

Title: Using STEAM to Depict the Meaning of the Music of Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei

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: Music and STEAM

Featured Songs: “Ho Hey/Cluck Old Hen” and “Pretty Bird”

Overview: Students will learn to find meaning in song, share hopes and issues across cultures and use engineering design and the arts to depict the meaning of the songs.

Suggested Grade levels: 9-12

Subjects: Special Education, Engineering Design, Art, Global Studies, Music

Corresponding National Standards:

NGSS: ETS1A, ETS1B, ETS1C, ETS1-1, ETS1-2, ETS1-3

ELA: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

History/Social Studies: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Corresponding Global Competency Skills: [Asia Society Global Competency Skills](#): Investigate the World, Recognize Perspectives, Communicate Ideas

Essential Questions:

- How do we determine the meaning of music?
- How do we compare music on the same themes across cultures and countries?
- Are there common problems and hopes all people share in the world?
- Can we use Engineering Design and the Arts to depict the meaning of songs, based on our point of view?

Lesson Objectives:

- Evaluate by comparing and contrasting music on the same topic
- Apply by using Engineering Design to build birds to fly to the music with one or two different activities
- Create by using Stop Motion Film to make and depict the meaning of the songs
- Define by learning to use STEAM to depict the meaning of songs

Background information for the educator:

Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei are two musicians who have infused both their music and cultures well.

“Cluck Old Hen” is a traditional well know song from the Southern Appalachian that is fun to play, typically using the fiddle and banjo. *“Ho Hey,”* a traditional catchy Chinese song which was also used by the Communists for propaganda. This song done by Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei combines them both which demonstrates the traditional music of both cultures and similarity in them.

“Fly Away Pretty Bird” is a folk song by Hazel Dickens (1925-2011) a bluegrass singer, who was from West Virginia. Hazel Dickens was an advocated for many causes from supporting coal miners for better working conditions and was also a supporter of women’s rights. This song is about her hope that women can fly free and use their greatness, beauty and skills in the world and will not be put down. This song is also attributed to an abusive relationship her sister or cousin had, about for her to fly away and be free of it and succeed.

The song played by Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei use traditional instruments from both cultures, the banjo from Appalachian Traditional Music and the guzheng an instrument is more than 2,500 years old and a staple of Chinese folk music. These songs help exemplify that music transcends culture and politics and when together can create beauty.

Discussion questions:

- How do we understand the meaning of songs?
- How do different cultures have similar themes in songs?
- How can STEM/ Engineering be used to depict the meaning of songs?
- How can songs be used as a tool of empowerment?
- How can a song’s meaning be visualized?

Preliminary Activity (Approximately 45 minutes):

Pick either or both activities for your students to complete depending on the time you have allotted for this.

Materials

- Computers to find song lyrics or have preprinted song lyrics copies for the students.
- [Close Reading Through Song Lyrics](#) by Jennifer McCarthur. Print or download the packet and students can complete it
- [5 Steps to Interpreting Song Lyrics](#)
- Have students select a song to analyze. A good website to choose is: <https://www.azlyrics.com/>

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- Have student complete the [“Meaning of Songs” handout](#)
- [“Pretty Bird” lyrics](#)
- [“Ho Hey/Cluck Old Hen” lyrics](#)

Student Activity: Music Lyrics Analysis (60 minutes):

Introduce Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn, life and music using some of the videos and articles below. Introduce them by saying, Abigail Washburn is a folk musician from America whose major instrument is a banjo. Wu Fei is folk and classical musician originally from China who uses a guzheng a traditional Chinese instrument. Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei collaborate with each other to make music that infuses both cultures and traditions and shared human experiences.

Websites, Videos and Articles to Choose From:

About Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei

- This [NPR Interview](#) with Abigail Washburn, her music, experiences in Chinese culture and language and how she blends them into her music.
- This [Ted Talk](#) from Abigail Washburn about her life, how she went from politics to music and how music can bridge cultures and hearts.
- This [video](#) of Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei at an immigrant conference about their music which blends both Chinese and American culture and shared human experiences.
- This [NPR story](#) about Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn, their lives and music together.
- This [website](#) with Information about Abigail Washburn latest interviews, songs and projects.
- This [website](#) with information about Wu Fei’s latest interviews, songs and projects.

About Hazel Dickens, Composer of Pretty Bird

- This is a [video](#) with Hazel Dickens singing Pretty Bird.
- This [video](#) is about Hazel Dickens music and life, composer of Pretty Bird Part 1
- This [video](#) is about Hazel Dickens music and life, composer of Pretty Bird Part 2.
- This [article](#) in Smithsonian Folkways Magazine about Hazel Dickens life and music

Activity steps:

- Listen to both songs, “Ho Hey/Cluck Old Hen” and “Pretty Bird” by Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn
- [“Pretty Bird,”](#) featuring Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei
- [“Ho Hey/Cluck Old Hen,”](#) featuring Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei
- Hand out and go over the lyrics of both songs.
- [“Pretty Bird” lyrics](#)
- [“Ho Hey/Cluck Old Hen” lyrics](#)
- Have students do a think, pair, share on the meaning of the songs. Student should first complete the [“Meaning of Songs” handout](#) by themselves. Share with a partner and then with the whole class.
- Watch the video from Abigail Washburn about the meaning of the songs. You might also want to expand this and use the videos about: Hazel Dickens, US Chinese relations, Wu Fei at the National Immigrant Conference. This section can be as long as preferred. It could take a whole class, comparing these songs to other songs about Women’s Empowerment or Chickens. (See “About

Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei” above for videos.)

- Have students compare and contrast a song with a similar theme using the links below:

Links about Women’s Empowerment songs to use to compare with “Pretty Bird:”

- This is an [article](#) about Country Songs about Female Empowerment. Students might find this helpful when choosing a song to compare with “Pretty Bird”.
- This is an [article with videos](#) of top ten songs about women’s equality in many different music genres.
- Spotify lists many songs that are about women’s rights.
- This is an [article](#) with videos of songs for International Women’s Day
- This is an [article with videos](#) of songs for International Women’s Day

Links to songs related to chickens: Share with class and discuss similarity and differences of: music styles used, themes, instruments and other characteristics that are chosen. Students can present this by: discussion or making a poster.

- [Chicken Disco song](#) to use to compare “Ho Hey/Cluck Old Hen”
- [Popular chicken song.](#)
- [Native American Song](#) with a similar beat.
- [Cluck Old Hen](#) Traditional Version

Student Engineering Design Activities (60 minutes to 180 minutes, depending on how many activities are done)

Using Stop Motion Films to Depict Meaning of a Song

Materials:

- Computers, iPads, Kindles or phones to download the program and take pictures
- Download the free App: Stop Motion Studio or pick one from this [free stop motion App list](#).
- Paper, plain and construction paper
- Paint/ markers/ colored pencils
- Scissors
- Tape/Glue
- Playdough or clay
- Popsicle sticks
- Craft Materials: Google Eyes, yarn, cloth, glitter
- Recycled materials: cloth, boxes, containers
- Toys: Lego characters, blocks, plastic animals
- [“Stop Motion Movie Rubric Handout”](#) (one per student or group)
- Have students pick which song they want to focus on for their stop motion film: “Ho Hey/Cluck Old Hen” or “Pretty Bird”
- Watch videos on how to do STOP Motion Film:
- [Stop Motion App Tutorial](#)
- [How to Animate a Flying Bird](#)

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Student Activity Steps:

- Students can work in groups or individually. The activity works well in collaborative pairs.
- Students should first design the story board by using the [Story Board Handout](#). Students should determine how many photos they need for each box.
- Students need to create the characters for the story from playdough, clay, paper or other materials.
- Students need to make the background scene for the movie on paper or out of materials to make it 3-D such as decorated boxes and recycled materials.
- Students should take pictures to make the movie with an iPad, phone, Kindle or another device.
- Students will need to practice and understand it takes many pictures per frame to make a few seconds of film.
- Students will make the movie.
- Students will add the songs. One way to do this is by playing the song and using the record button in the movie program.
- Students should share the movies with the class and discuss how they depict the meaning of the songs.
- They can be shared on Class Websites and with other classes too.
- Students should complete the [rubric](#) on each video as a class. The teacher should also complete a rubric for each film.

Engineering Designing Flying or Cranking Birds (60 to 180 Minutes). There are four separate challenge levels for this assignment (Flying Bird, Paper-Crank Moving Birds, Origami Bird and Helicopter Birds)

Most Challenging: Flying Bird

- Watch this [video](#) on how to make a flying bird with a motor.

Materials:

- String
- Glue Gun and sticks
- Scissors
- Wood/skewers
- Wooden Coffee Stirrs
- Popsicle Stick
- Small motor and battery
- Construction or tag paper
- String
- Bottle nosed pliers
- Wire
- [Rubric for flying birds](#)

Medium Challenge: Paper Crank Moving Birds (60 minutes)

- Watch this [video](#) on how to make a paper crank

Materials:

- Cardboard
- Glue Gun and sticks

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- Paper
- Construction paper
- Hand Drill
- Sticks 6 ½ inches or we used skewers and cut off the ends
- Kids Safe Cardboard Cutters (can be purchased on Amazon)
- Scissors
- Pencils/ markers
- (You can use a hand crank to move the design listed in the most challenging model, instead of a motor)
- [Rubric for flying birds](#)

Medium to Easy Challenge: Origami Bird (15 minutes)

- Watch this [video](#) shows how to make an origami flying bird

Materials:

- 8x11" piece of paper
- [Rubric for Origami Bird](#)

Easy Challenge: Helicopter Birds (30 minutes)

- Watch this [video](#) on how to make a flying helicopter. Put a bird picture on it instead.

Materials:

- Popsicle Sticks
- Construction paper
- Paper clips
- Rubber bands
- Toy Propellers (a class set can be ordered on Amazon)
- [Rubric for Helicopter Birds](#)
- Discuss with students how STEM, arts and music can all go together. Have students summarize what they learned by completing the [What I learned Form](#) and [Letter to Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei](#). Student might also verbally discuss the project in a group.

Extension Activities:

- Design a bird out of various materials that can fly
- Use another song to analyze the lyrics and make a Stop Motion Film
- Compare and contrast more music with similar themes but from different countries/cultures
- Share student work in the Media Center, with other classes or families via the internet or at an event

Adaptions for Special Education Students or ELL Learners for All Learners

- Read aloud all texts
- Show videos as visual cues to complete each step for the projects
- Complete each step together and divide the projects in parts
- Differentiate rubrics when appropriate

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- Encourage student perseverance and that it is okay if their first attempt does not work. Remind students that engineering design is “hurry up and fail” and then learn from their mistakes
- Encourage a growth mindset when completing activities
- Look for positives, artistic, great ideas, etc.
- Pick songs from cultures that students are familiar with to compare the featured songs to
- Assist students with fine motor skill issues
- Make good collaborative groups where students all participate and share skills
- Have one class mentor another class

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