

**Title: Exploring the Intersection of Appalachian and Chinese Culture through 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:** Exploration of culture through creative movement, poetry, language, and dance

**Featured Songs:** “The Roving Cowboy/Avarguli” and “Banjo Guzheng Pickin’ Girls”

**Overview:** Students will explore Chinese culture through the exploration of Chinese dance, music and poetry and experience the intersection of cultures (Eastern US/Appalachian, Korean, Chinese-American, and traditional Chinese culture) by exploring the elements of music related to the partnership of Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei.

**Suggested Grade levels:** 3-5

**Subjects:** Music, Creative Movement/Dance

**Corresponding National Standards:**

<https://nafme.org/wp-content/files/2014/11/2014-Music-Standards-PK-8-Strand.pdf>

MU:Cr2.1.4(5)(6)a, MU:Cr3.1.4(5)(6)a, MU:Cr3.2.4(5)(6)a

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

- Communicates and collaborates using verbal and non-verbal strategies or behaviors that are appropriate for most audiences.
- Identifies the perspectives of other people, groups, or individuals

**Essential Questions**

- How do musicians improve the quality of their creative work?
- When is creative work ready to share?
- How do musicians make creative decisions?

**Lesson Objectives:**

- Lesson 1: Students will be able to identify qualities of traditional string instruments of China (Guzheng) and Appalachia (Banjo)

- Lesson 2: Students will be able to create movements in the style of traditional Chinese dance forms to accompany a story
- Lesson 3: Students will be able to identify and perform rhythm, instrumentation and elements of form as they listen to Arguvali/Roving Cowboy by Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn
- Lesson 4: Students will be able to create music and movement to accompany selected poetry

### Materials:

- **Props:** fans, scarves, or streamers
- **Visuals 1-5** (see [Lesson Materials Document](#))
- [Lyrics to “The Roving Cowboy/Avarguli”](#)
- [Lyrics to “Banjo Guzheng Pickin’ Girls”](#)
- **Books:**
  - *Chineasy Everyday: Learning Chinese by its Culture* by ShaoLan Hsueh
  - *My Chinatown, Poem 1 Winter* by Kam Mak
- **Recordings:**
  - “Banjo Guzheng Pickin’ Girls” from the Smithsonian Folkways album *Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn*
  - “The Roving Cowboy/Avarguli” from the Smithsonian Folkways album *Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn*
  - “Black Swan” from BTS Map of the Soul: 7
  - “Wild Geese Descending on a Sandy Beach” from *Masterpieces by Guzheng Masters*.
- **Videos:**
  - [Banjo Basics with Abigail Washburn](#)
  - [Guzheng Showcase with Wu Fei](#)
  - [“Banjo/Guzheng Pickin’ Girls”](#) by Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei
  - [Traditional Chinese Fan Dance](#)
  - [The Ripple Effect: Two Cultures, One Voice:](#)

### Student Learning Activities

#### Lesson 1/Day 1: Listening Activity: *Banjo/Guzheng Picking Girl*

- Students begin class by listening to “Banjo Guzheng Pickin’ Girls” by Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei.
- Students use listening guide (see [Visual #1](#)) providing answers to listening prompts in note taking style as they listen.
- Teacher facilitates a second listening, encouraging students to continue adding to their reflections in the listening guide.
- Students use think-pair-share strategies and discuss their notes and prepare for whole group discussion.
- Teacher leads large group discussion and writes key reflections on the board for students to consider.
- Teacher shares photos and video clips of the banjo and guzheng and discusses their origin and use in the US and China respectively (see materials)
- Teacher leads a brief discussion of the artists and their friendship. Play the video [The Ripple Effect](#)
  - Lead a discussion with students about the friendship between Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei: What obstacles might they have had to overcome in their friendship to write music together (ex: language, stylistic differences, etc.) What might we do when we come across someone who

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is different from us? What techniques can we use to reach out to someone who has different experiences or speaks a different language? How can we learn/share/collaborate with people who are different from us?

## Lesson 2/Day 2: Creative Movement

- First, present images of traditional Chinese characters. There are many resources and images online. I recommend the basic characters for sun, moon, mountain, water, and rain. You can also present characters in the book, game and flashcard series “Chineasy” which presents the characters with beautiful and simple illustrations that tie each of the characters to their origin.
- Next, ask students to describe some of the characteristics of the shapes they see in the traditional Chinese lettering. (for example: curved, straight, wavy, zigzag, etc.).
- Next ask students to close their eyes and imagine how their body might recreate some of those shapes.
- Next, ask students to stand and create the shapes they imagined. Encourage students to use different levels (might, medium, and low) and to extend their shape, using every part of their body. Sound a gong or drum to cue students to try a new shape, holding it steady and strong until the gong sounds again.
- Next, present the Movement Word List (see [Visual #2](#)) and encourage students to explore those words and how they might relate to the characters they are exploring through frozen shapes.
- Encourage students to apply these words in the Movement Word List to their exploration of Chinese characters (giving them a few seconds to imagine and make choices). Continue until students have had a chance to explore each image.
- Ask students to take a moment and refine their movement. It should be steady, strong, and reflect the characters!
- When students are ready, play traditional guzheng music. Suggested: [Wild Geese Descending on a Sandy Beach](#) from *Masterpieces by Guzheng Masters*. Play gong or drum when you are ready for students to transition to their next shape as music continues to play.
- Next, prepare students to choose partners to create these shapes. Partners can be predetermined by the teacher or chosen by the students depending on what is best for your students.
- Next, present Elements of Chinese Dance (see [Visual #3](#)) and discuss ways to extend their shapes to include partners and these elements.
  - Emphasis on hand-eye coordination
  - Uses every part of the body
  - Props!
  - Stylized steps and gestures
  - Unique emphasis on movement accents in relation to the music (in this activity, the sound of the gong or drum).
- Next, allow students to explore movement in pairs while listening to KPOP music. Suggested: [Black Swan](#) from *BTS Map of the Soul: 7*
  - Provide a choice of props for use as movements become more defined (fans, scarves, etc)
- Ask students to perform their movement piece as a class, changing shape at the sound of the gong or drum along while music continues to play
  - Note: if time permits you can have students perform their movement explorations in different formations example: Number the pairs from 1-12 (as many groups as you have) and ask them to perform their shape at the sound of the gong going around the room until all have performed.

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- Display the **Elements of Chinese Dance Visual** and ask students to complete the performance assessment.

<b>PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT: MOVEMENT</b>	
4	I used all 5 of the elements of Chinese dance when I performed
3	I used 3-4 of the elements of Chinese dance when I performed
2	I used 1-2 of the elements of Chinese dance when I performed
1	I did not participate

### **Lesson 3/Day 3:** Music: “The Roving Cowboy/Avarguli”

- First, review **Elements of Chinese Dance Visual** with students (see [Visual #3](#))
- Next, present video of [traditional Chinese fan dance](#)
  - Students reflect on the style of the movement: Do the dancers work together? Individually? Are their movements fast or slow? Are their dance shapes frozen or fluid? Were the movements similar or different to the movements you improvised in lesson 2? What would you change or tweak in your group improvisation so that it better reflects the style of the music.
- Next, ask children to silently think of their favorite movement and then close eyes and imagine how their body might move to perform that movement.
- Next, give students a moment with their eyes shut or facing away from the group to work on their movements.
- Next the teacher models a mirroring activity where he/she shares her movement ideas with the class while the class mirrors her movements. Once students are comfortable mirroring, the teacher may pass off the leadership to a student. When finished (or at the sound of a gong or drum) students can choose a new leader.
  - During mirroring activity play “The Roving Cowboy/Avarguli” by Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei.
- Next, provide the **Listening Map** for “The Roving Cowboy/Avarguli” (see [Visual #4](#))
  - Teacher introduces the piece as a new collaboration between Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei, who they have studied previously in lesson 1.
  - Teacher leads students in the identification of the form. *Note: The piece is strophic with an introduction, and coda. An interlude separates the two strophic folk songs sung by Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei.*
- Next, listen to the piece following the listening map.
  - After the piece concludes, lead a brief discussion about what they’ve heard
  - What instruments do you hear? What cultures are represented? How do you know? How many vocalists do you hear?
  - Which sections would be best expressed through traditional dance?  
Answer: Introduction, Interlude.
- Next, identify the different rhythms in the two folks songs using the following rhythms: Roving Cowboy with 4/4 ti-ta ti ta ta rhythm (patch, alternating hands) and Avarguli with 3/4 ta ta ta (patsch snap snap) rhythm.
- Next, Listen a second time. Encourage students to explore traditional Chinese dance through mirroring during the introduction and interlude, and ask students to perform rhythms during the 2 folk songs

- Next, lead students in reflection: What are the similarities and differences between each of the folk songs? What was the theme of each of the folk songs? How did the artists work together to create a unified piece?

#### Lesson 4/Day 4:

- First, read selections from the children's book *My Chinatown, One Year in Poems* by Mark Kam.
  - Winter Poem 1 focuses on the Chinese New Year. Share images of Chinese New Year celebrations and traditions.
  - Explain that many Chinese immigrants have settled in New York City in a place called Chinatown.
- Next, present students with image of the pentatonic scale (**see [Visual #5](#)**) for barred orff instruments (xylophones/metallophones/glockenspiels). F and B bars should be removed to indicate a 5 note scale beginning on C.
  - *Note: in the visual is the explanation for the root of the word pentatonic and its relationship to Chinese culture.*
- Next, invite students to barred instruments. Ask them to create an 8 beat phrase that moves up (from low to high) and then an 8 beat phrase that moves down.
  - *Note: students are very successful when the last beat of the 8 beat phrase is a rest!*
- Next, ask students to perform a tremolo or roll on the home tone C
- Next work with students to establish a form that alternates AB form (example A = Stanza, Tremolo on C; B = Break Between Stanzas, 8 beat improvisations)
- Perform: Have students read the poem while the class performs the established form on barred instruments.

#### Text Connections and Extension Activities:

- Add movement to your performance piece using skills built in lessons 2 and 3 and the Chinese dance visual. Present students with video of traditional Chinese fan dances. Example: Students improvise Chinese dance shapes on key words during the poem freezing on a shape during the improvisations. Students could also extend their knowledge of Chinese dance by observing movement in traditional dance that extends these shapes to fluid movement and incorporating that into their work during the improvisations on the pentatonic scale. [Traditional Chinese Fan Dance](#)
- Explore more poems from the collection, *My Chinatown* and create instrumentation with unpitched/pitched percussion and movement.
- Explore the book, game, and flashcard series "Chineasy", which gives beautiful illustrations and information about the origin of the Chinese language. Many games can be played with the tiles that go with this series. More information can be found here: <https://www.chineasy.com/>

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