

Title: *Kodachrome: Capturing Life Through Music and Visuals*

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: Capturing life through music and visuals

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

Overview: This lesson explores the wonderful connection between music and words and music and images. We love music that tells a story through words or stirs our imagination and allows us to create our own images. This lesson explores how cultural traditions and histories are kept alive through music. Students will have the opportunity to discover music and artists from around the world and create a global music calendar that lets them take pleasure in world music all year long.

Suggested Grade level: Community College

Subject: Music

Corresponding National Standards: N/A

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

Essential Question(s):

- How do the songs “Four Seasons Medley” and “Ping Tan Dance” paint a picture for the listener?
- Do the instruments, the banjo and guzheng, set expectations of what we’ll hear and cause us to form musical or cultural stereotypes?

Lesson Objectives: Students will learn how to research music, artists and important events in music history. They will be exposed to and expand their knowledge of new music and, hopefully, develop a greater appreciation and respect for various styles of music from around the world. They will also learn how music enhances words and images and how this experience will be unique for each person.

Materials:

- Computer
- Flash drive or printer
- Notebook paper and writing utensils
- [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 version of the banjo 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 changes 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](#)

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 strategy

- How does the intro to “Four Seasons Medley” set the mood/tone for the piece?
- Read the English translation as the song “Four Seasons Medley” plays. What images come to mind for you? What are the women in the story wearing? What do they look like? Are they on foot? Motor scooters? Horseback? Include details.
- Do your images change when Abigail sings in English or does flatfooting?
- Are both the Appalachian and Chinese musical traditions equally represented in the songs? Does one predominate?
- Notice the plucking of the guzheng after the a cappella section in Ping Tan Dance. Does the plucking occur on or off the beats?

- As the music shifts from Chinese to English back to Chinese in “Four Seasons Medley”, does the underlying beat change?

Discussion questions

- If you heard either of these songs without visual cues or translation, would you be able to tell what cultures are represented in the music? If so, what are your musical cues?
- What type of text setting is primarily used for these songs? Discuss why that’s effective for each of these songs.
- What do you think the flatfooting in “Ping Tan Dance” represents?
- Discuss a situation (in or outside of music) where you’ve had the chance to collaborate with someone from a different culture. What impact did it have on your life?
- Can the arts positively affect and connect people across different cultures? How?
- People say that music is a universal language. Is it really? Support your answer either way.

Student Activity: Creating a Global Calendar

Time: minimum 2 weeks. This is an outside-of-class activity that can be done in conjunction with or separate from the Global DJ activity in the lesson, *Do You Hear What I Hear?* The primary goal of this activity is to get students to seek out music and musicians **outside of mainstream Western music**. Students need to look at a map and listen to music from Asia, Africa, Russia, the Islands, Central and South America, the Middle East, etc. The calendar should not feature artists of global stature such as Beyoncé, Taylor Swift and the late Michael Jackson. However, the calendar can feature an artist or style of music from the USA that is outside of the mainstream such as Native American music, zydeco, music of the Gullah people, etc.

Ideally each student should create a 12-month calendar, but instructors are free to modify this as they wish. Students could work in pairs, each person responsible for 6 months. If the activity is done in the fall semester, the class could create a calendar for the upcoming year. This fun and creative approach to studying global music gives students the opportunity to discover new artists and styles of music from around the world.

- Students will need a Global Jukebox account. Visit <http://www.culturalequity.org/resources/gjb> to set up this account.
- Students will create a global music calendar and each month should feature a different artist, style of music, country or region of the world.
- The calendar should feature no more than 2 artists from a region of the world.
- The layout/design of the calendar is up to the students but should include a visual (photo, drawing), text, and the days of the month.
 - Separate pages for the visual and the calendar look best and are easier to read.
 - If students are working in pairs to create a 12-month calendar, the look should be consistent (same layout, font, etc.)
 - Each image should be used once; however, a region may be represented more than once.
- The calendars may have a theme (string instruments around the world, female folk singers, rock bands around the world, etc.) or be eclectic.
- Wu Fei and/or Abigail Washburn must be featured in the calendar. They may be featured together or separately.
- The visual aspect of the calendars should be a photo or drawing of a musician, instrument or landscape. There must be some verbiage indicating who or what is represented in the visual. Students should list photo credits, even if the visual is drawn/created by the student.

- There should be a featured song each month with a link to an audio clip or YouTube video. Ideally, the song should be by the featured artist or associated with the country in the visuals, but instructors should allow for creativity.
 - The featured song should be designated by a symbol the student chooses, and it should be consistent from month-to-month. Some examples of symbols are a clef inside a circle, a musical note, etc. The link to the video should not be the symbol.
 - The featured song should be listed by title, artist and country.
 - Students should list some interesting facts about the song or artist and try to incorporate correct music terminology where appropriate.
- Each month should have 3 music-related events. This might include a festival, artist's birthday, premier of a new work, etc. (Examples: September 23, John Coltrane birthday. December 25, *Hansel and Gretel* first complete opera broadcast from the Met, 1931.)
- Google Slide and Power Point have good templates for this project. (Again, separate pages for the visual and the calendar look best.)
- Calendars can be saved to a flash drive submitted to the instructor via email.
- Break up the predictability of traditional classes by giving students the opportunity to do short presentations on the calendars. Presentations can be projected via PowerPoint or Image Maker/overhead projector.
 - The structure of the presentation is up to the individual instructor, but they should allow students a chance to play part of a song and briefly discuss an artist/music they found particularly interesting. They could also briefly flip through the calendar to give the class on an 'armchair' travel experience.
 - Consider having a mic available so students can be heard.

Additional Student Activities

Suggestion 1: Have students read [What Is A Griot and Why Are They Important?](#), an interesting article about the African griot (GREE-oh) and how they maintain tradition and history in their community.

- Discuss the role of the griot in their community.
- How does one become a griot? Is this a role open to men and women?
- Discuss ways we pass on traditions and history through music in our country/community.

Suggestion 2: Play Duke Ellington's tune, [East St. Louis Toodle-oo](#). Ask students to write down images they see as they listen to the music. Have them include as much detail as possible. For example, what is the time frame/era? If there are people, what are they doing and wearing? What time of day does the action take place?

(Students who have taken a jazz class may know this song was the original theme song for Ellington's band before Billy Strayhorn's "Take the 'A' Train". Duke wrote works for his 'orchestra' that painted a picture for the listener such as *Black and Tan Fantasy* and *Transblucency*.)

Suggestion 3: Play this [video clip](#) from the final scene to the movie, *Call Me By Your Name*. The young man in the clip, Elio, fell in love over the summer, and, now, as the winter snow flies, he learns that his love is marrying someone else.

- How does the intro to the song and Elio's face set the tone for this scene? Discuss the details of these scene that make it so heartfelt and compelling. (The tears, the fly, the flickers flames across Elio's face; the instrumentation, the electronic (synthesized) pulse in the accompaniment, etc.)

Assessments:

Global Calendar Activity—was it completed following the instructions provided? Did the calendar offer a sense of travel and adventure?

- Ask students what they learned from the activity. What did they learn about themselves from the project? What surprised them?
- On a test, ask students to reflect on a song(s) that best describe or tell about their lives. What about these songs capture the essence of their lives? Are the songs mostly instrumental or vocal? If vocal, what lines in the lyrics especially capture aspects of their lives?
- Explain the role of the African griot in the community.
- Are there people in the Western culture who function as griots? If so, who are they?
- Test questions can cover Appalachian music, the featured artists, recognizing the sound of the guzheng and banjo.

Learning Extension: After discussing source and functional music in movies, watch a movie in class and have students select music of their choice to go with 6 scenes (or however many you wish). This will require students to mentally erase the music already featured in the film. Have students tell why/how the music enhances the scene. Responses need to be more than “It makes the scene funny.” That may be true, but how does the music make the scene funny? It could be the lyrics, instrumentation, etc. (This exercise can also be done by having students select scenes from a movie and tell how the existing music enhances or supports that scene.)

Explore Further:

- [Live performance and talk by an African griot.](#)
- *Latcho Drom*, a music/travelogue/documentary about the Rom people in various parts of the world. The story is told through their music and the cinematography.
- [Quentin Tarantino on music in film](#)
- *Guerilla Film Scoring* by Jeremy Borum
- *City Lights*, a Charlie Chaplin film. Great examples of mickey-mousing (music in sync with on-screen actions).

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