

VOCAL ARTS

NASHVILLE

De Colores - A Listening Guide

Grade Level: High School

Class Period Length: ~40-80 minutes

Subject Areas: Tone Color, Lyric Analysis

Focus: Tone Color, Cultural Context

National Standards

- MU:Pr4.3.E – Identify expressive qualities in a varied repertoire of music that can be demonstrated through prepared and improvised performances.
- MU:Pr5.3.E Develop strategies to address expressive challenges in a varied repertoire of music.
- MU:Re8.1.E.5a Identify interpretations of the expressive intent and meaning of musical works, referring to the elements of music, contexts, and (when appropriate) the setting of the text

TN Standards

- HS.VM.P2.C Demonstrate technical accuracy through appropriate use of expressive elements, including dynamics, phrasing, and stylistic characteristics
- HS.VM.P2.D Develop and apply strategies to address expressive challenges in a varied repertoire of music, and evaluate success using feedback from ensemble peers and other sources to refine performances.
- HS.VM.R2.A Interpret and describe the artistic intent and aesthetic qualities of musical works, citing as evidence the elements of music, contexts, historical significance, and the setting of the text.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of class, students will:

1. **Identify** differences in tone color within a piece of choral music, **connecting** it with the lyrical context of the piece (HS.VM.R2.A) (MU:Re8.1.E.5a)
2. **Identify** and **apply** stylistic choices of tone color (HS.VM.P2.C) (MU:Pr4.3.E)
3. **Compare** two different ways to **identify, evaluate, and refine** personal tone color while singing in an ensemble (HS.VM.P2.D) (MU:Pr5.3.E)

Materials Needed

- De Colores Slide Deck ([Canva](#) or [Google](#))
- De Colores [Guided Notes](#) and Pencils
- Optional - Current repertoire being prepared by students (for Ext. 1)
- Optional - Piano

Lesson Procedures

1. Vocal Warm-Up & Experiential Learning (10 minutes)

- Stretch
- Breathing cycles: Breathe in for four, hold for four (without excessive squeeze of the vocal folds), breathe out on “s” for eight. On each repetition, add four beats to the exhale
- Initial Phonation
 - Continue downwards, focusing on the /u/ vowel
- Experiential Learning: Timbre
 - Turn the slides to the “Brightness Meter”, and have them do the warmup in a very bright, then a very dark place on the meter
 - If their “bright” is not bright enough, try on a “Nyah”, then again on the “Zi-ah”
 - If their “dark” is not dark enough, try on a “Bu”, then again on the “Zi-ah”
 - Try the warmup in various places on the brightness meter.
 - Turn the slide. Try the warm-up with a back and a forward sound (similar to the brightness meter.
 - Turn the slide. Try the warmup once while focusing on a lifted soft palette, and once while focusing on a lowered soft palette.
 - Turn the slide. Ask what tone color is in music. If the concept of timbre has already been introduced, ask what timbre is in music. If not, ask if anyone may know another word for tone color.
 - Turn the slide. Explain timbre, and that we can create different timbres by how we shape our upper vocal tract.
 - Turn the slide. Explain both axes of the quadrants of timbre. From top to bottom, we have the height of the soft palate, and from left to right, we have the placement.
 - Pass out guided notes. Have them fill out the quadrants.
 - Turn the slide. Explain that our timbre can live in any of the four quadrants, with a sound that is more lifted and forward, lifted and back, lowered and forward, or lowered and back. You can place your timbre anywhere within the graph, making more subtle or extreme timbres of

each quadrant, on a line between quadrants, or even directly in the center. Try singing the warm-up using an extreme timbre in each quadrant.

- Have them label in each quadrant what the tone sounds like, using descriptive words that make sense to them individually.

2. Context and Listening (15 minutes)

- Turn the slide. Explain the origin and context of “De Colores”, having students fill out the context portion of their guided notes
- Play the video from the beginning, having students fill out the questions on their guided notes, then discuss the questions
 - The timbre is warm and round (other descriptors may work too)
 - They are singing more towards lifted and in between forward and back
- Turn the slide. Play the video again while students look at the lyrics and translation, and fill out the Lyrics and Translation section of their guided notes. Discuss the meaning and translation of the song
 - The lyrics talk about the many different colors we see in the world, referencing beauty and nature in all the different colors around us
 - The warm and round vocal timbre reflects the warmth the singers feel about the colors they see in the world around them
- Turn the slide. Starting at 0:00, play the video, have them fill out the next part of the guided notes, then discuss the questions
 - The timbre changed in the third verse.
 - Brighter, pingy, etc.
 - They are closer to lowered and forward.
 - Bonus question: Looking at the lyrics, why do you think the arranger chose this moment to change the timbre? It is a new section of lyrics, now imitating sounds instead of describing colors.

3. Manipulating Tone Color (10 minutes)

- Turn the slide. Teach this phrase of “De Colores” by rote:
- Turn the slide. Try singing it in each of the quadrants of timbre, turning the slide for each.
- Turn the slide. Explain that we have used quadrants to describe timbre, and we will now try something new
- Turn the slide. Discuss what words you would use to describe the dark red color, having students fill out their own descriptors in the guided notes
- Turn the slide. Try singing with a timbre that matches the color. In the guided notes, have students put a dot on the quadrant chart where they think that color lives.
- Turn the slide, and repeat for the remaining four colors

4. Closer (5 minutes)

- Turn the slide. Have them answer and fill out the question on their guided notes. Discuss why students may prefer one or the other, and ask how they can use it in the future to implement stylistic choices.
 - Note that neither is correct nor incorrect; it is more a mode of preference based on what makes sense to each singer's brain.
- Give the information on how they can see "De Colores" live!

5. Extension 1 (5 - 20 minutes) - Finding your choir's "Home Timbre"

- Have your choir stand in the position that they sing the most successfully in (mixed or section, in a circle or in rows, closer together or with more space etc.)
- Try singing a solfege scale or vocalise (as repertoire may give bias towards specific timbres), using different colors and/or placements on the timbre quadrant chart
- Experiment until you find a sound that blends the best and suits the choir. Have them write down the placement and what it feels like in their voice and body, then name this as the choir's "home timbre". Different pieces may call for changes, but reminding them of their home timbre during warmups and applying it to repertoire when appropriate by saying "home timbre" can help shape their timbre and blend, creating a more desired timbre without jumping through different hoops every time they need to upgrade their tone color!

6. Extension 2 (10 - 20 minutes) - Application to Current Repertoire

- Take out and/or sing a piece(s) from your current repertoire with the most specific timbre or timbre changes.
- Try using the quadrants and/or different colors to find a tone that best fits the piece or section. Discuss why that timbre works, and have students write down a color or quadrant placement in their music.

Assesment Options

- Formal - Guided Notes
- Informal - Observe timbre and expression
- Participation - Engagement in discussions and singing