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Music Was IT

Young Leonard Bernstein

An Activity and Discussion Guide
Developed by Susan Goldman Rubin

Beginning with Lenny's childhood in Boston and ending with his triumphant conducting debut at Carnegie Hall with the New York Philharmonic when he was just twenty-five, *Music Was IT* draws readers into the energetic, passionate, challenging, music-filled life of young Leonard Bernstein.

For Discussion:

-  What were the biggest obstacles Lenny faced in following his dream and making music his life's work?
-  Why did Lenny's father Sam Bernstein object to Lenny becoming a musician? Were his objections reasonable?
-  How did other members of Lenny's family feel about his passion for music?
-  Discuss perseverance and cite examples of Lenny overcoming obstacles to follow his dream.
-  Why did Lenny need piano lessons?
-  How do you think Lenny felt about his family? About his Jewish identity and background?
-  What were the influences on Lenny during his struggle to become a musician? Who were his mentors? How did they help him?
-  What kinds of music did Lenny enjoy playing as a teenager? Name some of the compositions and composers that Lenny particularly loved. Listen to them and discuss your responses.

Did Lenny ever feel discouraged despite his obvious talent and drive?

What does a symphony conductor do? What must he or she learn?

Discuss anti-Semitism: what it is and how it affected Lenny's chances of breaking into the world of classical music in the 1930s and the 1940s.

Discuss world events in 1939 and how the situation affected Lenny and his goal to be a musician.



Activities:

Listen to a recording of Lenny conducting one of his own compositions, such as the overture to *Candide*, or the dance suite from *West Side Story*, or perhaps playing the piano. How do you respond? What words would you use to describe the sounds of the music? What feelings do you have?

Watch a DVD of Lenny conducting a symphony orchestra. What do you observe? Is he quiet or excited? Compare his style with that of another conductor and note the differences and/or similarities.

Watch a DVD of one of Lenny's "Young People's Concerts." What did you learn that you didn't know before? How did it change the way you listen to music? Did you hear something new?

Listen to one of the recordings cited in the Discography section of the book and discuss your responses.

Bring in a recording of one of your favorite pieces of music or songs and discuss it in musical terms: mood, rhythm, beat, instruments performing, and the lyrics (if there are any). Is the piece fast or slow? Is it melodic? Is it a tune you can hum? Or, is it discordant? What's the difference and how does it affect the mood of the music and how it makes you feel?

Discuss the similarities and differences of popular music and classical music? As a class, is there a preference for a particular kind of music? Discuss why.

Are there any music students in the class? If they are willing, perhaps they can demonstrate a piece of music they are working on and talk about what it's like to be a musician.

Visit www.leonardbernstein.com for more information about Leonard Bernstein.

