

Instructions to Incorporate Music Themes into a Haiku Increases Perceived Creativity of the Haiku

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Abstract

The current research examines the degree to which thematic/referential music affects performance in Amabiles American Haiku task. Thematic music conveys meaning to the listener by activating concepts associated with the music in semantic memory. Ward (1994) demonstrated that generating novel exemplars is influenced by activated concepts in memory. Consequently, participants listening to thematic music before writing a haiku should be more likely to incorporate thematic elements into the haiku which increases the perceived creativity of the haiku. Participants specifically instructed to incorporate thematic elements into the haiku should include more thematic elements and write more creatively than participants not instructed to include thematic elements and participants who wrote their haiku without having listened to thematic music beforehand. 206 undergraduates listened to a 90 second sample of unfamiliar lullaby- or war-themed music. Participants were instructed to write a haiku inspired by the music (Inspire), write a haiku after listening to the music (Neutral) or write a haiku before listening to the music (Control). We found a significant main effect of the Inspire instruction on incorporation of thematic elements into the haiku. Participants in the Inspire condition included significantly more thematic elements of the music into their haiku than participants in the Neutral condition or Control conditions. Participants in the Inspired condition wrote haikus that were marginally more likely to be rated as more negatively valenced and were more creative than the haikus written in the Neutral and Control conditions. Results suggest ways of increasing creativity through use of thematic music.