

The Chorus Handbook:

**What to Expect in Eighth Grade Chorus at
North Hills Junior High School
with Mr. Cloonan**

2009-2010 School Year



North Hills Junior High School
55 Rochester Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15229

Chorus Room: A100
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Welcome

Welcome to 8th Grade Chorus! By selecting chorus this year, you have committed to a more intense study of singing, since we meet every day throughout the school year. This year's chorus is divided into 2 sections, periods 1 and 2, and meets in Chorus Room A100. The instructor is Mr. Cloonan, who also teaches music at West View Elementary (some of you had me for several years before!).

Class Structure

As much as possible, a daily routine will be established. Every class will begin with warm-up exercises that are focused on muscles, breathing, and singing. Much like playing a sport, you must learn to use the muscles needed in the game by stretching, doing exercises, and practicing proper technique to get better so you can win the game. Our "games" are our public performances/concerts, and a "win" is us singing the songs we have prepared with the best technique and musical expression possible.

Here's what to expect when you enter the classroom:

- 1) You will take a music folder from the cabinet and quickly find your assigned seat, throwing away any gum or candy you may have before class begins. **Chorus is a "no gum zone!"**
- 2) *As soon as the late bell rings*, you should end any conversations, stand up and face the front of the room, and begin silent stretching along with whoever is leading warm-ups. Our general warm-up routine will be stretching, then breathing, then singing exercises.
- 3) During warm-ups, talking is not permitted, as you must focus completely on relaxing your muscles, focusing your breathing and singing, and following the directions of the teacher. If you are carrying on a conversation with your neighbor, you will distract others, and we will not be acting like the "team" we need to be. Also, many important announcements are made, and attendance is taken, during warm-ups. If you are in an incorrect seat or are wandering around the room, you may be marked absent and written up for a class cut.
- 4) The hall pass may be used **after warm-ups are completed, one at a time**. If you need to see the nurse, come to Mr. Cloonan directly, as the nurse's office will not allow you in without a note from your teacher. Please do not abuse the hall pass or the privilege will be taken away from you
- 5) Keep homework put away unless you are told that there is free time or that you may work quietly. Since we do not have desks or books, our choir music is like our textbook, and should always be out so that when parts of the music are discussed, you can follow along.
- 6) When class is over, make sure that your music is put neatly back in your folder and that you return your folder to the cabinet. Mr. Cloonan's job is not to be your personal butler... take pride in your classroom. "Always leave a place better than how you've found it."

Grading

You will receive a progress report in the middle of each report period as well as a letter grade and percentage for each 9-week grading period. Grades are a reflection of your participation, attention, and motivation. Here is how the percentages are calculated:

- 50% *Daily Participation:*** arriving to class on time, having music daily, participating in all required activities, displaying a positive attitude, staying on task, showing good singing posture, and attempting proper vocal technique
- 25% *Vocal Hearings and Assignments:*** hearings are times when you will be singing in small groups (not alone) to demonstrate progress on pitches, parts, and memorization of concert selections, to allow Mr. Cloonan to check for changes in range (mostly boys' changing voices), a chance to discuss any problems you may have with sections of a song. Any assignments given will be completed during class (written observation of concert video, journal reflection after a video or performance, etc.) You will not receive homework outside of class, except to make sure songs are memorized for the concert, or a possible wiki response/reflection.
- 25% *Concerts & Combined Rehearsals:*** attending scheduled pre-concert rehearsals, participating in the 3 required evening concerts, following the dress code for concerts

As you can see, the largest part of your grade is your daily participation. As long as you follow directions and sing when asked, those should be easy points. ***It takes work to fail chorus!*** You have to make a conscious effort to not participate, to not follow directions, to show disrespect for others, and to not attend rehearsals and concerts. The only thing preventing you from having a 100% in chorus is YOU. Strive for excellence...be the best you can be. We'll be a better chorus because of it!

Combined Rehearsals

Before each concert, there will be a scheduled combined rehearsal, where all 3 classes will come together to hear how the songs we have practiced will sound with everyone. These rehearsals are **very** important, also, because it is here where we practice coming on and off of the risers, figure out standing arrangements, and work with our piano accompanist. You will be notified at least 2 weeks before these rehearsals are to take place. The rehearsals are held during periods 1 and 2, and your teachers will be given a list of chorus members excused from class.

Attendance is required, and it is your responsibility to make arrangements for missed work. If there is a conflict that you find out about, please tell Mr. Cloonan immediately, so he can discuss it with your other teacher or make arrangements for you to make up what is missed. Missing this rehearsal is like not showing up to the practice right before a game, meet, or competition...you would be confused if the coach changed something and you didn't find out ahead of time (and may not be allowed to play/cheer/etc.). The choir "team" counts on every voice to be there.

Concerts

The purpose of singing in a chorus is not only to learn music with other people who like to sing, but it is to share music with others. We work very hard in class and should *want* to share what we have learned with friends and family. Public performances are a part of the district choral curriculum, and are required. It would be like being on the basketball team, coming to all of the practices, but then not showing up for the games. Why join the team in the first place?

North Hills School District follows a strict attendance policy for concerts. We only require 3 evenings throughout the year. **Take the time to write them on your calendars when you go home tonight.** These dates are also published on the district's calendar, and are available online at nhsd.net. "I didn't know about it" is not considered a valid excuse for missing a concert. "I couldn't get a ride" is not valid, either. Between the 7th, 8th, and 9th grade choral groups, there are over 250 students involved in our concerts (over 90 in 8th Grade Chorus alone!). *Someone* who is also a part of the concert lives near you. If it becomes apparent that transportation is going to be an issue, talk to that person to arrange a ride.

If there is a legitimate conflict with a concert date (and very little is considered legitimate), it should be brought to Mr. Cloonan's attention as soon as possible **IN WRITING, and submitted BEFORE the day of the concert.** Remember that concerts make up 25% of your grade. If you become ill on the day of the concert, it is your parent/guardian's responsibility to notify Mr. Cloonan (voice mail ext. 5225, email: cloonans@nhsd.net). Failure to submit an excuse will result in your grade being lowered by at least one full letter grade (do the math – you lose 25%, that means the highest grade you can get is a 75%, which is a "C"). We all must work together and help to make the best concerts possible – even one person missing from the choir "team" hurts everyone, so don't think that your voice doesn't matter!

A side note from Mr. Cloonan: one of my least favorite excuses when talking to students or parents is, "I'm only one person, no one will miss me." Just imagine if 25 people all thought that same thing and missed a performance. Think of all of the hard work you put in, and then suddenly a group of 85 strong voices suddenly becomes 60. You DO make a difference, your voice matters, and you WILL be missed. So, please, for everyone's benefit, BE AT THE CONCERTS!

Concert Dress Code

The North Hills Choral Department follows a strict dress code policy for public performances. We strive to look as polished and presentable as possible, reflecting the hard work put in before each performance. A student found to be in violation of the dress code may be sent home to change clothes before the concert. If the student refuses, they will not be permitted to participate in the concert and their grade will be lowered by one letter grade.

Girls:

White long sleeved top (or $\frac{3}{4}$ length – no bare midriffs)
Black skirt to the knee
Black stockings
Black comfortable (flat or low heel) shoes (not sandals)

Boys:

White button down dress shirt
Tie
Black dress slacks
Black dress shoes

2009-10 Performances

As published in the district calendar, performances for the 2009-10 school year are as follows:

Required Curricular Performances:

Winter Holiday Concert

Tuesday, December 22, 2009

7:00PM, Auditorium

4th-12th Grades Combined Concert

Thursday, March 4, 2010

7:00PM, Auditorium

Spring Concert

Thursday, June 3, 2010

7:00PM, Auditorium

Additional Performing Opportunities:

7th/8th Grade Celebration of Learning

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

6:00-8:30PM, Auditorium

Arts Alive

Friday, May 7, 2010

5:00-9:00PM, Auditorium

School Board Meeting

Date & Time TBA

(small group)

Mr. Cloonan's Website



Everything that is announced in class, sent home as a letter, or somehow communicated to you as a group, is posted on Mr. Cloonan's website. To access this information, you can either go to the "Teachers/Department Pages" link under the Junior High menu at nhsd.net, or you can go directly to the site by typing teachers.nhsd.net/cloonans into your browser (no "www"). Click on the "Eighth Grade Chorus" menu link at the top of the page to find chorus information. Updated calendars will be posted, flyers and forms are available in PDF format, listening examples and practice tracks for concerts and festivals are posted as MP3 or RealAudio files, and photos from past concerts are also shown. If you can't remember some important piece of information (like when a combined rehearsal is), chances are it will be listed online. Use this as a resource – that's why it was created! ☺

Other Choral Opportunities

If singing is really what you enjoy, there are several other ensembles and activities you may want to consider taking part in at North Hills Junior High School...

Concert Choir:

Made up of select members of the 7th, 8th, and 9th grade choral groups, as well as some from band and orchestra who can't be in a scheduled chorus class, this ensemble meets during homerooms to learn more challenging music that requires more advanced singing skills, and often includes other instrumental parts. The weekly schedule is as follows:

Tuesdays – full group, everyone

Thursdays – boys only

Fridays – girls only

Participation in the Concert Choir is by audition. If you are interested in being considered for this group, see Mr. Cloonan. Auditions will be held after school on Thursday, September 17th.

Boys Ensemble:

The boys in the Concert Choir, as well as any other interested 7th-9th grade boy, meet on Thursday mornings during homeroom. The group works on Concert Choir music as well as music written just for guys' voices. At the combined concert in March, the Boys Ensemble joins with the Senior High guys on a feature song.

Mucho Macho Music:

Now in its 6th year, this one-day festival on November 3rd brings jr. high guys from all over the western Pennsylvania region to sing together with the Choir Men of Slippery Rock University and to learn how to sing with a voice that doesn't sound like it used to before.

PMEA District Chorus:

A 2-day festival, this year held at Burgettstown, that brings nearly 50 schools together to learn music to perform for friends and family at a weekend concert. Participation is by teacher recommendation and a festival selection committee put together by the host school. Extra practices are held in preparation for this event.

Drama Club:

One of our most popular extra-curricular music activities at the junior high, the Drama Club puts on a 90-minute musical each year during the last week of January. Last year's production of *Willy Wonka Junior* was very successful, and we're expecting this year's *Alice in Wonderland Junior* to be just as big of a hit. Auditions are held during the last week of October, and the cast rehearses daily from November through January. Non-singing positions are also available on the Technical (Tech) Crew.

Questions?

Parents/Guardians can feel free to leave Mr. Cloonan a voice mail (ext. 5225), send an e-mail (cloonans@nhsd.net), or send a note in to school with your son/daughter. Let's build a great singing team, working and playing hard to make great choral music in our school!



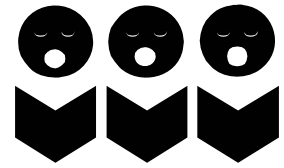
North Hills School District

North Hills Junior High School

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Choral Department

Susan McKinney, 7th Grade Chorus, ext. 4054
Shaun Cloonan, 8th Grade Chorus, ext. 5225
Harriet Valliant, Freshmen Girls Choir, ext. 3047

Eighth Grade Chorus Student-Teacher-Parent Agreement 2009-10 School Year

On the previous pages, you read what to expect in a regular chorus classroom from your teacher, what behaviors for students are required, how our combined rehearsals are organized, and when our concerts are scheduled. You also read the attendance policy, the dress code policy, and the grading policy.

Any other policy not specifically outlined in the Chorus Handbook means that it is covered in the *2009-10 North Hills Junior High School Parent/Student Handbook*. This refers to disciplinary action due to coming to class late, violating school policies, etc. All established school rules will be enforced according to what is outlined in the handbook.

To the Parent/Guardian: By signing below, you agree that you have read and understand the policies set forth by the North Hills Junior High School choral department, and that you will support Mr. Cloonan and principals in adhering to those policies. Thank you in advance for helping to make this year's chorus to be the best possible experience for your son/daughter.

To the Student: By signing below, you agree that you have read and understand the expectations discussed in class, and that you understand the consequences of not following the rules and policies.

Please return the completed form to Mr. Cloonan by Friday, September 4, 2009.

You will receive one week's worth of participation points for returning the form on time.

Student Name _____ Chorus Period _____
(Please Print)

Parent/Guardian Name _____
(Please Print)

Preferred Contact Number _____ Best time to reach you? _____

Preferred E-mail Address (if desired) _____

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____