

# Jonas Clarke Middle School Choral Handbook

Mr. Coombs

Welcome to the Clarke choral program! By signing up for 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Chorus, 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Chorus, Men's Chorus, or Women's Chorus, you have chosen the amazing experience of making music with others, AND learning to become a better singer. The choral groups at Clarke are committed to performance excellence, teamwork, personal responsibility, self-discovery, and musical expression. So what does that mean, and why are we really here?

- *We are here to learn about ourselves and each other by cooperating, supporting one another, and expressing ourselves.*
- *We are here to gain the skills that allow us to become more independent musicians.*
- *We are here to explore, quality vocal music that you otherwise may never have discovered!*
- *We are here to learn to work as a team, by taking pride and personal responsibility for our personal roles in the ensemble.*
- *We are here to make great music each day, and to create an experience we'll never forget!*



## A LESSON ON TEAMWORK...

Even though my computer keyboard is an old model, it works quite well except for one of the keys. It is true that there are forty-six keys that function well enough, but just one key not working makes all the difference.

I believe with all of my heart that a chorus is just like my computer keyboard when not all of the members are working together as a team.

You may say to yourself, "Well I am only one person. I won't make or break any organization."

But it really does make a huge difference! You see, for any performing ensemble to be effective, it requires the active participation of every member. So the next time you think that you are only one person and that your efforts don't matter, please remember my old computer keyboard, and start telling yourself:

"I AM A KEY PERSON IN OUR PROGRAM, AND I AM  
NEEDING VERY MUCH."

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### **Helpful Reminders**

- We are cooperative, not competitive. Your only competition is yourself.
- You are safe here. You will not make others feel unsafe.
- Everything we do is abnormal. If it feels different, it's probably good!
- You only get better when you take responsibility for your own learning.

# **Expectations: You Probably Have Some Questions...**

## **What do I need to bring to chorus?**

- ✓ Every member of the chorus must bring their chorus folder, sheet music, and a pencil every day. NO FOOD OR DRINK IN THE AUDITORIUM.

## **What do I do when I arrive to chorus?**

- ✓ Throw away your gum. Leave your books in the upper area of the auditorium and come down to your seat. You may talk with friends until you hear the piano music come to an end. There is absolutely NO running, jumping, yelling, physical contact with each other, or touching of stage equipment.

## **What does the piano music mean?**

- ✓ At the beginning of the class, Mr. Coombs will play something on the piano. This is your cue to be in your seat if you're not there already. Once the music stops, you will have a 5-second countdown to be standing and ready to sing.

## **What's the bathroom policy?**

- ✓ Leaving in the middle of class is a huge disruption to our group flow. If you ask me to go to the bathroom in the middle of class, I will ask you if it's a dire emergency. Please take care of it before class instead of having to let us all know how badly you need to go!

## **Why do we spend so much time warming up? Is it that important?**

- ✓ YES! You will be asked to put forth a lot of physical and mental effort during warm-ups. This is where you build the skills to become a better singer, making it easier to use those skills during the songs that we sing later in the class.

## **What do I do when Mr. Coombs isn't working with my section?**

- ✓ You may sit quietly and wait for your section's turn. For possible extra participation points, you may also follow along with your part to see how it fits with the other parts. Another great idea is to listen to the instructions being given to another section, because it may apply to you as well. DO NOT TALK while other sections are working.

## **Why can't I talk if I'm not singing?**

- ✓ Other sections need to concentrate on the work they are doing, and talking around the room is extremely distracting. We move very quickly, and it may be your turn to sing again before you know it. If you're talking, you'll likely miss your cue and slow the entire class down. Stay on task at all times!

## **I'm just one person, and I just wanted an easy A. Do I really have to sing?**

- ✓ Yes. This is an experience that depends on every single member working as a whole, much like a sports team. Some of you will become leaders, and most of you will learn from each other how to work as a team and how to become better group singers. No one, however, has the choice to not participate. If you signed up for chorus at Clarke, you signed up to be part of something excellent!

## **How am I graded in chorus?**

- ❖ *Participation -- 40%*
- ❖ *Concert Attendance -- 30%*
- ❖ *Assessments -- 30%*

## **How is my participation grade calculated?**

- ✓ Each student begins the week with a 90% in participation.
- ✓ Points are added based on observable positive behaviors. More points are added for active participation (e.g. Following one's own part while Mr. Coombs works with another section) than for passive participation (e.g. Simply sitting quietly while Mr. Coombs works with another section).
- ✓ Points are deducted based on observable behaviors that are inconsistent with class expectations (talking instead while other sections are working, frequent tardiness, lack of physical effort, etc)
- ✓ More points are deducted for more disruptive behaviors (e.g. Talking instead of singing, refusal to sing, disrespectful behavior, missing class materials).

## **How is my concert attendance grade calculated?**

- ✓ There are two required concerts per year, and all students are expected to attend. Please see the concert attendance policy and concert schedule on the next pages for more details.

### **What is the assessment part of my grade?**

- ✓ Typically after each concert, you are given a very brief singing exam in private, with the option of doing it with a friend. You are graded on your growth with the skills we've been working on, NOT on how naturally "good" your voice is. Everyone is on their own journey!
- ✓ Additionally, we learn a lot of musical skills such as ear training and rhythm in chorus class. There may be various quizzes on these things as well, which usually involve decoding musical patterns and writing them down.

### **What else happens if I don't follow expectations?**

- ✓ In addition to the effect on your participation grade, you may have your seat moved. Additional writing assignments may also be added, depending on the situation. If behavioral problems persist, a meeting with a parent will be scheduled.

### **So what's the most important thing I should take away?**

- ✓ Support and respect. This must be a safe place for people to open up and take risks. Encouraging others in a nonjudgemental way is the best thing anyone can do. On the flip side, unsupportive behavior toward others destroys the energy in the room instantly. There will be zero tolerance for this type of behavior.
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## **2016-2017 CONCERT SCHEDULE**

Each concert in which your child will sing, during the 2016-2017 school year, will be the result of many weeks of hard work and preparation. Please put these dates in your calendar and plan to attend these concerts with your child and your family. The memories of your supportive presence will stay with your child long after the words and the melodies have been forgotten.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Who?</b>
Monday, Dec. 12 <sup>th</sup> 2016	7:00 pm	Clarke Auditorium	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade Chorus, 7 <sup>th</sup> Grade Chorus
Tuesday, Dec. 13 <sup>th</sup> 2016	7:00pm	Clarke Auditorium	JCGC, Men's Choir, Middle Cs
Tuesday, June 13 <sup>th</sup> 2017	7:00 pm	LHS Auditorium	ALL Clarke Choirs

## CONCERT ATTENDANCE POLICY

This course is performance based. Therefore, attendance at all concerts is required, unless there is a legitimate reason. These are the important things to consider:

1. Homework, sports activities, rehearsals or performances for other shows, and inappropriate last moment obligations are not considered valid reasons for being absent from a concert. The concert is considered a major exam.
2. Students who are in school on the day of the concert and on the day following the concert will **NOT** be granted an excused absence for illness without a doctor's note.
3. Any anticipated concert absence due to travel, etc. must be cleared with Mr. Coombs in writing **two weeks prior** to the concert. Travel plans must be consistent with school policy.
4. An unexcused absence from a performance will result in a loss of credit for concert grade, **no higher than a C-** for that quarter.

*\*Parents of students who anticipate transportation issues affecting their child's participation in an upcoming concert should contact Mr. Coombs at least two weeks prior to the concert. The school will make every effort to help facilitate your child's participation in each scheduled concert event.*

## CONCERT DRESS CODE

**Ladies:** Black dress pants or a black skirt (at least knee length), with a black shirt or long sleeve blouse. Black dress also ok (at least knee length) Black dress shoes and dark socks (if wearing pants) are a must! **No sneakers please.**

**Gentlemen:** Black dress pants, and a white dress shirt (short or long sleeves). In addition, they should wear a nice looking pair of dark dress shoes and dark socks. **No sneakers please.**

## **OTHER OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Junior District Chorus:**

Junior District Chorus is a chance to sing with the best middle school and high school students in the area. It is hard work, but very exciting and rewarding. It is open to girls & boys in 7th and 8th grades, and boys only in 6th. Please DO NOT audition unless you know you can make all rehearsals as well as the concert.

#### **Auditions: 2017 Junior Festival Auditions**

Saturday, January 28, 2017

Tenney Grammar School

75 Pleasant Street, Methuen, MA 01844

More information on how to register will follow shortly.

### **Middle Cs:**

Middle Cs Auditions will be held on **Wednesday, September 14<sup>th</sup>** for 7<sup>th</sup> graders and **Thursday, September 15<sup>th</sup>** for 8<sup>th</sup> graders. You must sign up to audition, and bring the completed audition form with you! All forms will be available in class.

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### **Contact**

Mr. Griffin Coombs  
Director of Choirs  
Jonas Clarke Middle School  
17 Stedman Road  
Lexington, MA 02421

gcoombs@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
(781) 861-2450 ext.1130  
mrcoombsmusic.weebly.com

## Clarke Middle School Choir Agreement

By signing below, you assert that you have read and understand the course expectations as outlined in the Jonas Clarke Middle School Choral Handbook. You are also acknowledging your personal role in the choir and agreeing to live up to these expectations and guidelines in order create a productive and musically rich environment for everyone involved.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Student PRINTED Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Student Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

As the parent or guardian, I ask that you confirm your own understanding of the course expectations by signing below. This helps assure me that we are ready to help each other in maintaining a high standard for each child in the performing arts.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)