

**Title:** *Cross Cultural Comparisons with Chinese, American and Indian Music*

Integrating global music into classroom instruction provides a gateway to exploring and connecting across cultures. Music has always been a vital part of human expression. It has the power to engage, motivate and inspire students and builds bridges between both what is familiar and what is unfamiliar. The integration of music across the curriculum enables students to engage in rich textual analysis of diverse, interdisciplinary primary source materials, as well further develop global competency skills such as recognizing perspectives and communicating across cultures. This lesson integrates music from the album [Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn](#), available through Smithsonian Folkways.

**Lesson Theme:** Explore similarities and differences among traditional Chinese, classic American, and contemporary Indian musical genres

**Featured Songs:** “Ping Tan Dance”; “Weaving Medley: Busy Weaving/Julianne Johnson/ Open Little Hand/ Back Step Cindy”

**Overview:** This lesson features 5 days of instruction that will provide students with several examples of Chinese traditional music blended with modern American bluegrass. Students will also be exposed to Indian Bollywood music in order to compare the instruments used in the Chinese traditional music. These activities are specifically designed for 4th grade students and covers Social Studies and English Language Arts standards. 4th graders will explore how traditional North Carolinian music and culture from Appalachia can influence music today.

**Suggested Grade level:** 4

**Subject:** Social Studies, ELA Literacy

**Corresponding National Standards:**

**Social Studies**

- 4.B.1 [Understand how various groups of people have developed and changed in NC from past to present.](#)
- 4.B.1.2 [Summarize how artistic expression from various groups in NC represents their cultural heritage.](#)
- 4.B.2 [Understand cultural features and characteristics of NC at the state and local level.](#)

**English Language Arts**

- RI.4.1 [Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.](#)
- RI.4.5 [Describe the overall structure of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.](#)

**Corresponding Global Competency Skills:** [Asia Society’s Global Competency Skills:](#)

Investigate the World; Recognize Perspectives

## Essential Questions:

1. How are songs in different cultures similar to American culture?
2. How does Chinese culture influence and/or blend with American music and dance in North Carolina?

## Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will be able to compare music genres from different cultures and regions around the world.
2. Students will be able to infer the meaning or purpose of songs based on their background knowledge.
3. Students will be able to appreciate different songs from diverse cultures.

## Materials:

- Art supplies: markers, colored pencils, or water color paints
- Classroom writing notebooks
- KWL in notebook
- Venn Diagram in notebook or whole class Smartboard
- Laptops or smartboard for Internet access
- [Lyrics and Translation for Ping Tan Dance](#)
- [Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei](#) website
- Library of Congress [Teacher's Guide to Analyzing Sheet Music](#).

**Background information for the educator:** Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn created an album to showcase how Chinese traditional music and songs can blend beautifully with American bluegrass music and English lyrics.

- In this recorded [interview](#) with Paste Magazine, Abigail Washburn and her husband, Bela Fleck, play their banjos. Abigail explains her “Old Time” style, learned from a native North Carolinian musician. Her technique is to use her nails and no metal finger picks; this method is also reminiscent of how the banjo was originally played in West Africa before being brought to the US. To further explore the music of Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn, check out:
- [Banjo Basics with Abigail Washburn](#)
- [The Sinica Backgrounder on Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn](#)
- The guzheng is a popular traditional Chinese stringed instrument. Learn more by reading “[Guzheng: China's Most Popular Traditional Musical Instrument](#)” from China Daily.
- Bollywood is an Indian traditional movie genre, but music and dance play a very important role as well. Learn more by reading this India Guide article on “[Bollywood](#).”

## Student Activities: (5 Days of 30 minute activities)

Chinese speakers will most likely be able to comprehend the lyrics in Chinese. This will allow Chinese ELL students to become leaders in the class since they can teach their classmates about the lyrics, song meanings, and possibly instruments used. Other ELL students may be able to contribute by sharing similar songs from their home countries and cultures. Similarly, on Day 5, Indian students may be familiar with Bollywood, so they can help lead the discussion. All lesson activities are flexible and can take longer or shorter as the teacher deems appropriate. It is suggested to break up the activities into 30 minute chunks spread out over 4-5 days.

## Day 1

- Have students list and brainstorm what they think of when they hear bluegrass or country music.
  - What instruments are used? Where is the music from?

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*This lesson was created by Susan Azzu, Rashkis Elementary School, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, as part of the 2019-2020 World View Global Music Fellows Program  
For more information about the program, please visit <http://worldview.unc.edu/>*

- Students can record on KWL in their literacy notebooks.
- Discuss to build background knowledge.
- Provide context of lesson by showing a picture of the album cover or pictures of Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn with their instruments. See the image on this [website](#) for an example.
- Next give students a copy of the [“Ping Tan Dance” lyrics](#) and preview the meaning of the lyrics in English.
- Now provide students with the Primary Source Analysis Song Document from the Library of Congress [Teacher’s Guide to Analyzing Sheet Music](#).
- While listening to “Ping Tan Dance”, have students write responses to what they hear in the song. Newcomer students with limited English and/or EC students could draw or sketch what they hear. Allow time to repeat the song and have students work independently at first.
- Using Think, Pair, Share, students will first respond on their own, then they can share with a partner.

## Day 2

- Continue Think, Pair, Share as needed. Then discuss as a whole class, and respond to the following questions:
  - Why do you think this song was created?
  - What is the role of the grandmother character?
  - Can you make a connection to your own personal experience with your grandmother--how do they act/what do they say?
- After discussing, now have students watch the bluegrass documentary video, [“The Story Behind the Best Bluegrass Clog Dancing.”](#) It takes place from 1965-1966 in North Carolina’s Appalachian region. It shows mountain clog dancing and music for the first time on television.
- After viewing, provide students with a laptop to view on their own or display text on the Smart-board: visit <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/dance-clogging-and-buckdancing/> for the literary text “Dance: Clogging and Buckdancing”. Have students compare and contrast what they learned about clogging.
- Have students summarize by writing a description of how mountain clogging is similar or different to the “Ping Tan Dance” song and lyrics.

## Day 3: Optional Activity

- As a learning extension, students can demonstrate how to clog if they would like to try dancing. Some students may have similar dances from their home cultures that they can demonstrate. Try this instructional video on clogging, [“Learn to Clog in 5 Minutes.”](#)

## Day 4

- Have students complete the KWL about traditional Chinese music.
- Introduce guzheng as a traditional Chinese instrument by showing what the instrument looks like. Use the video [“Bei Bei Guzheng: The Butterfly Lovers”](#) is a good example.
- Play the song “Weaving Medley: Busy Weaving/Julianne Johnson/ Open Little Hand/ Back Step Cindy”. While listening, have students draw or sketch what they hear and think about. Provide students with colored pencils, markers, or water colors. After students complete their illustration, engage the whole class in a discussion about what the purpose of the song might be. Encourage the students to

make an inferences-

- Why do you think this song was included in the album?
- How is it different from “Ping Tan Dance”?
- Which song do you prefer and why?

## Day 5

- Ask students to complete the KWL and share what they know about Bollywood or the Indian music genre.
- Introduce students to an Indian instrument called the benjo or banjo by playing the video, “[Dil hai ke manta nahin Benjo Cover by | Nikul Vaiahnav](#)”. For more Bollywood instrumental music listen to [Diwani On Benjo | Bulbul Tarang | Bollywood Instrumental](#).
- Have students compare the Chinese version of “Weaving Medley: Busy Weaving/Julianne Johnson/ Open Little Hand/ Back Step Cindy with an Indian song featuring the benjo. What is the same and different about each of the songs, instruments, countries of origin, reasons for creating each song? Encourage students to make inferences
  - What do you think is the meaning of each song?
  - Discuss how instrumental music does not have lyrics but can convey a lot of important meaning.
- Students can create a Venn Diagram in their notebooks or this can be done collectively with the whole class.

## Assessment:

Assess students’ background knowledge of bluegrass, traditional Chinese music, and Bollywood music by completing a KWL. Students can complete the “W” want to learn column of the KWL at the end of each day. The final assessment will be to complete the “L” column to share what students learned throughout this entire experience.

## Optional Extension Activities:

Student-led book clubs and/or whole class read alouds on books set in Appalachia. One idea is to use the book “How to Steal a Dog” by Barbara O’Connor. When her family is kicked out of an apartment and has to live in the family’s car, a young girl hatches a plan to steal a dog for the reward money. She learns there are no victimless crimes and the consequences of her own actions. [chapter book, ages 9 and up]

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