



ELEMENTARY: ESCAPE THE MUSIC ROOM

By Eric Hanson

One of the shared challenges for elementary music educators is inadequate time to teach our students. Most educators I know teach their students once a week for less than an hour, while others see their students even less—on a seven- or eight-day rotation. Throw in the unpredictability of a spring calendar packed with testing, field trips, and end-of-year events, and soon you realize how incredibly valuable each moment in the music room is for your young musicians. Furthermore, keeping upper elementary students engaged, especially toward the end of the year, can be especially challenging for even the most seasoned teacher.

Responding to these inherent challenges, I strove to find an activity where we could simultaneously review concepts in an efficient manner, engage upper elementary students, and provide real-time feedback on music literacy progress. *Enter the music escape room!* Escape rooms have become a popular activity for people who enjoy mental challenges. In most escape rooms, you are locked into a room and must solve a series of challenges and puzzles to escape.

Through trial and error, online resource reviews, and collaborations with other educators, I developed a music escape room recipe for success. It has become one of the top activities for my students.

BEFORE THE ESCAPE ROOM

Before the big day, I make sure all preparations are complete. This includes copying all the colored clues and folding them up, hanging my hints and tips around the music room, hiding the padlocks and keys around the school with other educators (this is an optional step), and gathering pencils and a stopwatch.

Students will solve multiple clues in a specific order, so it is best to have the color-coded clues folded and mixed up before they walk in. I also create some slides with hints that I occasionally display on the board while student groups are working. After breaking out, students pose for fun photos that I later display.

MUSIC ESCAPE ROOM DAY

On the big day, I invite the students to class a few minutes early as the activity typically takes about 45 minutes to complete. Students are put into groups of four or five, and they pick up all needed supplies. I give them instructions for how the escape room works and specific rules about obtaining their next color clue. Each student group will get the white clue first, which includes an answer sheet to record all the colors in order. The white clue, when solved correctly, will lead to the pink clue, which leads to the blue clue, and so on.

Go to www.tmea.org/hanson2025 or scan this code for more information and to download sample music escape room materials.



One of the biggest tips I have for educators beginning escape rooms is to make your students check with you before they move on to the next color. Sometimes they will get the first letter and just fill in the blanks or see the group next to them figure it out and assume they can just move forward with the correct answer. If you require them to show all their work, they will have to demonstrate how they got their answers and why.

In my music escape room, one of the final clues leads them to another classroom in the school where they get a key and their last clue. When they solve that clue, they are taken to a second classroom where the educator has a ring of padlocks. Once their team brings me their completed color list, key, and padlock, I record their time of escape.

CONTENT REVIEW

In the escape room, each color clue allows me to do some quick assessment on where students are in multiple curricular areas. Rhythmic note values, instrument families, intervals, treble and bass clef identification, academic language, and more are covered in this activity.

When several groups struggle with the same concept, this becomes an area for which I will design more reviews before the end of the year. This activity also reveals the areas where students have succeeded with high mastery. For sample music escape room materials, go to www.tmea.org/hanson2025.

Engaging upper elementary students is no easy task, especially with our important end-of-year review, but music escape rooms can help. This will be one of the most talked about activities you host all year. Your students will get to review many areas of music literacy and content, and they will do it with excited smiles on their faces!



Eric Hanson is an Elementary Music Educator at Coppell ISD in Dallas.