

Do They See The Big Picture?

by

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Even in college, students are often made to memorize details for exams that seem (to the students) to have little connection to anything. The students will memorize the details, “throw them up” on a test, and then move on to the next set of “mindless” details forgetting the previously learned information. Understanding and retention of material is an important issue, especially when the information may show up on a preliminary exam for a student entering graduate school.

In my classes I work to make sure that my students understand how information fits into the larger scheme of things, i.e. “See The Big Picture.” For example, in music history I emphasize a basic outline of the major periods in music history and then show the students how specific details fit in. It is easy to see and remember the significance of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 6 (the “Pastoral”) when it is understood that he was a transitional figure (both timeline-wise as well as musically) between the absolute music of the classical era of Mozart and Haydn and the programmaticism of romantic era composers such as Berlioz and Liszt.

I have also found this approach effective in private lessons, music appreciation classes and other teaching situations. So, let us always be sure our students, “See The Big Picture.”

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