

The Crayon Analogy (for Band)

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BandDirector

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Tell your ensemble this story if they are overblowing, not blending or not playing within the band sound...

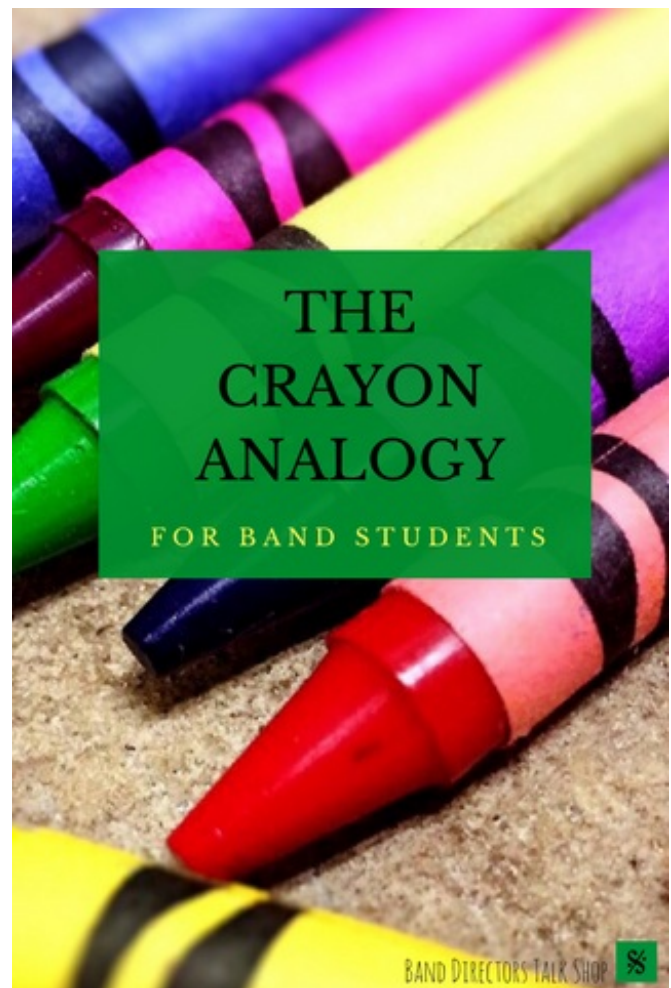
Have you ever seen a two year old with a crayon? They take that crayon and grip it as tight as they can and press down as hard as possible on the paper and just scribble away. They can flatten the tip of the crayon in about 10 seconds. All they care about is getting as much color down on the paper as fast as possible.

And as the tip gets flatter, the color gets more spread out and out of the lines and the crayon gets shorter and shorter. They may even rip the paper they're scribbling so hard.

And they don't care.
And that's ok.
Because they're two.
They don't have the skills to color any other way.

But as they get older, maybe kindergarten, they learn how to hold the crayon, color back and forth neatly, and control the amount of pressure on the paper. And their coloring starts to look like a real picture.

Then as they get older and older, the skills become more refined.
The coloring becomes more clear.
They stay in the lines.
They use the tips of the crayons precisely.



And I don't know if you've seen the adult coloring books that are the new big thing, but those coloring books are amazingly detailed. And I think what has made them catch on is the challenge.

The challenge to stay in the lines,
The challenge to be creative,
The challenge to be precise,
The challenge to turn it into a finished work of art.

That reminds me of playing a musical instrument. Being in a musical ensemble like band.

When you first come in and join beginning band you're like a two year old with a crayon. Now, not to be critical, but some of the sounds that came out of your instruments the first time you played were far from anything recognizable. 😊

You remember. And if you don't I promise your parents do. It was like scribbling. Playing as loud as you could and not caring what came out.

And that was ok.

Because you were a beginner.

You didn't have the skills to play any other way.



But then you got older. Towards the middle and end of beginning band you learn how to play with some control. You don't just blast as loud as you can.

And your playing starts to sound like music.

You listen to your sound and you try not to squeak and crack pitches.

You start to play with a characteristic sound on your instrument.

The tone and rhythms and pitches become more clear, more precise.

But then after you start to sound pretty good by yourself, we give you a new challenge. We put you in an ensemble. With lots of other instruments. And lots of different parts. And you have to play with those other parts and still be in control.

You are challenged to still play with a characteristic sound.

You are challenged to be clear with your pitches.

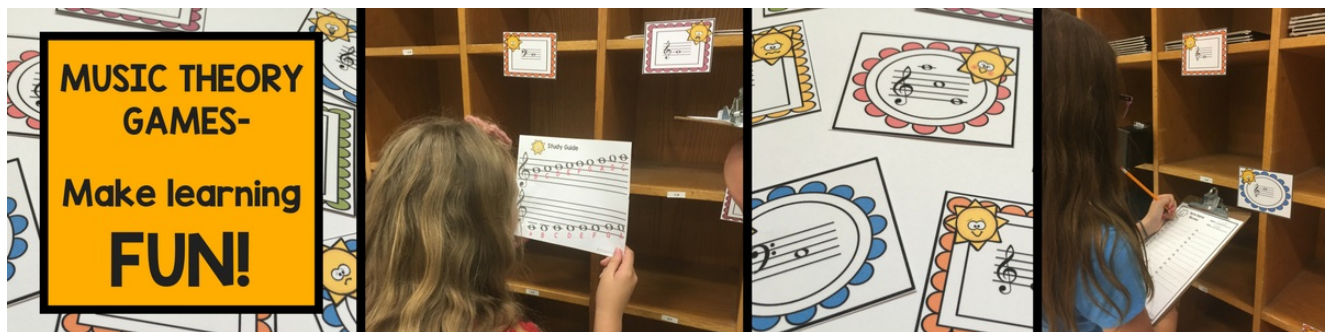
You are challenged to be precise with your balance and dynamics.

You are challenged to be a part of the band sound, not just your own sound.

And just like the crayons get used up quickly when you scribble, your embouchure and your energy get used up quickly when you overblow. When you play with a controlled, beautiful, balanced sound your endurance will improve. Just like a crayon tip will stay sharp and fresh, you will stay sharp and fresh. Just like the crayon can last till the end of the coloring, you will end to the end of the concert.

You all are ready. You're ready to color a masterpiece together. As a group. Each color adding to the beauty. Each color playing it's part. You're ready to make a work of art.

*This article was contributed by **BJ Sayger**. He is in his 18th year of teaching middle school band in Texas.*



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