Students are filing into your classroom and you hear them talking about a musician they all know. One is singing the chorus to the singer’s newest hit, and you realize you not only don’t know the song, but you have absolutely no idea who the singer is. JAY GABLER, ED.M.’98, digital producer for The Current, a music show on Minnesota Public Radio, shares five tips for educators interested in staying in tune with their students’ musical tastes.

▷ Read the news. “Even with everything else going on these days, the best mainstream national news sources are still finding room for insightful music coverage. Music publications like Pitchfork and Rolling Stone also offer plenty of food for thought and can help you separate a forgettable fad from a meaningful trend. Many also offer podcasts if your ears have more time than your eyes.”

▷ You don’t have to wear a flower crown to go to a music festival. “Festivals are a great way to hear what people are getting excited about, and they’re low risk: On a large lineup there’s likely to be something you enjoy. Increasingly, the biggest festivals are making live video part of the package, so you can even attend vicariously.”

▷ Find a cool radio station. “Radio is still an unbeatable source for carefully programmed music with commentary by knowledgeable hosts who can make the tracks more accessible than an algorithmic stream. Local stations are great, but remember you’re not confined to your dial. Virtually every station has an online stream, and many have their own apps. Also, every major streaming service has curated playlists and ‘radio’ functions that let you dive deeper on genres and artists that pique your interest.”

▷ Keep an open mind. “Your students don’t like everything, and you don’t have to either! Just give their music a chance, and tell them what you think. It is important to keep in mind that you might have to relax any strict rules around language — not necessarily in the classroom but with respect to your own ears. Ideas about what kinds of words and expressions are appropriate evolve over time. Give your students’ music a fair chance, and share your honest opinion. After all, open exchange is what learning is all about, and what music is all about, too.”

▷ Ask them. “When it’s appropriate, let your students pick the playlists for classroom listening. Try incorporating music into coursework: Ask your students to write about their favorite songs as an essay topic, or examine the lyrics as poetry. Strike up a conversation by asking your students what they’re listening to, and check it out later. Maybe they’ll even turn the tables and ask what you’re into.”