



**From the Top at Carnegie Hall**  
**Episode 7: "Singing, Strumming,  
and Skating"**

Airing on PBS (check local TV listings)  
Available online at pbs.org

## Learning Activity

### Title: *Exploring Excellence*

**Description:** Through group discussion, individual reflection and a short writing exercise, students will explore the qualities, characteristics and skills necessary for excellence in any field by examining Kimani's high achievement in both music and sports.

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**National Music Standards:** **8** Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts, **9** Understanding music in relation to history and culture; **Language**

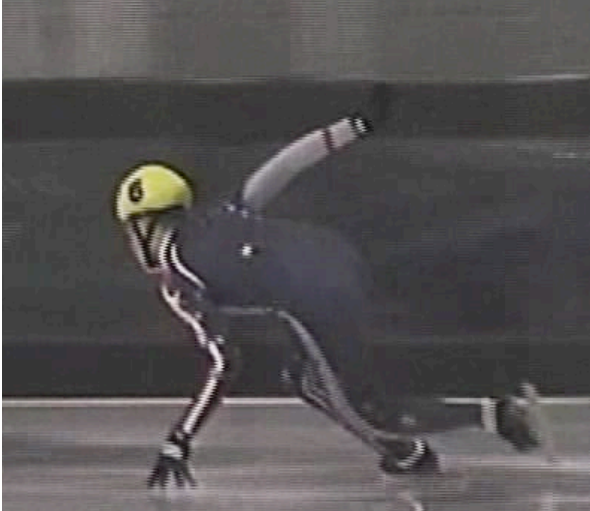
**Arts: 12,** Applying language skills



Kimani Griffin on stage at Carnegie Hall

### Background

In this episode 17-year-old Kimani Griffin, from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, shares his passion for classical guitar and speed skating. He has devoted equal time and energy to both activities over the past ten years and it has really paid off! In addition to being an exceptionally talented classical guitarist, Kimani is also a champion speed skater and competes on the national level. He recently received an endowment from the U.S. Olympic Committee to continue his training in Utah for the 2010 Winter Games under two-time Olympian Derek Parra. Kimani talks to Christopher O'Reilly about the similarities between playing the guitar and speed skating, and why he could never do one without the other.



Kimani in the U.S. Speed Skating Short Track American Cup III  
2008 Ohio Invitational

## Materials

Computer with media player and Internet access; speakers and projector if needed; pencils and paper

## Activity Instructions

- 1) Before watching the video, **ask the students** to look for and note the comparisons Kimani makes between music and speed skating.
- 2) **Watch** the video segment that includes Kimani's guitar performance, interview and hometown footage of him skating. Ask students for their reactions.
- 3) Using Kimani's video as a starting point, have students **brainstorm** and **discuss** the elements that have contributed to his high achievement in both music and sports.

Some questions to consider:

- What does Kimani think music and skating have in common?
- What are some things he talks about that are important to high achievement?
- What behaviors or actions does he exhibit that contribute to his success?
- What did they observe about his attitude towards both activities?
- Are there aspects of Kimani's personality they noticed that might have helped him achieve success in music? In sports?
- What else did they notice in the video that may have contributed to Kimani's success? This can include skills, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, support structures, routines, etc.
- What are some of the personal qualities and skills they think are needed to achieve excellence in sports? In music?

4) **Create** two columns on the board, one for music, another for sports. List all of the skills, personal qualities and characteristics that the students generate for each category. **Compare.** Is there overlap? What common themes can they find between high achievement in music and

sports? Can these be applied to other fields? Are there any other elements of success missing from these lists? Start a third column with shared elements and have students identify what they believe to be the essential elements of excellence and high achievement in *all* fields.

5) Take 5-10 minutes to have everyone review the lists on the board and **reflect** on how they have applied these elements in their own lives. Have students pick one example of an activity where they have demonstrated excellence. **Write** a short description of the activity, identify what element(s) of excellence they have used, how it was applied and why it was important in achieving success.

6) Invite students to **share** their responses with the class.

**Extra Credit!** Have the students interview someone in their own community who has achieved excellence in any field (it could be a friend, neighbor, family member or classmate). Write a short profile following the same model used for the self-reflection exercise.

## Find out more!

### **About Kimani Griffin**

Kimani also appeared on From the Top's radio program. You can hear him play and learn more about his musical life at:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88062726>

### **About the guitar**

In episode 3, you can watch another young guitarist and learn more about the instrument in the accompanying activity guide titled "Guitar Is Everywhere!"

### **About speed skating**



Explore the world of speed skating here:

<http://www.usspeedskating.org/>

## **About Derek Parra**

Derek Parra is an Olympic medalist in Speed Skating and a world champion inline speed skater. Kimani was invited to train with him in Salt Lake City, Utah for the 2010 Winter Games.

Watch this video of him talking about how he got started in the sport:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7pHmwXnKg8>

## **About Elements of Excellence**

This site contains more detailed information about the critical mental factors that lead to excellence in all fields.

<http://www.zoneofexcellence.ca/free/wheel.html>

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