Students will learn about some of the basic facts regarding homelessness in America
- Students will conduct in-depth research on one specific demographic within the homeless population in America
- Students will relate statistics about homelessness to the personal experience of being homeless

### Requirements:

#### Materials:

- Chalkboard and chalk, or chart paper and markers
- *Student Handouts: Faces, Some Facts About Homelessness, and Research Project on Homelessness in the U.S.*

#### Time:

- 2 class periods

### Techniques and Skills:

Vocabulary building, reading comprehension, large group discussion, small group discussion, working in pairs, critical and analytical thinking, public speaking, supporting ideas with examples, comparing and contrasting information sources, listening skills, research, and expository, creative, and responsive writing.



**Procedures:**  
**Day 1**

1. Begin by writing “Home” on the chalkboard or on chart paper. Allow 10 minutes for the class to respond and reflect on the word in writing.
2. Allow 5 – 10 minutes to discuss the assignment as a large group. Ask for volunteers to read their responses.
3. After a few students have read their responses aloud (in whole or in part), allow 5–10 minutes for a short discussion as a whole class. Use some or all of the following questions to guide the discussion:
  - Define the term “home,” in literal terms. What, specifically, does a home provide?
  - Define the term figuratively. What emotional, or intangible, comforts does a home provide?
  - How many of you included a literal definition of “home” in your free write? How many of you focused on the intangible, or emotional aspects of “home”? Why do you think this is?
  - Which is more important, the literal provisions of a home (shelter, protection from the elements) or the intangible ones (comfort, a sense of belonging, a place to relax)? Explain your answer.
  - How do you feel about your home? How do these feelings shape who you are?
  - Have you ever felt “homesick”? Why do you think people get homesick?
  - Define the term figuratively. What emotional, or intangible, comforts does a home provide?
4. Write the phrase “Living without a Home” on the chalkboard or on chart paper.
5. Ask the students what comes to mind when they read this phrase. Allow 5 minutes for reflection and discussion.
6. Now write the word “Homeless” on the chalkboard or on chart paper.
7. Conduct a short brainstorm with the whole class, charting responses as a word web. You may use some or all of the following questions to guide the short discussion:
  - Reflect on the definition of the word “homeless” — both literally and figuratively. Could a person have a roof over their head and still be “home-less”?
  - How is the *connotation*, or implications, of the word “homeless” different than that of the phrase “living without a home”? Is there a literal difference?
  - Have you ever known anyone who has lived without a home?
  - What do you imagine the biggest challenges of being homeless might be?
8. Now write the following definition on the chalkboard or on chart paper:

A person is considered homeless who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and/or has a primary nighttime residency that is: (A) a supervised shelter (B) an institution, or (C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

9. Explain that this last definition adapted from the McKinney–Vento Act, the first federal legislation developed to address the issue of homelessness in America, passed into law in 1987.
10. Ask the class to describe how this definition of homeless is different than, or similar to, the definitions they have brainstormed as a class. Chart their responses on the board or on chart paper, alongside their responses from the earlier brainstorm.
11. Distribute Student Handout: *Faces*. Students should complete the handout for homework.

**Procedures:  
Day 2**

1. Begin class with a 10–15 minute, whole-group discussion, reflecting on last night’s homework. Use some or all of the following questions to guide your discussion:
  - How did you describe the daily life of the person in Photograph 1? Photograph 5? Photograph 6?
  - Of all the people pictured, which would you guess might be experiencing homelessness? Why?
  - How did you describe the family and home environment of the person in Photograph 3? Photograph 4? Photograph 7?
  - If you imagined one of these people being homeless, how do you think he/she got there?
  - Of all the people pictured, did you imagine any of them to be without a family? Which one(s)? Why?
  - Would you be surprised if I told you that the woman pictured in Photograph 2 was homeless? What about the woman pictured in Photograph 6?
  - Would you be surprised if I told you that the little girl pictured in Photograph 8 was homeless? Why? How did you describe her imagined life?
2. Explain to the class that none of the photographs from their handout were specifically of people experiencing homelessness. However, the point of the exercise was to show that there is no “profile” of a homeless person. The homeless population in the United States is as diverse as the general population. Anyone, regardless of age, gender, race or ethnicity, could find himself “without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”
3. Distribute Student Handout: *Some Facts About Homelessness*. Allow 5–10 minutes for students to read the handout silently. Or, alternatively, ask for volunteers to read the handout aloud.

4. After the class has had time to read the handout, allow 10-15 minutes to discuss what they read. Use some or all of the following questions to guide the discussion:
  - Name one fact from this handout that surprised you. Explain.
  - What social implications can be drawn from the fact that families with young children are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population? How might this statistic contribute to the continuation of homelessness? How might it contribute to other social issues such as crime, the federal deficit (our nation's economic woes), or unemployment?
  - A hate crime can be defined as a crime that is committed against someone because of their perceived race, color, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation. Why or how might a violent crime committed against a homeless person be classified as a hate crime?
  - Why is it relevant to note the incidents of hate crimes perpetrated against those experiencing homelessness?
  - The overwhelming majority of people in a shelter on any given night are homeless for only a short period of time, and only approximately 10% of homeless people are the "chronically homeless," that you might picture panhandling or living out of a shopping cart. Does this statistic surprise you? Why or why not?
  - According to the fact sheet, what are the main reasons why "unaccompanied youth" (minors without a guardian) find themselves homeless?
  - How might drugs and alcohol contribute to the nation's homeless problem?
  - How might homelessness contribute to the nation's drug and alcohol problem?
  - What do you see as a correlation between mental illness and homelessness? How might mental illness lead to homelessness? How might homelessness lead to mental illness?
  - As you read through all of the statistics on the fact sheet, what *questions* come to mind?
  - As you read through all of the statistics on the fact sheet, what *solutions* come to mind?
5. Divide the class into small groups. Assign each group one of the following categories:
  - Homeless Families
  - Runaway Youth
  - Homeless and Mentally Ill
  - Addiction and Homelessness
  - Elderly Homeless
  - Life in the Shelter, Life on the Street
6. Distribute Student Handout: *Research Project on Homelessness in the US* to the class. Explain that each group will be responsible for presenting a research project on their assigned topic to the class, and that the specifics of the project are outlined in the handout.
7. Take a moment to review the handout with the class and field questions, if students have any.
8. The remainder of the class period may be dedicated to small group work on this project.

## Extension Activities and Ideas for Further Learning

### 1. **Comparing and Contrasting Multiple Sources**

In 2005, Steve Lopez, a columnist at the *Los Angeles Times*, began writing a series of feature articles about Nathaniel Anthony Ayers, a street musician that he befriended after hearing Ayers play beautiful music on a two-stringed violin. The articles uncovered the incredible life story of a musical prodigy, from a single-parent household in Cleveland, to New York's Julliard School of Music, to the devastating universe of mental illness, and, ultimately, the streets of LA's Skid Row. The weekly stories of Lopez's developing friendship with Ayers captured the city's imagination. It soon became clear that this story had leapt beyond the boundaries of Lopez's column. He began writing a book about his remarkable, on going bond with Ayers called *The Soloist: A Lost Dream, an Unlikely Friendship, and the Redemptive Power of Music*, which was published in early 2008. In April, 2009 their story was released as the feature film, *The Soloist*. In addition to the personal stories of Mr. Ayers and Mr. Lopez, the *LA Times* articles, the nonfiction book, and the feature film explore the very real problem of urban homelessness, each in a different way that is unique to the medium.

*Assignment:* Read the book, see the film, and read the abstracts of the original articles (abstracts are available for free online at the *L.A. Times* Archives: <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/latimes/advancedsearch.html>) that tell the story of Steve Lopez and Nathaniel Ayers. Take notes on how these accounts are similar and different. Also consider the purpose of each account: are they for entertainment? Education? Both? Who are their primary audiences? How do the various audiences and purposes affect how the story is told? As a reader/viewer, what did you gain from one account that was missing from another? Which account affected you the most? Why? Then, identify two or three recurring social issues that exist in all three accounts. Recurring issues that you might consider include: homelessness, mental illness, music education, race relations, politics, socio-economic disparities, or others. Then, conduct your own independent research on these topics. What are the real challenges and implications associated with each of these issues? What are the organizations that are working to solve these problems? What are your opinions about how these issues are affecting our nation? Write a comprehensive report in which you compare and contrast the three sources (book, film, and newspaper articles) to the independent research you conducted and explain what you learned about the three main issues as a result of your inquiry.

### 2. **Homelessness in Your Own Backyard**

The film *The Soloist* explores homelessness against the backdrop of downtown Los Angeles, a city with the highest homeless population in the country. Yet homelessness is not limited to only the largest cities, or to certain areas within large cities, such as Los Angeles' infamous Skid Row. In every state, and in every community, there are people who have felt the effects of homelessness.

*Assignment:* Conduct your own research into homelessness in your community. Conduct your own interviews, identify and visit local organizations that provide support to people without homes. Find information, statistics, and local policies on homelessness in your community. Then, create an informational pamphlet about homelessness and distribute it to the students in your school. The pamphlet should include information on the PROBLEM (what is homelessness? How is it affecting your local community? Who is affected?), the SOLUTIONS (what organizations exist in your community that offer support to people experiencing homelessness? What are the local policies that are in place to help solve the problem of homelessness in your community?), and SUGGESTIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT (what can people do to help? Examples might be: donations, volunteering, and letter writing). The pamphlet might also include some basic facts about homelessness to help educate students and their families about homelessness.

### **3. Homelessness in the Public Sphere**

Homelessness not only affects those individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness, but all citizens in terms of the quality and availability of our healthcare, public assistance and services, public education, safety, employment, taxes, and others.

*Assignment:* Choose one population of the nation's homeless that you wish to research. Populations might include families, the elderly, people experiencing mental illness, women, veterans, individuals with addictions, or unaccompanied minors. Research questions to consider: What is the impact on the public sphere of having people experiencing homelessness? How does your city deal with the homeless crisis?

What is the impact of your city's homeless situation on larger economic and social forces? What is the government's role? What is the role of non-governmental organizations? What about our current system works? How does permanent supportive housing answer some of the problems? What are the issues that arise around permanent supportive housing? In general, what doesn't work? What solutions would you put forward? Present your findings in a comprehensive, 5-page research paper.

## Student Handout: Faces

*Directions:* As you look at each photograph, imagine a life for the person depicted. In the space provided, be creative. Invent a description of the person, a daily routine, a back story. What sort of life does each person lead? What are their families like? Where do they live?



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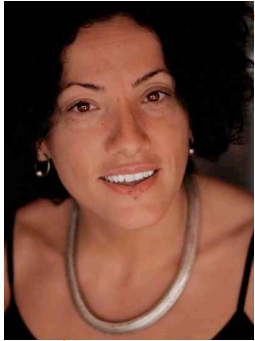


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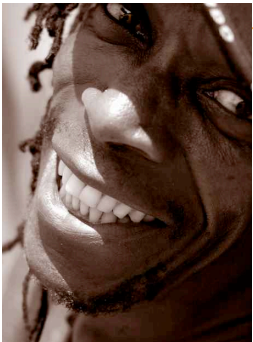




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## Student Handout: Some Facts About Homelessness

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1. Children under the age of 18 account for nearly 40% of the homeless population. Almost half of these children are under the age of 5.
2. Approximately 80% of people who stay in urban homeless shelters are homeless only once and for a short period of time. Approximately 10% are chronically homeless: single adults with disabling conditions who have been homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.
3. The homeless population is estimated to be 42% African-American, 39% Caucasian, 13% Hispanic, 4% Native American and 2% Asian.
4. Battered women who live in poverty are often forced to choose between abusive relationships and homelessness. Nationally, approximately half of all women and children experiencing homelessness are fleeing domestic violence.
5. On any given night, 271,000 veterans are homeless. 40% of homeless men have served in the armed forces.
6. Approximately 16% of the single adult homeless population suffers from some form of severe and persistent mental illness.
7. Between 1999 and 2007, there were 774 hate crimes committed against homeless people, resulting in 217 murders.
8. There are an estimated 3 million people who are homeless in the United States on any given night. This translates to approximately 1% of the U.S. population experiencing homelessness each year.
9. Between 30 and 40% of homeless adults are addicted to drugs or alcohol.
10. The number of unaccompanied homeless youth is estimated at 1.6 million, 1% of the nation's urban homeless population. The primary causes of homelessness among unaccompanied youth are physical and sexual abuse by a parent or guardian, neglect, parental substance abuse, and family conflict.
11. Approximately 10.3% of the nation's homeless are considered "elderly," over the age of 51. These older homeless people, often ravaged by poor nutrition and severe living conditions, have physical health issues that are usually associated with people over 70 years old.

## Student Handout: Research Project on Homelessness in the U.S.

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Your group will be researching the following topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(fill in topic here)*

Your research project should be organized around the following “Six P’s”:

1. State the **PROBLEM**: What is the defining issue or problem that people who fall into this category face?
2. Research existing **POLICIES**: What public policies (federal, state, or local legislature) are in place to help the people in this category?
3. Research existing **PROGRAMS**: What sorts of programs are already in place, locally and nationally, to try to help people in this category? What non-profits exist and what sort of work are they doing? What governmental organizations and/or programs exist? What are they doing to try to help?
4. Find **PERSONAL STORIES**: Research books, newspapers, magazine articles, films and documentaries, or radio programs to find real-life stories of people who are, or who have been, a member of this category. Who are they? What are their names? What was their experience? How did they get there? How did they (if applicable) get out?
5. Note your own change in **PERSPECTIVE**: How has this research changed your own perspective on homelessness in general, and, more specifically, the people in this category? Were any of your own stereotypes challenged? Have your understandings changed? Have your own thoughts and opinions on the issue changed at all? If so, how? If not, why?
6. Create your own **PLAN FOR ACTION**: Come up with a 5-point plan of action that you or your peers could implement that will help solve some of the problems and issues that the people in your category face.

**Deliverables:** Your final research project must consist of two elements. First, a 10-minute oral presentation to the class, and second, a 6-page minimum written report (one page for each “P.”).

Additional things your group should consider:

- Decide how to divide the assignment among members of the group before you begin.
- Decide how you plan to present your findings to the class. You can be creative!
- Remember that research projects require citations. All sources must be cited.

## Classroom Module: Communication Through Music

### About This Activity:

Participant Media provides this activity about **Communication Through Music** to explore the impact and power of music as a form of communication and interpersonal connection. This activity is geared towards students aged 14–18 but can be modified for use with other age groups.

### Curriculum Connections:

This activity fits perfectly with lessons that address curriculum standards in music, language arts, conflict resolution and mediation, behavioral studies, thinking and reasoning, health, working with others, and art connections.

### Activity Preparation:

- Prepare a portable CD player and/or portable speakers to plug into MP3 players
- Prepare a copy (a download or CD) of the 1<sup>st</sup> movement of Beethoven's 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony (*Symphony No. 3 in E-Flat Major, Op. 55 "Eroica": I. Allegro Con Brio*) to bring into class. It is recommended to listen to it in its entirety before teaching this lesson. The entire first movement is approximately 15 minutes long.
- Prepare copies of *Student Handouts* for distribution

### Key Words and Phrases:

Aristotle, plot, symphony, resolution, arc, discord, sonata allegro form, narrative, character, therapeutic, dialogue, heroic, demographic.

### Rationale:

The purpose of this activity is for students to consider how music can be used as a mode of communication. Specifically, the lesson encourages students to look for emotion, meaning, and plot in music and then try to apply these elements to the use of music as a catharsis.

### Student Objectives:

- Students will learn about the elements of Aristotelian plot structure (narrative plot structure)
- Students will learn about the elements of sonata allegro form
- Students will work in small groups and pairs to draw parallels between music and storytelling
- Students will explore popular music as it relates to specific emotions
- Students will be introduced to Beethoven's life and music, specifically his *Heiligenstadt Testament* and his *Symphony No. 3 in E-Flat Major, Op. 55 "Eroica": I. Allegro Con Brio*

### Requirements:

#### Materials:

- Chalkboard and chalk, or chart paper and markers
- Portable CD player and/or portable speakers to plug into MP3 players

- *Student Handouts: Plotting Stories and Music, Emotions and Music, From the Heiligenstadt Testament, and Essay Prompt*

*Time:*

- 2 class periods

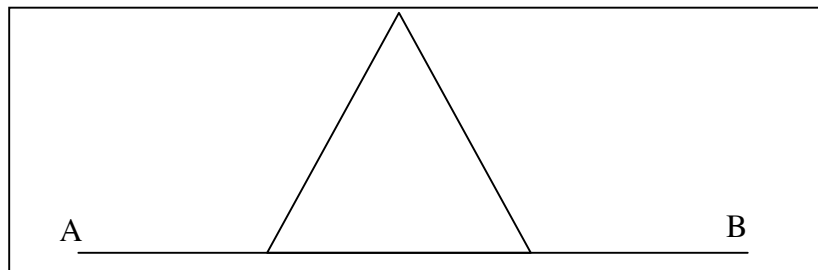
**Techniques and Skills:**

Vocabulary building, reading comprehension, large group discussion, small group discussion, working in pairs, critical and analytical thinking, supporting ideas with examples, comparing and contrasting information sources, listening skills, research, and expository and responsive writing.

**Procedures:  
Day 1**

1. Divide the class into groups of 4–5 students. Assign each group one of the following terms. Allow 10–15 minutes for the students to work in groups and brainstorm as many definitions, examples, and associations as possible.
  - a. Conflict
  - b. Music
  - c. Resolution
  - d. Hero
  - e. Rhythm
  - f. Emotion
  - g. Action
  - h. Turning Point
  - i. Beginning

2. When the groups have had ample time to brainstorm their terms, draw the following shape on the chalkboard or on chart paper:



3. Explain that this graph represents the narrative arc, or the plot, of a story. Point A is the beginning of the story. Point B is the end.
4. Ask each group where they think their term belongs on the story arc. Encourage students to be creative since their term might, at first glance, not be a literary term. Remind students that the whole graph is available to them — including outside the box, inside the triangle, etc.
5. Take turns for each group to position their term on the graph and then explain to the rest of the class why they chose that position. Their explanation should include how that position relates to their brainstormed definition of their term.
6. When every group has had an opportunity to place their term on the graph, conduct a 5–10 minute whole-group discussion, using some or all of the following questions as a guide:
  - How does the term “music” fit into the arc of a story?
  - How might music fit in to the art of writing, reading, or telling a story?
  - How might telling a story fit in to the art of music?
  - What does rhythm have to do with storytelling?



- What does “turning point” mean, literally (think of dance, or movement)?
  - What does it mean in terms of a story arc? What might it mean in music? How are all three related?
  - What does “discord” mean to you? Where do you think it belongs on the graph?
  - What is a hero?
  - How do the terms “conflict” and “resolution” relate to one another, in terms of their definitions, as well as their positions on the graph?
  - What do “conflict” and “resolution” look like in a story? What do they look like (or sound like) in a piece of music?
7. Distribute *Student Handout: Plotting Stories and Music*. Divide the class into pairs and allow 10 minutes for students to complete their handouts with their partners.
  8. When pairs have completed their handouts, allow 5-10 minutes for a whole-group discussion, using all or some of the following questions as a guide:
    - How do the narrative plot form and the sonata allegro form relate to one another? What are their similarities and differences?
    - Based on these definitions, how might a piece of instrumental music tell a story? What aspects of music would be used? Explain.
    - How do both the narrative plot form and the sonata allegro form end — in discord or in harmony? Why do you think this is the case?
    - Why is resolution important in a piece of music or in a story?
    - Why is building tension important in a piece of music or in a story?
    - Name your favorite song. Does that song have any of the same elements as the sonata allegro form? Explain (be specific).
    - Name your favorite movie. Does that movie have any of the same elements as the narrative plot form? Explain (be specific).
  9. Write the word “joyful” on the chalkboard or on chart paper. Ask for a volunteer to tap a joyful rhythm on their desk. Then, write the word “sad” on the chalkboard or on chart paper. Ask for another volunteer to tap a sad rhythm on their desk.
  10. Ask the class to try to describe what made one rhythm communicate joy, while the other communicated sadness. How is it that the simple act of tapping on a desk can communicate a human emotion? How does this translate into the expressive power of music?
  11. For homework, students should complete *Student Handout: Emotions and Music*.

*Note:* As an optional assignment, ask students to prepare a MP3 playlist or a mix CD of the songs they listed on their handout to share with the class.

## Procedures: Day 2

1. Begin by allowing 10–15 minutes for students to share their homework, *Student Handout: Emotions and Music*. Students will enjoy comparing notes regarding which songs they chose for each term. Ensure that when students share, they include their definition of the term and their explanation for why they matched the song with the term.

*Note:* If students brought in MP3 playlists or CDs, this is a good time to play excerpts of the songs and discuss how they illustrate the terms. Make special note of sections of the songs that illustrate building tension (in rhythm, tempo, melody, and harmonics) and the relief of that tension. If students were not asked to bring in examples of their music, another option would be to bring in a few music samples to share with the class.

2. Once students have had the opportunity to explore a few of the terms on the handout, distribute *Student Handout: From the Heiligenstadt Testament*.
3. Ask for volunteers to read each paragraph aloud. Once the class has read the excerpt, conduct a whole-group discussion about the *Testament*, using the *Questions for Further Discussion* from the *Student Handout* as a guide.
4. Tell the class that they will now hear the first movement of Beethoven's 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony (approximately 15 minutes long).
5. Tell the class that Beethoven titled this symphony "Eroica" which means "Heroic." This first movement was written in sonata allegro form.

*Note:* The class might benefit from a quick review of all the elements of the sonata allegro form at this time.

6. Tell the students that you will be stopping the music from time to time to ask for feedback, specifically, what kinds of emotions Beethoven is communicating with his music and what sort of story, with what sort of characters, he is trying to tell.

*Note:* There are a number of points in the movement when it might be appropriate to pause and discuss. The following Timecodes indicate a few such points in the movement, but are general references, as each recording of the symphony differs slightly.

- Timecode 01:19 – ask students if they were able to identify two distinct themes, one that is easily hummed, one which is more evasive, more fluid
- Timecode 01:30 – point out the emotion in this section – a building to joy, a building of tension, a series of small "arrivals"
- Timecode 03:15 – begins to build tension, discord, perhaps sadness – there seems to be a struggle between happiness and sadness or calm and anxiety
- Timecode 4:40 – has joy won over despair?
- Timecode 06:00 – 09:00 – the tension builds to a new peak, seems to resolve itself but builds again

- Timecode 09:14 – 11:15 – a triumphant arrival
  - Timecode 11:32 – a new dialogue begins?
  - Timecode 11:55–14:50 – stops and starts lead to a dramatic ending to the movement
7. After the movement is over, conduct a whole-group discussion, using the following questions as a guide:
    - What emotions did you feel, or hear, during the piece of music?
    - How can you relate the music that you heard to the excerpt that you read from Beethoven’s *Heiligenstadt Testament*? How does the content of his text relate, support, or refute the mood and content of the music?
    - Based on what you just heard, why do you think the symphony is named the “Heroic Symphony”? What sounded heroic to you?
    - What questions did the music raise for you?
    - If you could ask Beethoven any question about this movement, what would you ask him?
    - Based on this preliminary exploration of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony, if there were lyrics to the music, what do you think they would be?
  8. For homework, students should respond to the following essay prompt. Copy the prompt onto the chalkboard or chart paper, or, alternatively, copy and distribute *Student Handout: Essay Prompt*.

*Directions:* Respond to the following prompt in a 2-page (minimum) critical paper. Support your statements with both personal opinion and examples from research.

How could music be used in a therapeutic, educational setting? How might people who are otherwise unreachable (or difficult to reach) be reached through music? You may consider some or all of the following (or other) demographics: people with disabilities (physical and/or developmental), at-risk youth and/or runaways, people experiencing mental illness, individuals and families experiencing homelessness, people with addictions, or people who are incarcerated.

## Extension Activities and Ideas for Further Learning

### 1. **The Power of Music**

In 2005, Steve Lopez, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, met Nathaniel Anthony Ayers, a classically-trained musician experiencing mental illness and homelessness. The ensuing story of how their friendship develops is the basis for the film, *The Soloist*. Nathaniel gained much from his friendship with Steve. And, perhaps surprisingly, Steve gained equally as much from his friendship with Nathaniel. In the film, Steve reflects on Nathaniel's relationship to music:

“When I see him playing, right inside his music, I’m filled with awe – and loss – because he manages to connect with something higher, something beyond himself, that I don’t know how to connect to.”

“If you could have seen him while they were playing, if you’d felt him. I sat right next to him, in the same hall, listening to the same music, and I looked at him, and all I could think was, my God, there is so much I don’t hear. There is so much I don’t see. There’s something higher out there that he lives with and in, and I never even touch.”

“I can tell you that by witnessing Mr. Ayers’ courage – his humility – his faith in the power of his art – I’ve learned the dignity of being loyal to something you believe in. Of holding onto it, above all else. Of believing, without question, that it will carry you home.”

*Assignment:* View the film *The Soloist* and reflect on how music is represented. Pay specific attention to how music provides a release, or a safe haven, to Nathaniel. In a 5- page expository essay, explore how a man in such dire straits can find such unadulterated joy in music. What does this say about the power of music, about the ability that music has to transform and to illuminate the everyday details of the world? Use specific examples from the film, as well as additional sources, such as novels, poems, song lyrics, or research articles to support your opinion.

### 2. **Music As Therapy**

Soft music can be relaxing. Before a big game or important race, athletes will often listen to upbeat music to get them going. Hearing a song from your past can bring back powerful memories — and these are just a few examples of how music has the ability to affect our emotional and physical state. In the film *The Soloist*, Nathaniel is, on some level, saved by music: when he is listening to, or playing music, no longer is he plagued by his mental illness or trapped in his life on the street. He is transported. Music therapy is a therapeutic approach that uses this power of music to help patients who have physical, emotional, cognitive, and social issues.

*Assignment:* Research music therapy. In a comprehensive, 5-page research paper, present your findings. What exactly is music therapy? When and where did it start? How is it used, and with whom? How effective is it? Then, apply your findings to the population represented in *The Soloist*: how could music be used as effective therapy with people experiencing homelessness or severe mental illness? How might music be used as a therapy with these populations? How might it be used to improve their lives? Provide specific ideas and examples.

### 3. **Music Everywhere**

Both rap and hip hop are genres of music that come from the streets: their rhythms, and lyrics, reflect the attitudes of the neighborhoods where the songs were born. And yet all music, on some level, reflects the daily personal experiences of the composers, and, in turn, the sounds of daily life can be, in their own way, musical. In other words, music is everywhere.

*Assignment:* Go out into your community and find music. Bring a recording device so you can record the sounds you hear. Be creative and listen. What are the sounds of your city? When you're done collecting, design and present a creative presentation for your peers that highlights your "found music," as well as your interpretation of this music. What does it say about your community? About the people who live there? About you, the composer? Why do you consider it "music?" Feel free to add your own input to the mix (lyrics, rhythms, melodies, etc).

### 4. **Music Education**

According to the VH1 Save the Music Foundation: "Research shows that music education develops critical-thinking and self-discipline skills and improves early cognitive development, math and reading abilities, self-esteem, ability to work in teams, spatial reasoning skills and school attendance. Children who have hands-on, sequential music instruction show improved SAT scores, are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college, and are less likely to be involved with gangs and substance abuse." And yet when budget cuts strike, one of the first things to get cut from school programs and curricula is music education.

*Assignment:* Conduct your own research into the state of music education in America's public schools. In a comprehensive research paper, explore what exists, and what is missing. Why is music education important? What does it provide that other subject areas cannot? What is the perception and attitude towards music education among educators, administrators, and students? Why does this perception exist? What can be, or should be done differently? How can changes be implemented – nationwide, or in your community? What populations are more likely to miss out on music education or exposure to music? What are the implications of this statistic? Give specific examples and provide specific ideas in your paper.

## Student Handout: Plotting Stories and Music

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**Directions:** Read through the elements of narrative plot, or story plot, listed out of order below. Then, position the elements in order on the graph as you think appropriate.

### Narrative Plot Form

#### **Dénouement or Resolution**

The dénouement, or resolution is when the plot concludes, the conflict comes to a final resolution, and all the loose ends of a story are tied up.

#### **Climax**

The climax is the pinnacle of action. It is a major turning point in the story, where the tide turns and the main conflict begins to resolve.

#### **Falling Action**

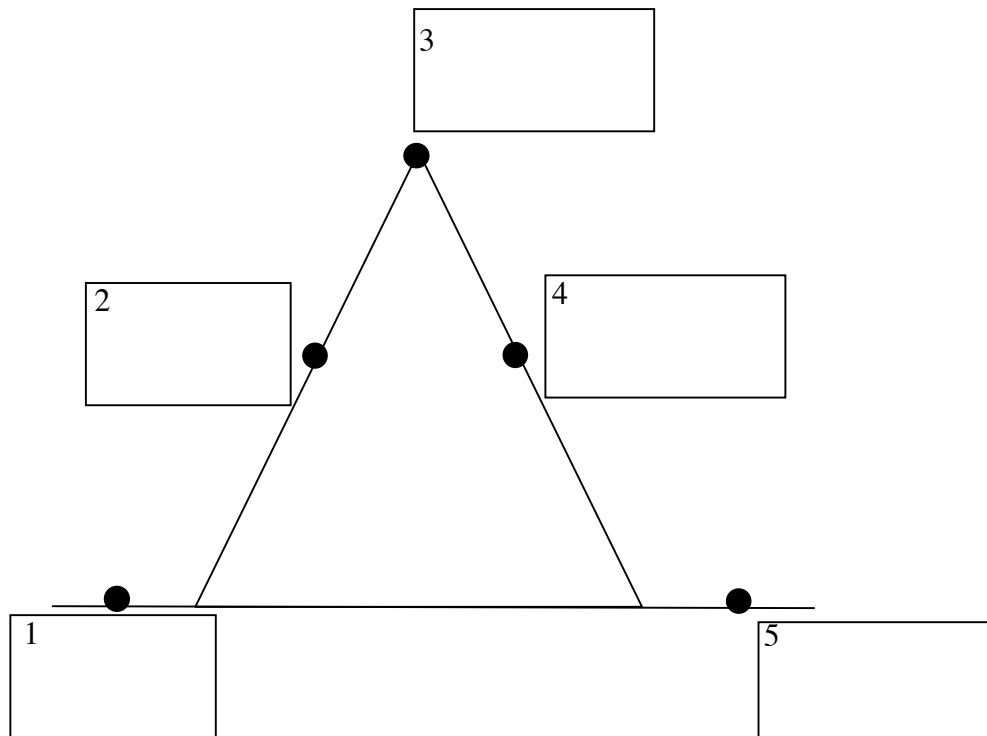
The falling action is the part of the story where the main conflict begins to resolve itself, and the outcome of the story starts to emerge.

#### **Rising Action**

During rising action, the action in the story begins to build, creating tension and the development of a central, main problem or conflict.

#### **Exposition**

The exposition provides the introduction to a story, including protagonist, antagonist, basic conflict, and setting





## Student Handout: Plotting Stories and Music

**Directions:** Read through the elements of the sonata allegro form, listed out of order below. Then, position the elements in order on the graph as you think appropriate.

### Sonata Allegro Form

#### **Recapitulation**

In the recapitulation, Theme A and Theme B are repeated, but this time both themes are in the same, original key. This provides a resolution to the conflict, or dissonance, from earlier in the piece. Recapitulation is harmonic and generally free of tension.

#### **Coda**

A coda is sometimes included in this form, providing a final ending to the movement. Codas are not always included and vary in length.

#### **Development**

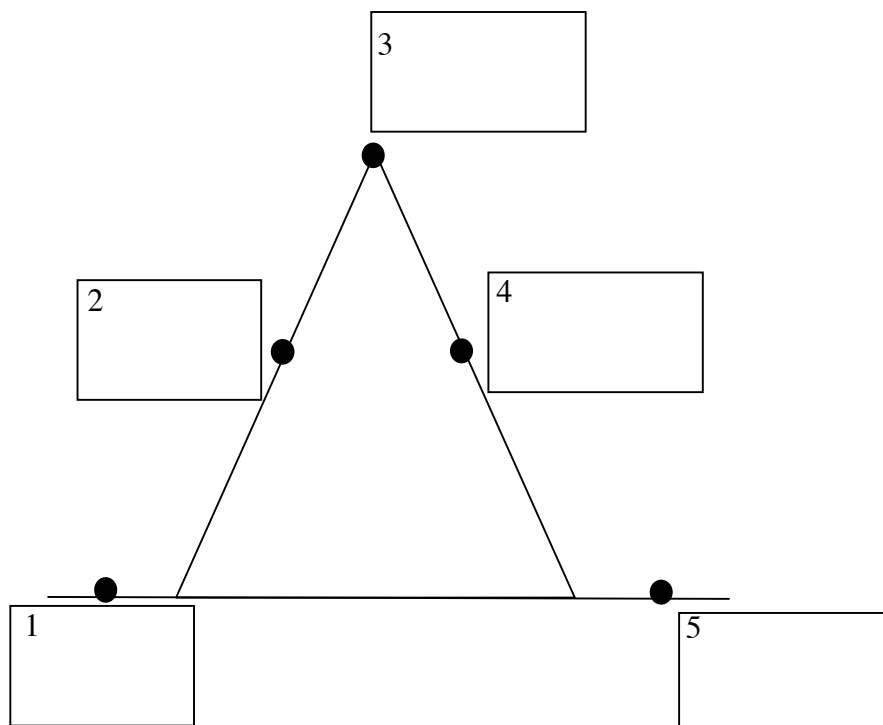
During the development, the two main themes are explored and deepened, often in numerous keys (different than the original key of the piece). The development section is a section where tension builds, often through harmonic discord and rhythmic instability. The musical tension of the piece builds throughout this section.

#### **Exposition**

The primary two themes for the movement are introduced in the exposition.

#### **Retransition**

In the retransition section, the music transitions back into the key in which the movement started. This section is a turning point in the piece and often provides a bit of relief and resolution of musical tension.



## Student Handout: Emotions and Music

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**Directions:** Next to each of the terms below, write the following: a definition of the term, the title and artist of a song that you think relates to the term, and an explanation of why you chose that song.

1. Conflict, or Anger:
2. Resolution, or Forgiveness:
3. A Hero, or Heroine:
4. Rhythm:
5. Happiness, or Joy:
6. Action, or Energy:
7. A Turning Point, Moment in Time:

## Student Handout: From the Heiligenstadt Testament

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*The following text is excerpted from Beethoven's Heiligenstadt Testament, written on October 6th, 1802, just before he returned to Vienna and wrote his Symphony No. 3 (Eroica). Some musicologists believe that his mindset during his stay in Heiligenstadt, as illustrated in this Testament, can apply to the emotional messages in his Symphony No. 3.*

“It was impossible for me to say to people, ‘Speak louder, shout, for I am deaf.’ Ah, how could I possibly admit an infirmity in the one sense which ought to be more perfect in me than others, a sense which I once possessed in the highest perfection, a perfection such as few in my profession enjoy or ever have enjoyed? Oh I cannot do it; therefore forgive me when you see me draw back when I would have gladly mingled with you.

...what a humiliation for me when someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance and I heard nothing, or someone heard a shepherd singing and again I heard nothing. Such incidents drove me almost to despair; a little more of that and I would have ended my life — it was only my art that held me back. Ah, it seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt was within me.

With joy I hasten to meet death. If it comes before I have had the chance to develop all my artistic capacities, it will still be coming too soon despite my harsh fate,\* and I should probably wish it later — yet even so I should be happy, for would it not free me from a state of endless suffering? — Come when thou wilt, I shall meet thee bravely.”

—Ludwig van Beethoven, Heiligenstadt, October 6th, 1802

### Questions for Further Discussion:

1. How would you describe Beethoven's general emotional state in this excerpt? What emotions can you identify, and how are these emotions communicated (be specific)?
2. What are some of the major areas of struggle for Beethoven, based on this excerpt?
3. How would you “translate” the last paragraph into contemporary language? When Beethoven says “come when thou wilt,” who is he talking to?
4. Based on the tone and content of this excerpt, what sort of music would you imagine Beethoven would be composing at this time?

*\*The phrase “harsh fate” most likely refers to Beethoven's impending deafness. Based on letters and doctors' reports, many believe that by the mid-1790's Beethoven began suffering from a marked loss of hearing, accompanied by whistling and buzzing in his ears. This condition gradually worsened, until, by the time he wrote The Heiligenstadt Testament, his hearing was greatly diminished. It is generally agreed that, for the last 10 years of his life, Beethoven was completely deaf.*

## Student Handout: Essay Prompt

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**Directions:** Respond to the following prompt in a 2-page (minimum) critical paper. Support your statements with both personal opinion and examples from research.

How could music be used in a therapeutic, educational setting? How might people who are otherwise unreachable (or difficult to reach) be reached through music? You may consider some or all of the following (or other) demographics: people with disabilities (physical and/or developmental), at-risk youth and/or runaways, people with mental illness, homeless individuals and families, people with addictions, people who are incarcerated.

## Classroom Module: De-stigmatizing Mental Illness

### About This Activity:

Participant Media provides this activity about **De-stigmatizing Mental Illness** in order to raise awareness about the facts and myths surrounding mental illnesses, and encourage students to stand up to bias against mental illnesses. This activity is geared towards students aged 14 – 18 but can be modified for use with other age groups.

### Curriculum Connections:

This activity fits perfectly with lessons that address curriculum standards in science, health, conflict resolution and mediation, social studies, behavioral studies, psychology, and working with others.

### Activity Preparation:

- Prepare copies of *Student Handouts* for distribution.

### Key Words and Phrases:

Mental illness, diagnosis, awareness, slur, stigma, perception, perspective, symptom, biological.

### Rationale:

The purpose of this activity is for students to explore the stigma associated with mental illnesses in this country, and then to consider how that stigma affects individuals who suffer from mental illnesses. Specifically, the activity encourages students to explore the reasons why mental illnesses are perceived differently than other illnesses and to apply this new knowledge to a broader understanding of mental health issues.

### Student Objectives:

- Students will deconstruct the elements necessary for meaningful and respectful dialogue
- Students will learn about the importance of respect in creating a productive learning environment
- Students will explore the issue of bias and stigma surrounding mental illnesses and compare these attitudes to other diseases
- Students will try to assess why stigmas exist surrounding mental illnesses and not around other illnesses
- Students will assess what they know and don't know about mental illnesses
- Students will explore some of the symptoms of severe mental illnesses and learn to empathize with those who suffer these symptoms
- Students will learn about specific mental disorders, including symptoms and available treatments
- Students will conduct in-depth research regarding a specific mental disorder

### Requirements:

#### Materials:

- Chalkboard and chalk, or chart paper and markers

- *Student Handouts: What Do You Know About Mental Illness?, Writing Prompt, Learning About Severe Mental Illness, and Mental Illness In-Depth Study*

*Time:*

- 3 class periods

**Techniques and Skills:**

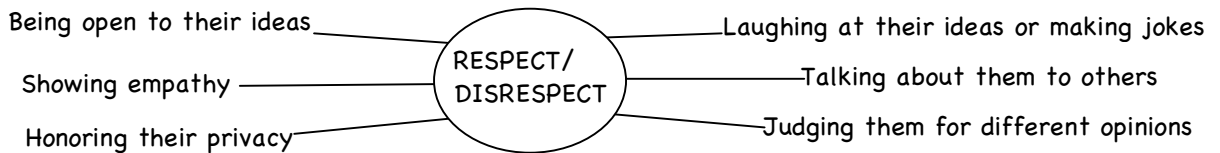
- Vocabulary building, large group discussion, small group work, working in pairs, critical and analytical thinking, research skills, supporting ideas with examples, listening skills, expository, responsive, and creative writing, and public speaking.



## Procedures: Day 1

1. Begin class by writing the following words on the chalkboard or on chart paper: RESPECT / DISRESPECT. Draw a circle around the two words.
2. Ask for a volunteer to offer a definition of the word “respect.” Then, ask for examples that show how a person might treat others (friends, siblings, parents, teachers, yourself) with RESPECT. Ask for examples of how a person might treat others with DISRESPECT.
3. Conduct a short brainstorm with the class and record the student responses as a word-web on the chalkboard or on chart paper. Record examples of “respect” on the left hand side and the examples for “disrespect” on the right. If there are relevant examples not offered by the class, suggest them and add them to the board.

*Note:* At the end of the brainstorm session, the board might look something like this:



4. Conduct a short, whole-group discussion. Use the following questions as a guide:
  - Give an example of a time when you felt disrespected by a classmate or friend.
  - Give an example of a time when you felt like someone treated you with respect.
  - What happens to a discussion when one of the people starts treating the other with disrespect?
  - Why might someone treat another person with disrespect? What would cause them to act that way?
  - What needs to be in place in order for people to treat each other with respect?
  - What sorts of benefits might come from treating others with respect?
  - What sorts of consequences might come from treating others with disrespect?
  - What specific steps can we take to ensure that we treat each other with respect within the walls of this classroom?
5. Explain that the following lesson addresses a difficult and sometimes personal topic, and that, in order to create a productive learning environment, each person in the class needs to respect one another’s opinions and perspectives.
6. Ask the students to raise their hands if anyone in their immediate or extended family has been diagnosed with cancer. Note the number of hands raised.

7. Next, ask the students to raise their hands if anyone in their immediate or extended family has been diagnosed with a mental illness. Again, note the number of hands raised.

*Note:* Due to the widespread stigma attached to mental illnesses, it is likely that more people will raise their hands in response to the first question than the second.

8. Tell the class that each year 1.4 million Americans are diagnosed with cancer, and 57.7 million Americans suffer from a mental illness.\*  
\*Statistics from *The National Cancer Institute* and *The National Institute of Mental Health* (both of the U.S. National Institutes of Health)
9. Tell the class that this means that every year, for each new cancer diagnosis, there are approximately 41 people who have a mental illness in the U.S.
10. Ask the class if they know what the pink “awareness ribbon” symbolizes. Ask if they have ever seen anyone wearing a pink ribbon. Ask if they know what the red “awareness ribbon” symbolizes. Ask if they have ever seen anyone wearing a red ribbon. Ask if they know what color the awareness ribbon for “mental illness awareness” is, or if they have ever seen anyone wearing a ribbon for “mental illness awareness.” If not, why?

*Note:* At this time, there is no official ribbon that signifies mental illness awareness.

11. Conduct a whole-group discussion, using some or all of the following questions as a guide:
  - Why is there so much more public awareness and dialogue about diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, or even HIV/AIDS and so much less public dialogue about mental illnesses and brain disorders?
  - Why do you think there might be a stigma attached to mental illnesses in this country?
  - What do you know, what have you heard, or what have you read about mental illnesses?
  - What are some of the slurs that you have heard, or even used, that relate to mental illnesses?
  - Why do you think people use these kinds of slurs about mental illnesses?
  - Have you ever heard anyone use a slur to describe someone who has cancer?
  - Have you ever heard anyone use a slur to describe someone who has heart disease?
  - Why do people use slurs like “crazy” or “nuts” to describe people with brain disorders or mental illnesses, but do not use slurs to refer to people who have been diagnosed with cancer or diabetes?
12. For homework, students should complete *Student Handout: What Do You Know About Mental Illness?*

## Procedures: Day 2

1. Begin class by reviewing the homework. Ask for volunteers to answer each question, and then conduct a whole group discussion about what they learned. Use the following questions as a guide:
  - What answers surprised you on this handout? Why?
  - How many of you know someone who has been sad for long periods of time? How many of you thought that this was normal behavior for a teenager or elderly person?
  - How many of you know someone with an eating disorder? How many of you would have thought that qualified as a mental illness?
  - How many of you thought that people with severe mental illnesses were more violent than the general population?
  - Why do you think people associate severe mental illnesses with violence?
  - What is one question that you still have?
  - What is one “bias” that you listed on your handout?
2. Ask the class why there might be more biases surrounding mental illnesses than other illnesses, such as heart disease, diabetes, or cancer.
3. Suggest to the class that one reason there might be more of a stigma attached to disorders of the brain is because the brain not only regulates body functions, as do other organs, but it also houses the “mind,” or the way in which a person thinks, creates, and understands the world.
4. Allow 10–15 minutes for students to free-write in their journals or notebooks on the following topic. You may copy it onto the chalk board or onto chart paper, or, alternatively, distribute the *Student Handout: Writing Prompt*.

Imagine that your basic ability to think, create, and understand the world begins to shift. Your usual likes and dislikes begin to change. Activities that you used to enjoy seem bothersome or overwhelming. For some reason that you cannot figure out, your friends start to seem incredibly judgmental and flakey. It’s like they suddenly start to misunderstand everything you say. You start getting into fights with them, and they stop calling you as often. Perhaps you begin to hear voices in your head — quietly at first — telling you that you are being stupid, or that people are making fun of you — and you are not sure if they are real or just your own voice being negative. You start to lose your ability to concentrate. Suddenly, things that normally would not worry or frighten you seem scary or overwhelming, such as going to the store, driving your car, or riding the train. You’re much more tired than usual, and everything feels difficult and exhausting. Your guidance counselor or teacher seems to be purposely finding ways to get you in trouble at school. When you walk through the cafeteria, it feels like people are staring at you. You can almost imagine that they know what you are thinking and feeling.

Use this prompt to begin a free-write in your journal or

notebook. Describe a day in the life of this imagined experience, using details from your own life to illustrate how these symptoms might manifest. Describe the feelings you might have if you were experiencing these changes. Afterwards, describe how this activity made you feel. Be creative, descriptive, and specific!

5. Once students complete the writing assignment, break students into small groups and allow time for students to share their writing with the members of their group. Student groups should use the following guidelines to organize their small group work:
  - Everyone in the group should share at least one thing from their writing assignment. Group members can read some or all of their assignment, or choose one thought or idea that they came up with during the free-write.
  - The group should decide on one idea or thought that came up during their discussion to share with the class.
  - The group should decide on one question that came up during their discussion to share with the class.

*Note:* At this point, the class might benefit from a reminder that this is a highly charged, and potentially personal subject, and that in order for learning to take place, each student must be respectful of their classmates' perspectives and opinions.

6. Moderate a whole-class discussion, allowing each group to report to the whole class.
7. For homework, students should complete *Student Handout: Learning about Severe Mental Illnesses*.

### Procedures: Day 3

1. Distribute one index card to each student. Instruct students to write one thing on their card that they learned from last night's research that they found surprising.
2. Ask for a volunteer (or volunteers) to read the first paragraph from their homework handout, *Student Handout: Learning About Severe Mental Illness*, aloud.
3. Tell the class that mental illnesses compromise a person's basic understanding of the world, and that those kinds of symptoms can seem scary. Acknowledge that traditionally, fear and ignorance often fuel prejudice and hate.
4. Tell the class that this is why learning about the realities of mental illnesses are so important. It is important to understand that mental illnesses are just like any other illness in the body, and they can be treated similarly.
5. As an example, write the following chart on the board. As you fill in the chart, talk it through with the class. Explain that this chart illustrates how mental illnesses — just like heart disease — are not mystical events, but biologically-based diseases affecting specific organs, which

	Heart Disease	Mental Illness
Type of Illness	biologically based	
Causes	genetics, biology, behavior – or a combination of the three	
Symptoms	disrupts the body's ability get oxygen to all the organs	disrupts the body's ability to think clearly
Treatment	combination of medication and other therapies, lifestyle changes – in severe cases, sometimes surgical intervention	

6. Conduct a short whole-group discussion with the class, asking for volunteers to read their index cards aloud. Use the following questions to guide the discussion:
  - What symptoms did you find the most surprising? Why?
  - What did you learn about treatments for mental health disorders that you did not know before?
  - What did you learn about bipolar disorder that surprised you?
  - What is schizophrenia?
  - What are some of the lifestyle effects that you were able to list for depression?
  - How does obsessive-compulsive disorder affect people's daily lives?
  - What treatments are available for anorexia?
  - How do the treatments available for panic disorder compare to the treatments available for borderline personality disorder?
7. Divide the class into small groups. Assign each group one of the following: Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Panic Disorder, Schizophrenia, Borderline Personality Disorder, Eating Disorders (Anorexia and Bulimia), and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
8. Distribute *Student Handout: Mental Illness In-Depth Study*. Allow students the rest of the class to work in groups to begin this project.

## Extension Activities and Ideas for Further Learning

### 1. **Put the Stress on Stress**

You've had it at least once in your life. So have your friends and family. It's stress. One mild mental disorder that almost everyone experiences at one time or another is stress. Stress can be positive (ramping up for a big race, feeling excitement before a performance) or can be negative (anxiety, grief).

*Assignment:* Research the different kinds of stress that the body can experience (eustress and distress), the physical and emotional symptoms of stress, the effects stress has on the body, and ways in which stress can contribute to, or be a symptom of, more severe mental illnesses. Include descriptions of the specific bodily systems that are affected by stress (and how they are affected) in your research project. Relate these findings to more acute mental disorders — how do psychological symptoms affect the body physically? How do other, more serious disorders, like stress, undermine a person's ability to function? What have you learned — and what can you extrapolate — about mild and severe mental illnesses from this exploration? Present your findings in a 5-page research paper.

### 2. **Mental Illnesses and Homelessness — One Person's Experience**

The film *The Soloist* follows Nathaniel Ayers, a man who is both experiencing homelessness and suffering from a severe mental illness. In the film, Nathaniel befriends Steve Lopez, a journalist at the *Los Angeles Times*. What follows is an exploration of Nathaniel's present state of mind, a journey into his past, and an examination of how his mental illness affects him — and those he loves.

*Assignment:* View the film *The Soloist* and read Steve Lopez's book by the same name. Pay close attention to the picture that is painted of mental illnesses through the lens of Nathaniel's experience. Then, write a 5-page reflection paper that synthesizes some or all of the following issues: How is mental illness represented in the film? Who exhibits symptoms of mental illness (severe or mild) in the film, besides Nathaniel? Describe Nathaniel's experience of mental illness (How has Nathaniel's illness affected him throughout his life? How has it contributed to his experience of homelessness? How has it affected his family and friends, and shaped his relationships? How has it impacted his environment? How has it impacted his playing, his appreciation, and his ability to hear music?

### 3. **Mental Illness' Effect on Families and Friends**

When an individual suffers with a mental illness — be it schizophrenia, addiction, anorexia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or any other disorder — it doesn't only affect that one individual. Their symptoms and their struggle affects everyone around them — from their immediate family, to their friends, as well as other people in their lives. It can be like a pebble dropped into a pond: the ripple effect of the disease can be ongoing and profound.

*Assignment:* Research the impact that severe mental illnesses have on the people who are NOT sick: family, friends, spouses, co-workers,

caregivers — and even the general population. How much does disability due to mental illnesses cost our country? How can these negative effects be improved with education and treatments? What is it like to be married to (or the sibling of, or the parent of) a person with severe mental illnesses? What support services exist to help the families and friends of people suffering from mental illnesses? Collect your research findings and write an article about the impact of mental illnesses on the family and friends of those who are ill, and suggest ways that this impact can be mitigated.

#### 4. **Mental Illness in Your Community**

Mental Illness affects 1 in 5 American families, which means that every community in the country is affected by mental illness — including your own. Does your community speak out in support of mental health services? Is there an awareness of the issues surrounding mental health disorders in your community?

*Assignment:* Research the state of mental illness and mental health in your community. Consider all types of disorders — from addiction to eating disorders, to depression, to bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. What programs are available to support people suffering with mental illnesses? What local organizations are working in this area? As a citizen of the community, what is the level of awareness — of both the problem and the available solutions? Is there a need for certain programs that do not exist? How can you (or other citizens) get involved to make a difference in this area? Collect all your findings and create an informational pamphlet about mental illness in your community. Include details regarding what is available — as well as what needs to be done — to help support people suffering with mental illnesses.

#### 5. **Creativity and Mental Illness**

It has been argued that there is a correlation between creative genius and mental illnesses, as many of history's most famous artists, composers, writers, and leaders have suffered the symptoms of mental illnesses. Such names include Sir Isaac Newton, Beethoven, Abraham Lincoln, Leo Tolstoy, Ernest Hemingway, Vincent van Gogh, John Keats, Michelangelo, and more.

*Assignment:* Research this phenomenon. Is it accurate to say that a large percentage of history's creative geniuses suffered from mental illnesses? Choose specific people to research. What sort of symptoms did they exhibit? Did their illnesses lend themselves to their art, detract from it, or both? How did their state help or hinder their creative process? Why might there be a correlation between creative genius and mental illness? Formulate your thesis in a 5-page research and opinion paper.

## Student Handout: What Do You Know About Mental Illness?

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**Directions:** Read each statement and decide if the statement is “true” or “false.” Then, circle “T” or “F” accordingly.

- |     |  |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 1.  | Electroconvulsive (“shock”) therapy is painless and can be an effective treatment for some severe mental illnesses.                            | T | F |
| 2.  | A person with schizophrenia is likely to have multiple personalities.  | T | F |
| 3.  | Addictions, such as addictions to drugs or alcohol, are considered mental illnesses.   | T | F |
| 4.  | More people in the U.S. have mental illnesses than heart disease.  | T | F |
| 5.  | People with severe mental illnesses are more violent than the general population.  | T | F |
| 6.  | Eating disorders like anorexia are not really considered mental illnesses.   | T | F |
| 7.  | Often, depression or anxiety disorders can be overcome by focusing and working harder to improve outlook and performance.                      | T | F |
| 8.  | Many mental disorders can be easily and successfully treated with medicines that have mild or easily tolerated side effects.                   | T | F |
| 9.  | Adolescents who are sad for long periods of time are not clinically depressed — they’re just going through a normal stage of being a teenager. | T | F |
| 10. | People with mental illnesses are lower functioning than the general population — they are not as successful, and have lower IQ’s.              | T | F |

### *Questions for Further Thinking*

- Complete a 5-minute free-write on the following quote on the reverse side of this paper, or in your notebook or journal:  
 “There is no great genius without some touch of madness.”  
 —Seneca (5 BC – 65 AD)
- What were your own biases about mental illnesses before this lesson?
- What do you think is scariest, or most upsetting, about mental illnesses?
- List at least 3 questions you have about mental illnesses.



## Answer Key: What Do You Know About Mental Illness?

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**Directions:** Read each statement and decide if the statement is “true” or “false.” Then, circle “T” or “F” accordingly.

- |     |  |                                    |                                    |
|-----|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Electroconvulsive (“shock”) therapy is painless and can be an effective treatment for some severe mental illnesses.                            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F            |
| 2.  | A person with schizophrenia is likely to have multiple personalities.  | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> F |
| 3.  | Addictions, such as addictions to drugs or alcohol, are considered mental illnesses.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F            |
| 4.  | More people in the U.S. have mental illnesses than heart disease.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F            |
| 5.  | People with severe mental illnesses are more violent than the general population.  | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> F |
| 6.  | Eating disorders like anorexia are not really considered mental illnesses.   | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> F |
| 7.  | Often, depression or anxiety disorders can be overcome by focusing and working harder to improve outlook and performance.                      | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> F |
| 8.  | Many mental disorders can be easily and successfully treated with medicines that have mild or easily tolerated side effects.                   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F            |
| 9.  | Adolescents who are sad for long periods of time are not clinically depressed — they’re just going through a normal stage of being a teenager. | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> F |
| 10. | People with mental illnesses are lower functioning than the general population — they are not as successful, and have lower IQ’s.              | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> F |

### Questions for Further Thinking

- Complete a 5-minute free-write on the following quote on the reverse side of this paper, or in your notebook or journal:  

“There is no great genius without some touch of madness.”  
 —Seneca (5 BC – 65 AD)
- What were your own biases about mental illnesses before this lesson?
- What do you think is scariest, or most upsetting, about mental illnesses?
- List at least 3 questions you have about mental illnesses.

## Student Handout: Writing Prompt

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Imagine that your basic ability to think, create, and understand the world begins to shift. Your usual likes and dislikes begin to change. Activities that you used to enjoy seem bothersome or overwhelming. For some reason that you cannot figure out, your friends start to seem incredibly judgmental and flakey. It's like they suddenly start to misunderstand everything you say. You start getting into fights with them, and they stop calling you as often. Perhaps you begin to hear voices in your head — quietly at first — telling you that you are being stupid, or that people are making fun of you — and you are not sure if they are real or just your own voice being negative. You start to lose your ability to concentrate. Suddenly, things that normally would not worry or frighten you seem scary or overwhelming, such as going to the store, driving your car, or riding the train. You're much more tired than usual, and everything feels difficult and exhausting. Your guidance counselor or teacher seems to be purposely finding ways to get you in trouble at school. When you walk through the cafeteria, it feels like people are staring at you. You can almost imagine that they know what you are thinking and feeling.

Use this prompt to begin a free-write in your journal or notebook. Describe a day in the life of this imagined experience, using details from your own life to illustrate how these symptoms might manifest. Describe the feelings you might have if you were experiencing these changes. Afterwards, describe how this activity made you feel. Be creative, descriptive, and specific!

## Student Handout: Learning About Severe Mental Illness

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One in seventeen Americans suffer with a serious mental illness. Serious mental illnesses include major depression, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, and borderline personality disorder. While millions of Americans suffer from these diseases, most people know very little about their causes, symptoms, or available treatments. This lack of information leads to fear and stigma, which, in turn, can lead to fewer people seeking help or treatment when they need it. Take the first step to break the cycle of ignorance and bias about mental illnesses by learning about some of the major mental health disorders.

*Directions:* Research each mental health disorder listed below and fill in the chart accordingly. List the main symptoms of the disease, the ways in which people suffering from the disease are affected in their daily lives, and the treatment options available.

	Signs and Symptoms	Effects on Lifestyle	Treatment Options
Depression			
Bipolar Disorder			
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)			
Panic Disorder			
Schizophrenia			
Borderline Personality Disorder			
Eating Disorders (Anorexia and Bulimia)			
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)			

## Student Handout: Mental Illness In-Depth Study

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Your group will be researching the following disorder: \_\_\_\_\_.  
(write mental illness here)

Work as a group to create a portfolio about this disease that includes ALL of the following elements:

1. **Definition and description of the illness, including (but not limited to):** What kind of a disorder is it? What part of the brain/body does it affect? What biological phenomena are associated with this disease? Use specific examples (descriptions of MRI's, etc.) to illustrate.
2. **Signs and symptoms, including (but not limited to):** How does the illness manifest itself? What are the main psychological symptoms? What are the main physical symptoms? At what age does it usually present itself? What demographic (if any) is usually affected?
3. **Available treatments, including (but not limited to):** What medicines are currently used to treat this disorder? What do these medications do? What other medical interventions are used? What therapies are used? What treatments may be on the horizon to treat this disease? What are the side effects of each treatment? What are the pros and cons to each treatment?
4. **Case studies and examples, including (but not limited to):** find actual case studies illustrating this specific disorder and paraphrase them to include in your portfolio. Find a book or article written by someone with the disorder, who describes living with the disorder, and describe their experience.
5. **Support systems available:** What organizations exist to support people who are suffering with this disease? What resources, networks, and programs are available to offer help and support?
6. **Post-research reflection, including (but not limited to):** What did you learn from your research project? What do you know now that you didn't know when you began? What can you do to help remove the stigma associated with this disorder and educate others about the realities of this disorder?
7. **Presentation to class:** As a group, devise a creative and thoughtful way to share your project to your class. Be prepared for a 15-minute presentation.

## Related Service Learning Projects: Homelessness

### **1. Who is Homeless?**

The film *The Soloist* explores homelessness through the specific experience of Nathaniel Anthony Ayers, who is a single man suffering from severe mental illness. However, individuals suffering from severe mental illness are by no means the only — or even the largest — homeless demographic in the country.

### **Step 1: Reading and Research**

View the film *The Soloist* or read the book, *The Soloist: A Lost Dream, An Unlikely Friendship, and the Redemptive Power of Music* and pay close attention to the specific homeless population that is represented in the film. Because the film is about a single man who is experiencing homelessness and suffering from a severe mental illness, much of the film's exploration of homelessness focuses on that demographic. Now, expand your understanding of the problem of homelessness by choosing one population of the nation's homeless that you wish to research. Populations might include families, the elderly, individuals suffering from severe mental illness, women, veterans, individuals struggling with addictions, or unaccompanied minors (runaway youth). Find out how large the population is, and what their unique challenges might be. Explore the statistics about that specific population and their typical experience. Collect statistics as well as anecdotal information. What organizations exist to support this population? What legislation exists to protect this population? What are their specific needs? How are these needs being (or not being) met?

### **Step 2: Service**

Once you've completed your research, offer support by donating time or resources.

- Help unaccompanied homeless youth by hosting a bake sale with all proceeds going to support an organization that helps runaways and homeless teens. One Los Angeles non-profit that works with this population is Covenant House, the largest privately-funded agency in the Americas providing shelter and other services to homeless, runaway and throwaway youth. Contact Tanya Quaife, volunteer coordinator, at 323-461-3131 x250 or [tquaife@covca.org](mailto:tquaife@covca.org) for more information.
- Women experiencing homelessness have a unique set of challenges to face. Focus your service on this often overlooked homeless population by volunteering to prepare or serve a meal to the women who live at a local women's shelter. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept volunteers to help prepare and serve meals is the Downtown Women's Shelter. Contact Vanessa Wai, volunteer coordinator, at 213-680-0600 x207 or at [vanessaw@dwcweb.org](mailto:vanessaw@dwcweb.org) for more information.
- Children under the age of 18 account for approximately 40% of the entire homeless population in the US. Children whose families are experiencing homelessness often miss school and lack basic school supplies. Organize a "school supplies drive" at your school. Collect backpacks, pencils, pens, erasers, rulers, binders, filler paper, spiral notebooks and more. Then, donate the school supplies to an organization that can distribute them to school-aged children whose families are experiencing homelessness. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept donations of school supplies is School on Wheels. Contact Rosemary Oliva, learning center coordinator, at 213-896-9200 or at [roliva@schoolonwheels.org](mailto:roliva@schoolonwheels.org) for more information.

- Many people experiencing homelessness are transitioning to a life with steady work and permanent housing. Help this population gain the skills they need to find a job by volunteering to tutor computer skills such as word processing or basic internet. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept volunteer computer tutors is PATH (People Assisting the Homeless). Contact Shaun Pruett at 323-644-2201 or at shaunp@epath.org for more information.
- When a family experiences homelessness, it can be difficult to meet the needs of even their youngest members. Help families with babies by organizing a “diaper drive” and donating all the new diapers to an organization that works with families with young children and babies who are experiencing homelessness. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept donated new diapers is the Shelter Partnership. Contact Ruth Schwartz, executive director, at 213-688-2188 x 4580 or at rschwartz@shelterpartnership.org for more information.

### **Step 3: Reflection**

How has your perception of “who is homeless” changed during the course of this project? What biases did you have when you started? What are your perceptions and thoughts about the issue now? Why do you think people have misconceptions about “who is homeless”? How do these misconceptions affect how the general population and the government address the problem of homelessness in America? How do you think they affect people who are experiencing homelessness? How has this project impacted your behavior? How might you sustain this new attitude going forward? How can you communicate your new perspective to your peers? How might that help the problem of homelessness in your community? Prepare a final presentation that includes your research findings, a description of your service experiences, and your final reflections to share with your peers. Use this presentation as an opportunity to educate your classmates on the myths and facts surrounding homelessness in America.

## **2. Homelessness in the Public Sphere**

The film *The Soloist* explores the issue of homelessness against the backdrop of downtown Los Angeles, a city with the highest homeless population in the country. Yet homelessness is not limited to only the largest cities, or to certain areas within large cities, such as Los Angeles’ infamous Skid Row. In every state, and in every community, there are people who have felt the effects of homelessness. Homelessness not only affects those individuals and families who are homeless, but all citizens in terms of the quality and availability of our healthcare, public assistance and services, public education, safety, employment, taxes, and others.

### **Step 1: Research**

Conduct your own research into homelessness in your area. What does the homeless population look like where you live? Conduct your own interviews, identify and visit local organizations that provide support to people who are experiencing homelessness. Find information, statistics, and local policies on homelessness where you live. What is the impact of having the homeless in the public sphere? How does your city deal with the homeless crisis? What is the impact of your city’s homeless situation on larger economic and social forces? What is the government’s role?

What is the role of non-governmental organizations or non-profit organizations? What about our current system works? What doesn't work? What solutions would you put forward?

### **Step 2: Service**

People experiencing homelessness are unable to meet their own basic needs. Explore this problem and what is being done to solve it by getting hands-on in your community.

- Create an informational pamphlet about homelessness. The pamphlet should include information on the PROBLEM (What is homelessness? How is it affecting your local community?), the SOLUTIONS (What organizations exist in your community that offer support to the homeless? What local policies are in place to help people experiencing homelessness in your community? An example might be permanent supportive housing), and SUGGESTIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT (What can people do to help? Examples might be: donations, volunteering, or letter writing). The pamphlet might also include some basic facts about homelessness in your area to help educate students and their families about homelessness. Organize an informational table in your school cafeteria or lobby and distribute your pamphlet as part of an awareness campaign to end homelessness in your local area.
- In addition to food, clothing, and basic necessities, people experiencing homelessness benefit greatly from access to small “luxuries” such as holiday or birthday celebrations. Volunteer to organize a holiday party or a monthly birthday celebration for residents at a local organization or residence. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept volunteers to help plan and organize birthday and holiday parties for residents is the Downtown Women’s Shelter. Contact Vanessa Wai, volunteer coordinator, at 213-680-0600 x207 or at [vanessaw@dwcweb.org](mailto:vanessaw@dwcweb.org) for more information.
- Help people experiencing homelessness by volunteering to help prepare and serve a meal. One Los Angeles organization that will accept volunteers to help cook a hot meal, serve it to residents, or organize and distribute sack lunches is PATH (People Assisting the Homeless). Contact Sally Evans, volunteer coordinator, at 323-644-2207 or at [sallye@epath.org](mailto:sallye@epath.org) for more information.
- Organizations that provide support services and housing to people who are suffering from severe mental illness and experiencing homelessness have a host of challenges to overcome. Give support to an organization that helps this homeless community by holding a bake sale and donating all proceeds, or by organizing an “art supply drive” and donating the art supplies to an organization that can use them. One Los Angeles area non-profit that will accept donations of art supplies is LAMP Community. Contact Patricia Lopez, director of operations at (213) 488-9761 or at [patricial@lampcommunity.org](mailto:patricial@lampcommunity.org) for more information.

### **Step 3: Reflection**

Prepare a presentation that integrates your research, your service experience, and your own personal reflection and assessment of the experience. What did you learn? Did your service experience support the “solution ideas” you put forth during the research phase? Why or why not? What did you learn in the field that supported or refuted your research findings? What recommendations would you provide to local government to help improve the homeless situation in your city? What impact does homelessness have on an individual’s mental and physical health? Their ability to work in the future? The prognosis for their children? What impact does homelessness have on the average citizen, in terms of governmental services, economics, and quality of life? Integrate your pre-service research findings, your service experiences, and your post-service reflections into a comprehensive, 5-page minimum, research and reflection paper.



### **3. A Day in the Life of the Homeless**

View the film *The Soloist* and notice how the simplest acts of daily life — getting clean, going to sleep, having possessions, doing your laundry, eating a meal — are exponentially more complicated for Nathaniel because he is experiencing homelessness.

#### **Step 1: Research**

Research what one 24-hour day in the life of a person experiencing homelessness might be like. Watch the film *The Soloist* and read the book by the same name and collect specific details of Nathaniel’s experience. Interview people who work with homeless populations and find out what a “typical” day is like with the populations they serve. Collect specific data about what each part of the day for a person who is experiencing homelessness might be like, for example: waking up, morning routine, afternoon, evening, night, and bedtime. Write these details out in a fictional journal. Be creative, incorporating your thoughts and imagination with the data and specifics you’ve gathered in your research.

#### **Step 2: Service**

Every day can be a challenge if you’re homeless. Help to make these challenges less of an obstacle by performing service in your community.

- When a person experiences homelessness, it becomes difficult to acquire basic personal necessities such as soap, shampoo, and toothpaste. Organize a “hygiene kit drive” at your school and ask students to donate new, travel-sized containers or hotel bottles of shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, deodorant, and more. Then, assemble the items into individual kits and donate them to an organization that can distribute them. One Los Angeles non-profit willing to accept donated hygiene kits is PATH (People Assisting The Homeless). Contact Sally Evans, volunteer coordinator, at 323-644-2207 or at [sallye@epath.org](mailto:sallye@epath.org) for more information.
- Life on the street is emotionally and physically draining. Due to the amount of walking that life on the street requires, individuals experiencing homelessness often suffer from foot ailments and are in need of clean and functional shoes and socks. Organize a “sock drive” at your school and collect new and gently used, clean, athletic socks to donate to an organization that can distribute them. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept donated new and gently used, clean, athletic socks is OPCC. Contact Donna Miller, associate development director, at 310-264-6646 x235 or at [dmiller@opcc.net](mailto:dmiller@opcc.net) for more information.
- To break the cycle of homelessness and dependence, a key factor for individuals experiencing homelessness is to get a job. And yet even just obtaining the appropriate clothes for job interviews can be a challenge when you’re homeless. Organize a “clothing drive” at your school to collect business wear for young people who are experiencing homelessness and trying to find a job. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept donations of business clothes for job interviews is Covenant House. Contact Tanya Quaife, volunteer coordinator, at 323-461-3131 x250 or at [tquaife@covca.org](mailto:tquaife@covca.org) for more information.



- Help individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness and transitioning to permanent housing get food on their tables by organizing a “grocery store gift card drive.” Collect \$10 gift cards from local supermarkets and donate them to an organization that can distribute them to people who need them. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept donated grocery store gift cards is the Downtown Women’s Shelter. Contact Vanessa Wai, volunteer coordinator, at 213-680-0600 x207 or at [vanessaw@dwcweb.org](mailto:vanessaw@dwcweb.org) for more information.
- Create your own oral or video history project by interviewing people who are or who have experienced homelessness, people who work at organizations who provide support to the homeless population, and others. Combine your interviews with research, photographs, and other documentation into a comprehensive multi-media presentation. Then, organize an exhibition of your project in your school’s cafeteria or lobby to educate the school community and the general public about the problems and solutions that exist surrounding the issue of homelessness.

### **Step 3: Reflection**

Keep another journal, this time your own, that documents your service experience. Did your service experience match what you imagined, and what you found in your preliminary research? Based on your service experience and research, what does it mean to be homeless on a daily basis? What do you think are the hardest details to address, or the most difficult basic needs to meet? What are some of the daily challenges that people experiencing homelessness face that you would not have anticipated before this project? What is being done — by local non-profits, national non-profits, individuals and governmental organizations — to meet some of these basic needs? What more needs to be done? What did you learn about the issue of homelessness during this project that you would not have learned otherwise? How can you use this newly gained knowledge to help fight homelessness? Compile your fictional journal, your service journal, your research and your post-service reflection into a final project portfolio. Include photographs, research clippings, poetry, drawings, and anything else you’d like to include. This portfolio is your final project, and represents your thoughts on the personal experience of homelessness.

## Related Service Learning Projects: Music

### **1. Music and Homelessness**

In 2005, Steve Lopez, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, met Nathaniel Anthony Ayers, a classically trained musician experiencing homelessness and severe mental illness. In the film *The Soloist*, Steve reflects on Nathaniel's relationship to music:

“If you could have seen him while they were playing, if you'd felt him. I sat right next to him, in the same hall, listening to the same music, and I looked at him, and all I could think was, my God, there is so much I don't hear. There is so much I don't see. There's something higher out there that he lives with and in, and I never even touch.”

#### **Step 1: Reading and Research**

View the film or read the book *The Soloist* and reflect on the specific ways that Nathaniel finds a release, or a safe haven, in music. How does a man in such dire straits can find such unadulterated joy in music? How does music help him “live with and in something higher”? What is that “something higher”? What does that higher space provide to Nathaniel, and how might it serve as a coping mechanism to deal with the hardships of life on the street? What does this say about the power of music, about the ability that music has to transform and transport? Use specific examples from the film, from Steve Lopez's book *The Soloist: A Lost Dream, An Unlikely Friendship, and the Redemptive Power of Music*, and additional sources such as novels, poems, song lyrics, or research articles to support your opinion.

#### **Step 2: Service**

When people experience homelessness, of immediate concern is ensuring that their basic needs (such as shelter, medical care, food, personal safety and hygiene) are met. Often lost in the shuffle are life's small “luxuries.” And yet those luxuries can help maintain normalcy for a family that is experiencing temporary homelessness, give self respect to a person who is experiencing homelessness but struggling to find permanent housing, or provide a much-needed escape for a person experiencing homelessness and simultaneously working hard to find a job or battle an addiction. Help provide music to a population of people who are experiencing homelessness and who might not otherwise have access to this small luxury.

- Organize an “instrument drive” in your community. Collect used musical instruments and donate them to a local shelter or non-profit. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept donations of musical instruments is School on Wheels. Contact Rosemary Oliva, learning center coordinator, at 213-896-9200 or at roliva@schoolonwheels.org for more information.
- Are you in the school band, jazz band, or orchestra? Organize and perform a concert for the residents at a local shelter or non-profit. One Los Angeles non-profit that will arrange for a concert is OPCC. Contact Donna Miller, director of development, at 310-264-6646 x235 or at dmiller@opcc.net for more information.
- Organize a “CD drive” at your school and donate all the CDs you collect to people who are experiencing homelessness and living in transitional housing. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept donations of CDs is PATH (People Assisting The Homeless). Contact Sally Evans, volunteer coordinator, at 323-644-2207 or at sallye@epath.org for more information.

### **Step 3: Reflection**

How did your service experience relate to the research you conducted beforehand? Do you agree or disagree with one of the implied messages of *The Soloist*, that music can transport and transform? If your service consisted of a concert, how do you think your performance affected the audience both in the short term and in the long term? How did it affect the environment, both in the short term and in the long term? If you donated instruments or CDs, how do you think these donations affected the recipients and the environment, both in the short term and in the long term? How did you go about organizing your concert or your instrument or CD drive? How did you publicize the event? How has your thinking about the impact of music changed since completing this project? Compile your research and your reflection in an organized essay that reflects on the following statement, from the film *The Soloist*:

“...by witnessing Mr. Ayers’ courage — his humility — his faith in the power of his art — I’ve learned the dignity of being loyal to something you believe in. Of holding onto it, above all else. Of believing, without question, that it will carry you home.”

—Steve Lopez

## **2. Music as Therapy**

Soft music can be relaxing. Before a big game or important race, athletes will often listen to upbeat music to get them going. Hearing a song from your past can bring back powerful memories — and these are just a few examples of how music has the ability to affect our emotional and physical state. In the film *The Soloist*, Nathaniel is, on some level, saved by music: when he is listening to, or playing music, no longer is he plagued by his mental illness or trapped in his life on the street. He is transported.

### **Step 1: Reading and Research**

View the film *The Soloist*, and/or read the book by the same name. Pay close attention to how both Steve and Nathaniel respond to music. How do the main characters use music as a way to affect their emotional or physical state? How is music used to calm, to focus, or to heal? How does the music used in the film affect the audience? What kind of music is used when something inspirational happens? What kind of music is used when something sad happens? Something happy? Something scary? Based on your interpretation of *The Soloist*, how might music be used to help people suffering from severe mental illness? How might it be used to improve their lives, or manage their illness? Provide specific ideas and examples. Conduct research on music therapy. Use articles, books, and websites, but also collect primary source materials, such as interviews with music therapists. What exactly is music therapy? When and where did it start? How is it used, and with whom? How effective is it? How does it work? What studies have been done on the efficacy of music therapy?

### **Step 2: Service**

Music therapy is a therapeutic approach that uses the power of music to help patients who have physical, emotional, cognitive, and social issues. According to the American

Music Therapy Association, “Music therapy improves the quality of life for persons who are well and meets the needs of children and adults with disabilities or illnesses. Music therapy interventions can be designed to promote wellness, manage stress, alleviate pain, express feelings, enhance memory, improve communication, and promote physical rehabilitation.” Go out and explore how music might be used in a therapeutic way.

- Research how music might be used to help your school community (for example, to improve test scores, improve athletic performance, resolve conflicts, etc). Interview a licensed music therapist and design your own school programs that use music in a meaningful and potentially therapeutic way. To take the project a step further, write an article that summarizes your findings and your ideas and submit it for publication in a local newspaper or a non-profit’s newsletter or website. One non-profit organization that is willing to receive article submissions is the American Music Therapy Association. Contact Al Bumanis at 301-589-3300 x103 or at [al@musictherapy.org](mailto:al@musictherapy.org) for more information.
- Organize a “mixed CD drive” at your school. Challenge students to create and donate mixed CDs with titles such as: Happy, Thoughtful, Calm, Hopeful, or Focused. Collect the CDs and donate them to an organization in your community that works with people who are suffering from mental illness. One Los Angeles non-profit that is willing to accept donated mixed CDs is NAMI Urban Los Angeles. Contact Deanna Curls, administrative assistant, at 323-294-7814, or at [info@namiurbanla.org](mailto:info@namiurbanla.org) for more information.
- Organize a benefit concert at your school and donate all proceeds to an organization that focuses on music therapy. One non-profit that is willing to accept donations is the American Music Therapy Association. Contact Al Bumanis at 301-589-3300 x103 or at [al@musictherapy.org](mailto:al@musictherapy.org) for more information.

### **Step 3: Reflection**

Compare what you learned in your research phase with what you learned in your service phase. What were your perceptions of music as therapy before you watched *The Soloist*? What were your perceptions after you watched the film? How did these perceptions change or deepen with your research, and then again with your service? How has this project changed or reinforced the role that music plays in your own life? Build a creative, multi-media presentation that incorporates music and clearly explains your findings and share it with your class.

### **3. The Importance of Music Education**

According to the VH1 Save the Music Foundation: “Research shows that music education develops critical-thinking and self-discipline skills and improves early cognitive development, math and reading abilities, self-esteem, ability to work in teams, spatial reasoning skills and school attendance. Children who have hands-on, sequential music instruction show improved SAT scores, are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college, and are less likely to be involved with gangs and substance abuse.” And yet when budget cuts strike, one of the first things to get cut from school programs and curricula is music education.

### **Step 1: Research**

Conduct your own research into the state of music education in America’s public schools. In a comprehensive research paper, explore what exists and what is missing? Why is music education important? What does it provide that other subject areas cannot? What is the perception and attitude towards music education among educators, administrators, and students? Why does this perception exist? What can be, or should be, done differently? How can changes be implemented — nationwide, or in your community? What populations are more likely to miss out on music education or exposure to music? What are the implications of this statistic? Give specific examples and provide specific ideas in your paper.

### **Step 2: Service**

Now that you’ve collected the data, educate your community about the importance of music education and do your part to make sure it doesn’t disappear.

- Organize a benefit “battle of the bands” and donate all proceeds to your school’s (or a local area school’s) music program, or to an organization that supports music education programs in schools. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept donated funds is P.S. Arts. Contact Amy Shapiro, director of marketing and major gifts, at 310.586.1017 or at amy.shapiro@psarts.org for more information.
- If you’re a musician or in a band, organize and perform a free concert for children whose families are experiencing homelessness. One Los Angeles non-profit that will arrange for a concert for children is School on Wheels. Contact Rosemary Oliva, learning center coordinator, at 213-896-9200 or at roliva@schoolonwheels.org for more information.
- Research and write an informational pamphlet on the importance of music education. Distribute your pamphlet throughout your school and community, and send copies to the stakeholders in your community: the government, school board, PTA, and more.

### **Step 3: Reflection**

After your experiences researching and working in the field, what are your personal thoughts about the importance of music education? What are your thoughts on your own experiences with music education as a student? Do you feel differently after this project? How might you quantify the impact that you had in your service project, particularly if you created an informational pamphlet? How can you translate that information into action in your community? How did your service experience affect you? How can you relate your personal service experiences back to the information you gathered in your research phase? What can you, and your peers, do to save music education in your school and in your community’s other schools? Write a 5-page paper that argues for more funds for music education. Use specific examples from your research, and from your service experience, to support your position.

## Related Service Learning Projects: Mental Illness

### 1. **Mental Illness and Homelessness – One Person’s Experience**

The film *The Soloist* follows Nathaniel Ayers, a man who is both experiencing homelessness and suffering from a severe mental illness. In the film, Nathaniel befriends Steve Lopez, a journalist at the *Los Angeles Times*. What follows is an exploration of the state of Nathaniel’s mind, a journey into his past mindset, and an examination of how his mental illness affects him — and those he loves.

#### **Step 1: Reading and Research**

View the film *The Soloist* and/or read Steve Lopez’s book by the same name. Pay close attention to the picture that is painted of mental illness through the lens of Nathaniel’s experience. How is mental illness represented in the film? Describe Nathaniel’s experience of mental illness. How has Nathaniel’s illness affected him throughout his life? How has it contributed to his experience of homelessness? How has it affected his family and friends, and shaped his relationships? His ability to care for himself? How has it impacted his environment? Then, research the relationship between homelessness and mental illness. How do the two issues relate to one another? What is being done to support individuals who are experiencing homelessness and suffering from mental illness? What organizations exist to address these issues? What support services are available?

#### **Step 2: Service**

Once you’ve researched the issue of mental illness and homelessness, offer support by educating your community or donating time or resources.

- Organizations that provide support services and housing to people who are suffering from severe mental illness and experiencing homelessness have a host of challenges to overcome. Give support to an organization that helps this homeless community by holding a bake sale and donating all proceeds, or by organizing an “art supply drive” and donating the art supplies to an organization that can use them. One Los Angeles area non-profit that will accept donations of funds or art supplies is LAMP Community. Contact Patricia Lopez, director of operations at 213-488-9761 or at [patricial@lampcommunity.org](mailto:patricial@lampcommunity.org) for more information.
- Create an informational brochure that explores the unique set of issues that arise when a person experiences both homelessness and mental illness. One section of your brochure should outline the problem and explain how the problem affects everyone — not only those who are experiencing homelessness and suffering from mental illness, but their families, friends, and the other residents of their communities. The next section should outline some of the solutions, and organizations, that exist to help this unique demographic. The next section should list some ideas for how people can get involved and make a difference. Distribute your brochure to the students in your school as part of an educational campaign about homelessness and mental illness.
- Volunteer your time to provide administrative support to an organization that provides mental health services to people who are experiencing homelessness and suffering from mental illness. One Los Angeles non-profit that provides mental health services to people experiencing homelessness and will accept volunteer administrative support is PATH (People Assisting the Homeless). Contact Sally Evans, volunteer coordinator, at 323-644-2207 or at [sallye@epath.org](mailto:sallye@epath.org) for more information.



**Step 3: Reflection**

What have you learned about how severe mental illness affects individuals who are experiencing homelessness? How can severe mental illnesses contribute to, or exacerbate, the experience of homelessness? Combine what you learned from your research and your service experience and create a fictional “diary” in the voice of a person who is both suffering from a severe mental illness and experiencing homelessness. Include specific daily experiences and challenges (getting food, shelter, good hygiene, medical care, etc.) as well as an approximation of the person’s mental and emotional experience, through the lens of their illness. Be specific and creative. The purpose of this “diary” is to help others understand, and empathize with, what it really might be like to be severely mentally ill and living on the street.

**2. Mental Illness’ Effect on Families and Friends**

When an individual suffers with a mental illness — be it schizophrenia, addiction, anorexia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or any other disorder — it doesn’t only affect that one individual. Their symptoms and their struggle affects everyone around them — from their immediate family to their friends, as well as other people in their lives. It can be like a pebble dropped into a pond: the ripple effect of the disease can be ongoing and profound.

**Step 1: Reading and Research**

Research the impact that severe mental illness has on the people who are NOT sick: family, friends, spouses, co-workers, caregivers — and even the general population. How much does disability due to mental illnesses cost our country? How can these negative effects be improved with education and treatment? What is it like to be married to (or the sibling of, or the parent of, or the friend of) a person with severe mental illness? What support services exist to help the families and friends of people suffering from mental illness?

**Step 2: Service**

- Collect your research findings and write an article about the impact of mental illness on the families and friends of those who are ill, and suggest ways that this impact can be mitigated. Submit your article to your school or local newspaper for publication to raise awareness about the impact of mental illnesses. Or, submit your article to a non-profit that works in the arena of mental illness for publication in their newsletter or on their website. One non-profit willing to accept submissions of 400 words is NARSAD, an organization that works to alleviate suffering from mental illness by raising funds for scientific research on brain and behavior disorders. Contact Kristen Simone, director of communications, at 800-829-8289 or at [info@narsad.org](mailto:info@narsad.org) for more information.
- Help individuals who are suffering from severe mental illness and their families by organizing a “grocery store gift card drive.” Collect \$10 gift cards from local supermarkets and donate them to an organization that can distribute them to the families of people who are suffering from severe mental illness. One Los Angeles non-profit that will accept donated grocery store gift cards is NAMI Urban Los Angeles. Contact Deanna Curls, administrative assistant, at 323-294-7814 or at [info@namiurbanla.org](mailto:info@namiurbanla.org) for more information.

- Educate your school community about the far-reaching impact that severe mental illnesses can have — on individuals suffering from an illness, as well as on their families and friends. Organize a “Change the Perception of Mental Health” table in your school lobby or cafeteria. Display the information you collected in the “research” phase of your project on poster board, and collect spare change from your classmates. Donate all proceeds to an organization that is dedicated to raising awareness about the impact that mental illness has on individuals and their families. One organization that will accept donations is the Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Foundation. Contact Ted Sapp, executive director, at 877-272-5272 or at [teds@naayers.org](mailto:teds@naayers.org) for more information.

### **Step 3: Reflection**

Prepare a presentation that integrates your research, your service experience, and your own personal reflection and assessment of the experience. What did you learn? Did your service experience support or refute the information you collected during the research phase? Why or why not? What did you learn in the field that supported or refuted your research findings? What recommendations would you provide to help improve support services for the families of mentally ill individuals? Why is it important to consider the impact that mental illness can have on the family and friends of the individual who is ill? How does mental illness affect the community at large? What can be done to mitigate these effects? Integrate your pre-service research findings, your service experiences, and your post-service reflections into a comprehensive, 5-page minimum, research and reflection paper.

## **3. Mental Illness in Your Community**

Mental illness affects 1 in 5 American families, which means that every community in the country is affected by mental illness — including your own. Does your community speak out in support of mental health services? Is there an awareness of the issues surrounding mental health disorders in your community?

### **Step 1: Reading and Research**

Research the state of mental illness and mental health in your community. Consider all types of disorders — from addiction to eating disorders, to depression, to bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. What programs are available to support people suffering with mental illness? What local organizations are working in this area? As a citizen of the community, what is the level of awareness — of both the problem and the available solutions? Is there a need for certain programs that do not exist? How can you (or other citizens) get involved to make a difference in this area?

### **Step 2: Service**

The first step towards solving a community problem is raising awareness and starting a local conversation about the issue. Get this process started by going out and performing service in your community.

- NARSAD, an organization that works to alleviate suffering from mental illness by raising funds for scientific research on brain and behavior disorders, hosts free public events in different communities around the country on what’s new in research on the causes, treatment options, and prevention of mental illness and



suicide. Volunteer your time to help staff a local event and assist with spreading the word, setting up, registering attendees, and handing out programs and educational materials. Contact Kristen Simone, director of communications, at 800-829-8289 or at [info@narsad.org](mailto:info@narsad.org) for more information.

- Collect all your research findings and create an informational pamphlet about mental illness in your community. Include details regarding what is available — as well as what needs to be done — to help support people suffering with mental illness. Copy and distribute this pamphlet to your school community and the larger community as well. This will provide information about mental illness as well as providing a list of important local resources for those who need them.
- Organize a “charity bake sale” at your school and donate all proceeds to a hotline that provides support and assistance to young people suffering from the effects and symptoms of mental illness. One hotline that offers immediate and confidential counseling to young people 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and which will accept donations is Covenant House’s Nineline. Contact Gil Ortiz, director, at 212-727-4021 or at [gortiz@covenanthouse.org](mailto:gortiz@covenanthouse.org) for more information.

### **Step 3: Reflection**

What is the state of mental health in your community? Based on your research and your experience, is the community aware of the prevalence of mental health issues? Why do you think this is the case? Is there adequate support for people in your community who might be suffering from a mental illness? If not, what can be done to remedy this? How did your service experience support or refute your research? How has your perception of your community’s mental health services changed since you began this project? Write a “letter to the editor” of your school or local newspaper that explains what is missing in terms of local support (governmental and non-governmental) for individuals suffering from mental illnesses. Offer specific suggestions for what can be done in your community to increase support, awareness, and services in the area of mental health in your community. When it is completed, submit your letter for publication.

## **4. Creativity and Mental Illness**

It has been argued that there is a correlation between creative genius and mental illness, as many of history’s most famous artists, composers, writers, and leaders have suffered the symptoms of mental illness. Such names include Sir Isaac Newton, Beethoven, Abraham Lincoln, Leo Tolstoy, Ernest Hemingway, Vincent van Gogh, John Keats, Michelangelo, and more.

### **Step 1: Reading and Research**

View the film *The Soloist* and/or read the book by the same name. How do you think Nathaniel’s mental illness has contributed to his musical abilities? How has it detracted from his musical abilities? How has it impacted his playing, his appreciation, and his ability to hear music? Consider the relationship between Nathaniel’s art and his illness, and then research this phenomenon with other artists. Is it accurate to say that a large percentage of history’s creative geniuses suffered with mental illness? Choose specific people to research. What sort of symptoms did they exhibit? Did their illness lend itself to their art, detract from it, or both? How did their state help or hinder their creative process? Why might there be a correlation between creative genius and mental illness?

### **Step 2: Service**

- Research how music might be used therapeutically with individuals suffering from severe mental illness. Interview a board-certified music therapist about how music is used in the mental health community. To take the project a step further, write an article that summarizes your findings and your ideas and submit it for publication in a local newspaper or a non-profit's newsletter or website. One non-profit organization that is willing to receive article submissions about how music can be used to fight mental illness is the American Music Therapy Association. Contact Al Bumanis at 301-589-3300 x103 or at [al@musictherapy.org](mailto:al@musictherapy.org) for more information.
- Organize a benefit "battle of the bands" and donate all proceeds from ticket sales to an organization that focuses on the arts and mental illness. One non-profit organization that will accept donated funds is mpower: musicians for mental health. Contact Steve Vetzner, senior director, media relations, at 703-797-2588 or at [svetzner@mentalhealthamerica.net](mailto:svetzner@mentalhealthamerica.net) for more information.
- Organize a student art show entitled "On My Mind" that features student artwork, all of which explores the topic of mental illness and mental health. The show can include visual art, music, writing, and other media as well. Organize an informational table about mental health at the door of the art show. Donate all the proceeds from ticket sales to an organization that provides resources to support artists who suffer from mental illness. One non-profit that will accept donations is Nathaniel's Place, a program established by the Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Foundation. Nathaniel's Place is an artist-in-residence program that focuses on identifying and providing support to artistically gifted individuals with mental illness who demonstrate exceptional talent in the arts. Contact Ted Sapp, executive director, at 877-272-5272 or at [teds@naayers.org](mailto:teds@naayers.org) for more information.

### **Step 3: Reflection**

Integrate your research and your service experience into an artistic piece that shows the relationship between creativity, the arts, and mental illness. Choose your medium, which may include, but should not be limited to music, literature, dance, drawing, sculpture, painting, photography, or video — or a combination of these — and design an artistic rendering of what you learned during the course of this project. Include a 1-page written interpretation of your piece, explaining the choices, the intentions, and the message that went into your project.

## **Myths and Facts on Homelessness**

**Myth:** Most homeless people are panhandlers or old men on park benches.

**Fact:** On any given night, 37% of homeless people are families with children; 63% are individuals.

**Myth:** Homeless people are lazy – they just don't want to work.

**Fact:** Many adults in shelters have jobs yet still can't afford housing. A survey of 23 U.S. cities found that 17.4% of homeless adults who had children were employed while 13% of single adults or unaccompanied youth were employed.

**Myth:** Homelessness has declined dramatically in recent years.

**Fact:** The criteria through which the government defines homelessness can change as often as these surveys are taken. Sometimes people living in cars, or staying with their relatives are considered homeless; sometimes they are not. Therefore it is not always an equal comparison to the previous count.

**Myth:** Homeless people will probably always be homeless.

**Fact:** The length of homelessness varies from person to person. Many spend years on the streets and then are able to get permanent housing.

**Myth:** Homeless people commit more violent crimes than housed people.

**Fact:** Homeless people actually commit less violent crimes than housed people. They are, however, more likely to be the victim of violent crime.

**Myth:** Setting up services for homeless people will cause homeless people from all around to migrate to a city.

**Fact:** Studies have shown that homeless people do not migrate for services. To the extent they do move to new areas, it is because they are searching for work, have family in the area, or other reasons not related to services.

**Myth:** Homeless people are a fixed population who are usually homeless for long periods of time.

**Fact:** The homeless population is quite diverse in terms of their length of homelessness and the number of times they cycle in and out of homelessness.

**Myth:** Homeless people don't work and get most of their money from public assistance programs.

**Fact:** Homeless people do work, and a relatively small percentage of them receive government assistance.

**Myth:** Most homeless people aren't motivated to work.

**Fact:** many adults in shelters have jobs yet still can't afford housing.

**Myth:** All homeless people are mentally ill or substance abusers.

**Fact:** Around a quarter of homeless people are mentally ill, and about 40% are alcohol or substance abusers, with around 15% suffering both disabilities.

<http://www.nhchc.org/Curriculum/module1/module1D/H3MythsandFactsaboutHomelessness.pdf>

## **Myths and Facts on Mental Illness**

**Myth:** I can't do anything for someone with mental health needs.

**Fact:** You can do a lot, starting with the way you act and how you speak. You can nurture an environment that builds on people's strengths and promotes good mental health.

**Myth:** Once people develop mental illnesses, they will never recover.

**Fact:** Most people with mental illnesses get better, and many recover completely. Recovery refers to the process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. For some individuals, recovery is the reduction or complete remission of symptoms. Studies have shown that having hope plays an integral role in an individual's recovery.

[http://allmentalhealth.samhsa.gov/myths\\_facts.html](http://allmentalhealth.samhsa.gov/myths_facts.html) (SAMHSA)

**Myth:** People with a severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia, are usually dangerous and violent.

**Fact:** The truth is that the incidence of violence in people who have a brain disorder is not much higher than it is in the general population. Those suffering from a psychosis such as schizophrenia are more often frightened, confused and despairing than violent.

<http://www.narsad.org> (NARSAD)

**Myth:** Mental illness is the same as mental retardation.

**Fact:** The two are distinct disorders. A mental retardation diagnosis is characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and difficulties with certain daily living skills. In contrast, people with mental illnesses—health conditions that cause changes in a person's thinking, mood, and behavior—have varied intellectual functioning, just like the general population.

[http://allmentalhealth.samhsa.gov/myths\\_facts.html](http://allmentalhealth.samhsa.gov/myths_facts.html) (SAMHSA)

**Myth:** Mental illnesses are brought on by a weakness of character.

**Fact:** Mental illnesses are a product of the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors. Research has shown genetic and biological factors are associated with schizophrenia, depression, and alcoholism. Social influences, such as loss of a loved one or a job, can also contribute to the development of various disorders.

**Myth:** Children do not experience mental illnesses.

**Fact:** A report from the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health showed that in any given year 5-9 percent of children experience serious emotional disturbances, which can result in mental illness.

[http://allmentalhealth.samhsa.gov/myths\\_facts.html](http://allmentalhealth.samhsa.gov/myths_facts.html) (SAMHSA)

**Myth:** Depression and other illnesses, such as anxiety disorders, do not affect children or adolescents. Any problems they have are just a part of growing up.

**Fact:** Children and adolescents can develop severe mental illnesses. In any given year, 5-9 percent of children experience serious emotional disturbances. In the U.S., one in ten children and adolescents has a mental disorder severe enough to cause impairment. However, only about 20 percent of these children receive needed treatment.

<http://www.mhagstl.org/myths.htm> (NARSAD)

**Myth:** Psychiatric disorders are not true medical illnesses like heart disease and diabetes. People who have a mental illness are just "crazy."

**Fact:** The actual fact is that brain disorders, like heart disease and diabetes, are legitimate medical illnesses. Research shows there are genetic and biological causes for psychiatric disorders, and they can be treated effectively.

<http://www.mhagstl.org/myths.htm> (NARSAD)

**Myth:** Schizophrenia means split personality, and there is no way to control it.

**Fact:** Schizophrenia is often confused with multiple personality disorder. Actually, schizophrenia is a brain disorder that robs people of their ability to think clearly and logically. The estimated 2.5 million Americans with schizophrenia have symptoms ranging from social withdrawal to hallucinations and delusions. Medication has helped many of these individuals to lead fulfilling, productive lives.

<http://www.mhagstl.org/myths.htm> (NARSAD)

**Myth:** Depression is a normal part of the aging process.

**Fact:** It is not normal for older adults to be depressed. Signs of depression in older people include loss of interest in activities, sleep disturbances, and lethargy. Depression in the elderly is often undiagnosed, and it is important for seniors and their family members to recognize the problem and seek professional help.

## Organizations and Resources

The following organizations provide crucial information, assistance, and services to the public about homelessness, mental illness, and the importance of music and music education. We are grateful for the cooperation and support they provided for this Educational Resource Guide.

American Music Therapy Association	<a href="http://www.musictherapy.org">www.musictherapy.org</a>
Covenant House	<a href="http://www.covenanthouse.org">www.covenanthouse.org</a>
Downtown Women's Shelter	<a href="http://www.dwcweb.org">www.dwcweb.org</a>
LAMP Community	<a href="http://www.lampcommunity.org">www.lampcommunity.org</a>
Mental Health America	<a href="http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net">www.mentalhealthamerica.net</a>
NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)	<a href="http://www.nami.org">www.nami.org</a> <a href="http://www.namiurbanla.org">www.namiurbanla.org</a>
NARSAD	<a href="http://www.narsad.org">www.narsad.org</a>
Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Foundation	<a href="http://www.naayers.org">www.naayers.org</a>
National Coalition for the Homeless	<a href="http://www.nationalhomeless.org">www.nationalhomeless.org</a>
OPCC (Ocean Park Community Center)	<a href="http://www.opcc.net">www.opcc.net</a>
PATH (People Assisting the Homeless)	<a href="http://www.pathpartners.org">www.pathpartners.org</a> <a href="http://www.epath.org">www.epath.org</a>
P.S. Arts	<a href="http://www.psarts.org">www.psarts.org</a>
School on Wheels	<a href="http://www.schoolonwheels.org">www.schoolonwheels.org</a>
Shelter Partnership	<a href="http://www.shelterpartnership.org">www.shelterpartnership.org</a>

## About Participant Media

Participant believes that a good story well told can truly make a difference in how one sees the world. Whether it is a feature film, documentary or other form of media, Participant exists to tell compelling, entertaining stories that also create awareness of the real issues that shape our lives.

The company seeks to entertain audiences first, then to invite them to participate in making a difference. To facilitate this, Participant creates specific social action campaigns for each film and documentary designed to give a voice to issues that resonate in the films.

Participant teams with social sector organizations, non-profits and corporations who are committed to creating an open forum for discussion, education and who can, with Participant, offer specific ways for audience members to get involved. These include action kits, screening programs, educational curriculums and classes, house parties, seminars, panels and other activities and are ongoing "legacy" programs that are updated and revised to continue beyond the film's domestic and international theatrical, DVD and television windows.

To date, Participant has developed active, working relationships with 83 non-profits reaching over 20 million people.



## About Big Picture Instructional Design

Some films dazzle us. Others entertain us. A very special few transcend time and place and become embedded in our culture, an eternal piece of shared history.

These powerful films shape our educational landscape and alter the way we view our world. They have the potential to make a lasting and sustained difference in the attitudes and behaviors of generations of people.

Today's students will one day be police officers and politicians, neighbors and friends. They will grow up to be doctors and lawyers, shopkeepers and librarians, journalists and parents. Some will even become teachers themselves.

*What movies do you want them to be watching?*

Big Picture Instructional Design gets young people talking about — and watching — movies that are both entertaining and informative.

Our mission is to increase the reach and impact of issue-driven feature films, television programs, and documentaries by building custom-designed educational outreach campaigns for use in communities and classrooms throughout the nation.

Big Picture Instructional Design's services include designing, writing, and implementing:

- Educational distribution plans and outreach campaigns
- Curricular materials and lesson plans
- Student and teacher viewing guides
- Supplemental resources and bibliographies
- Screening guidelines
- Informational brochures, public service announcements, and training manuals, and

Developing distribution strategies tailored to an educational audience, including:

- Forging partnerships with community based organizations, non-profits, school districts, and other educational organizations around the country
- Field testing materials with teachers nationwide
- Designing and executing teacher training campaigns
- Writing and submitting articles to national educational magazines and journals
- Aligning with national and state curricular standards
- Presenting at conferences, workshops, and consortia about the educational applications of film and video