

Title: *Do You Hear What I Hear?*

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: Listening to, Hearing and Writing About Music

Featured Songs: “Four Seasons Medley: Four Seasons/Dark Ocean Waltz” and “Ping Tan Dance”

Overview: This lesson will emphasize music terminology learned through studying the elements of music, help students correctly use and apply that terminology, and improve their listening skills for whatever style of music they enjoy. Through this lesson, students will also concentrate on the role and importance of music in their personal lives, culture and community. The activities are designed to enrich students’ understanding of the elements which are common to all music. The activities will also tap into each student’s creative side, give them the opportunity to examine and reflect on their culture, and provide an opportunity to interact with others in the class.

Suggested Grade level: Community College

Subject: Music

Corresponding National Standards: N/A

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

Essential Question(s)

- What is the difference between hearing and listening to music?
- Is music important to our overall well-being? Why or why not?
- What are the essential elements of all music?
- What makes us like one song over another?

Lesson Objectives:

- The ways of defining and describing the elements can be applied to all music.
- Students will explore how music is essential to our lives, and how aspects of it are embedded into our very existence.

Materials:

- Computer to access the internet
- [The Global Jukebox](#)
- Notebook paper, writing utensils
- Open mind, willingness to be vulnerable expressing personal ideas/thoughts/actions
- A designated journal, notebook for Activity 2
- [Lyrics to Four Seasons Medley](#)
- [Lyrics to Ping Tan Dance](#)

Background Information for the Educator

- Students should create an account in Global Jukebox <https://theglobaljukebox.org/#>

The Artists: Abigail Washburn (banjo) and Wu Fei (guzheng).

- This video, [The Ripple Effect: Two Cultures, One Voice](#), gives a brief overview of their friendship and musical collaboration.

Abigail Washburn is a clawhammer banjo player and singer who hails from the Midwest. She speaks Chinese fluently. Her original career plan was to become an international attorney. The TED Talk, [Building US-China Relations by Banjo](#), features Washburn talking about the unexpected change in her life plans:

- Abigail Washburn's website: www.abigailwashburn.com.
- [Parts of the banjo](#)
- [Basics of the banjo with Abigail Washburn](#)

Background on the banjo

- The banjo traces its roots to Africa. Black slaves constructed handmade banjos from animal skins stretched over hollowed-out gourds. The strings were made from guts with a makeshift bridge to support them. During colonial times, slaves danced to fiddle and banjo music during Christmas and Easter holiday celebrations. Here is a brief history of the black banjo by Rhiannon Giddens: [On the Lost History of the Black Banjo](#)
- The akonting is believed to be ancestor of the banjo. Here is an example of the [akonting](#)
- Whites in Appalachia made their own homemade banjos and created music to fit the range and timbre of the instrument. The banjo became better known and more popular through the minstrel show which was a popular, yet degrading, form of entertainment in the 19th and early 20th centuries where whites blacked up as African Americans. Minstrel shows featured comedy, songs, dances and skits to depict the white perception of black life on the plantations.
- During the early days of the minstrel show, a man named John Sweeney added a shorter, fifth string to the banjo and developed a more complex style of playing. The best-known practitioner and innovator of the banjo in recent history is Earl Scruggs. He devised techniques of playing that allowed the banjo to bend notes and meet the standards to be an integral part of a bluegrass ensemble.

[Background on Appalachian Traditional Music](#)

[Map of Appalachia](#)

Wu Fei plays the guzheng (goo-ZHANG), an instrument native to China. Connect to her website: www.wufeimusic.com.

Background on the guzheng:

- It is a portable instrument played by men and women.
- Various models of the guzheng have 5, 12, 16 or 21 strings.
 - In the old days, strings were made of silk. Now they are made of steel wrapped in nylon.
- The bending of notes imitates the voice and lets the performer create half steps.
- The guzheng is based on the G pentatonic (five pitches) scale. The five pitches represent the five classes in ancient China. The performer can change keys by moving the bridge.
- Fingers are taped so sound is even between the hands. Some performers wear plectrums on their fingers.
- Confucius said that music is a metaphor for social harmony and stressed the importance of music and etiquette.

Background Information on the songs: “Four Seasons Medley: Four Seasons/Dark Ocean Waltz” and “Ping Tan Dance”

“**Four Seasons Medley: Four Seasons/Dark Ocean Waltz**” is a love song about the women in the Qinghai province in central western China who aggressively pursue any man who catches their eye. These bold, loving women go after the man they want. The flowers in the story are an expression of their love.

Informational videos on Qinghai province:

- [The China Project: Qinghai Province](#)
- [Things to Do in Qinghai, China](#)
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Here is the Chinese text of [Four Seasons Medley](#), translated into English.

[Four Seasons, Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei](#) (video)

“**Ping Tan Dance**” was composed by Wu Fei to vent her frustrations about her friends. After they left high school and entered college, Wu Fei noticed how her friends’ personalities changed...and not for the better. The story is told from the perspective of a grandmother who is looking at the young people of today and wondering, “What is the world coming to!” Wu Fei composed this piece while in college as an exercise for her composition class.

A special feature of this song is the flatfooting (clogging) performed by Abigail. According to Abigail, flatfooting is an Appalachian dance that precedes tap dance has influences from the British Isles, Africa and Native Americans. Here’s a video of a [flatfooting demonstration](#).

Music Analysis Strategies

- Do you find either melody easy to sing or memorable?
- List and describe the aspects of the song that immediately catch your attention.
- Listen to the unique timbre of the banjo and the guzheng. Identify the similarities and differences between the guzheng and the banjo.
- How do the instruments, clothing and tonal production (vocal quality) reflect the respective cultures of the artists?

- Is either of these songs based on the Western harmonic system? (Major scale, minor scale, etc.)
- What might be appropriate performance setting for these songs?

Four Seasons

- Recognize the change in meters, determine what the time signatures are, and observe whether the beat changes.

Ping Tan Dance

- Listen and describe the textures used throughout the song.
- Concentrate on the flat footing. Does it change the beat/groove of the song?
- Listen to when the guzheng enters. Is it plucking on the downbeats?

Discussion questions

- What is the difference between hearing and listening to music? What musical information is picked up from each?
- List some circumstances where you listen to or hear music. Is there an overlap between the two?
- Discuss the aspects of bluegrass and Chinese music heard in the song(s).
- What are memorable aspects of each song? Can you sing/hum any aspect of the song to give someone an idea of how each song goes?
- Is there anything particularly feminine about Washburn/Wu's music? Could their music be performed by men? If so, would it have the same meaning or impact?
- How might this music (CD) be promoted to the public by a record company? Discuss possible category options such as World Beat, Country, Folk, etc.

Activity #1 Recognizing and Writing about the Elements of Music 15-30 minutes. (This activity assumes the instructor has covered the eight elements of music--sound, rhythm, tone color, dynamics, harmony, tempo, form and texture.)

- Break the class into small groups of 3 or 4 students.
- Encourage students to have roles within the group such as note taker, spokesperson, and timekeeper. However, all students should actively participate in the discussion.
- Select which song you wish to use for the activity. Either play the song for the entire class or let students play it on their phones.
- Have each group discuss and write down each element as it pertains to the song (or the specific elements you wish to focus on for that session.) Encourage students to use music terminology. If students struggle with an element, have them discuss why that element is challenging.
- Have a spokesperson from each group discuss one element of music. (There may be repetition depending on the class size and number of groups.)
- Have a spokesperson from each group discuss one element they found challenging. (There may be repetition depending on class size and number of groups.)
- Students should compare their answers to those from the other groups. Encourage civil feedback for disagreements and discussions.
- Groups who had difficulty with an element should note the responses from other groups about that element.
- Consider using "Ping Tan Dance" (or one of the other songs from the CD) for a homework assignment on the elements or as part of a listening activity on a test.

Additional Student Activities

Suggestion 1: Have students read and/or listen to: [Anatomy of A Dance Hit: Why We Love to Boogie with Pharrell](#)

1. According to the neuroscientists in Denmark, what causes us to dance or move to music?
2. “Happy” is a hit from 2015 and was heard everywhere. Does it still make you want to dance?
3. What current songs on your playlist make you want to dance/move? Do those songs have the same move-provoking qualities as those listed in the NPR story?
4. Does the rhythm of “Ping Tan Dance” (or “Four Seasons Medley”) make you want to dance/move? Why or why not?

Suggestion 2: Rhythm and sound are the two key elements of music. Use this video to show how rhythm plays a part in our everyday lives: [FOLI: There is No Movement Without Rhythm](#). After watching the video, have students discuss the ‘rhythm’ of their lives. Their observations could be personal (how they walk, perform any repetitive action (i.e. folding pizza boxes at work)), or from watching others at work or play.

- Have students clap or notate some of the rhythms from their observations or put words to the rhythms like the men do in the video.
- Extra credit option: let students combine the rhythms **with** pitches and create a song. This could also be a class project in conjunction with a lecture over the staff, scales, etc.

Suggestion 3: Have students listen to the radio broadcast of [Think of Your Favorite Song. Got It? Here’s Why It’s Stuck With You](#) from WBUR. Students should select their favorite song and write a paragraph or so about why it’s their favorite song. If their favorite song changed over the course of the assignment, they should write why their new favorite song replaced the old one.

Assessment:

- Reaction papers on the elements, listening / hearing music, their favorite songs.
- Test questions about the banjo, the guzheng, Washburn and Wu.
- Create a listening test based on one of the two selected tunes for this lesson (preferably one that’s not been discussed already). Have students concentrate on and describe specific elements of your choice.

Learning Extension: Have the class build “The Machine”. This is a great exercise for students to get up and move, interact with one another, be creative and a part of something larger than themselves. One student begins with a motion accompanied by a sound that sets the pace for the machine. One by one, the other students join in with a motion/sound that fits with the established motions/sounds. Here is an example of [the Machine](#) in practice.

Explore Further

- Watch this video about [black social dances](#) from the 19th century.
 - Discuss similarities between flatfooting and the dances in the video.
 - Have students demonstrate popular dances that may have been influenced by the dances mentioned in the video.
- *Listen to This* by Alex Ross

Activity #2 (Last Night) A DJ Saved My Life (With A Song)!

Time: 1-2 weeks is long enough, but this can be modified by the instructor. Week 1 can be for researching and listening and Week 2 can be used to create the script. The time frame should be long enough for students to discover various artists or styles of music from around the world and create a playlist. This activity can be combined with Activity #1 on the elements of music or done separately.

Students will need a designated journal/notebook for this assignment. They should log into their Global Jukebox account or set one up if they haven't done so already. <http://www.culturalequity.org/resources/gjb>.

During the designated time frame, students should select several regions of the world (US included on a limited basis) and find songs / artists that appeal to them and add them to their playlist. They may use the Global Jukebox as a jumping off point to further explore music or artists that have more of a presence on YouTube. At the end of the designated time for this part of the project, students should have 7-10 new songs from around the world on their playlists.

Students will use their journals/notebooks to write down the genre of music, title of the song, artist, and country or region of the world. They should note any interesting observations about the music, using music terminology. Their notes might include aspects of the songs that appeal to them such as the lyrics, the groove, an instrument they've never heard of or a voice they like. They need to be as specific as they can and do their best to write about the music. Instructors may wish to request these notes and include them in the grading rubric.

Now here's the fun. Students should pretend they are a radio announcer and create a playlist for a radio program.

- Their playlist should feature music they currently enjoy as well as the new music they've been listening to from other parts of the world.
- The playlist should feature more tunes from other parts of the world than Western/US pop music.
- Their playlist must include one song from the [Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn](#) album.
- Students should write a script about the songs on the playlist. The narration can precede the song or back sell it (ID tunes after they've been played).
 - The script must include the title of the song, the artist, and one or two interesting facts about the music, the artist, their country, instrumentation, etc.
 - Students can use their notes from their weekly listening to create an interesting script.
 - Students should type their playlist/script before submitting it to the instructor.
- While you want to allow for creativity, you might encourage students to have a variety of tempos and styles, and selection of vocal and instrumental works.
- They may wish to have a theme (women in music, rock bands around the world, etc.) or present songs by regions of the world or have an eclectic format.
- The show should be a minimum of an hour long. Song selections should be 3-4 minutes to allow for a variety of tunes and styles.
- Consider having each student present one song/artist on their playlist to share with the class. They may use their script as part of the presentation, but there should be some information about the artist and the music.
- The script/playlist should be submitted to the instructor for grading. Instructors are free to create a rubric/grading scale for this project which may be based on the class presentation, variety of artists/cultures represented, use of music terminology, etc.

- If you have students in a broadcasting program, they can record their ‘show’ and submit the recording.

Example script:

You’re listening to Your Independent Music Source, WSGE, 91.7. I’m (name), and I have a lot of great music lined up for you and your listening pleasure. First up...a tune by Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei from their new CD that was released in the spring of 2020. Washburn’s a banjo player, but in this song, she is doing some fancy Appalachian footwork called flatfooting. Fei is on the guzheng. The guzheng—sometimes referred to as a Chinese zither-- is native to China and has been around for 2500 years. Here’s their original tune, *Ping Tan Dance*.

[SONG: DANCE]

[SONG: ARTISTYA]

(as song fades....) Artistya. Artistya....by Regina Carter from her CD, *Reverse Thread*. An eclectic ensemble with an African kora, an accordion, bass, drums, and Ms. Carter fronting the group on violin. That album was widely acclaimed for its use of African folk music, unique instrumentation and infectious Afro-pop rhythms.

Literacy/Text connections: [Top 7 Reasons Why You Should Listen to Music Every Single Day](#) by Emily Lopez.

- How important is music to you in your daily life?
- Do you listen to music for a purpose or is it background sound/noise?
- The author lists 7 reasons to listen to music. Select 2 that apply to you and write a paragraph or two about them.

Connections to traditional music:

A beautiful piece by R. Carlos Nakai, [Shaman’s Call](#).

- What occasion or event might this music be appropriate for?
- What is the texture of the music?
- What culture do you associate this music with?

Connections to contemporary music:

A new twist on [Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony](#).

- Beethoven’s famous symphony is fused with the sounds of what other style of music?
- How might you present this music on a radio program? Does it fit neatly into one category or another?
- Why do you think this arrangement of Beethoven’s symphony was created?
- Do you like this version more than the original version? Why or why not?

[Brule](#), A Native American music/dance troupe

- Discuss how this performance retains or exhibits elements of Native American music and culture.
- What do you think the audience is learning about Native American culture?
- Does this performance pique your interest in contemporary Native American music? Why or why not?

Assessment:

- Did students follow the instructions for the Global DJ assignment---representation of music from around the world, a cohesive script, and listening journal? Did the script include details about the music from the listening journal?
- What did they learn from the Global DJ experience? How was it meaningful to them? Will they continue to seek out new music?
- Students should know about the banjo and guzheng, what flatfooting is, and how to describe the elements of music.
- Students should be able to listen to a piece of music and identify the elements of music and cultural influences, if any.

Learning Extension

- Have each student select one song /narration from their playlist. Create a class playlist of those tunes and give each student a copy of the playlist.
- Offer students extra credit for attending a concert of music that is new to them and writing a reaction paper about the experience.
- Ask students for their definition of world music. Does the term mean something different than non-Western music? Of the two, which term is more inclusive?

Explore Further

- Radio Garden <https://radio.garden>. Very similar to Global Jukebox.
- *Music in America: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* by Adelaida Reyes
- *North American Indian Music Styles* by Bruno Nettl
- *Indian Story and Song from North America* by Alice Fletcher
- [Top 100: Global on Apple Music](#)
- *Graceland*, an album by Paul Simon
- Visit the Earl Scruggs Center, Shelby, N.C.
- Attend a Native American PowWow

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