

Title: Triple Meter & Quadruple Meter: Comparing and Combining them in Musical Compositions

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: Triple and Quadruple Meter

Featured Song: “Four Seasons Medley: Four Seasons/Dark Ocean Waltz”

Overview: In this lesson, students will explore quadruple and triple meter through different genres of music from different countries using excerpts from Vivaldi’s “Four Seasons” and the Chinese folk song “Four Seasons.” First, students will examine the text of these different pieces (the sonnets that Vivaldi wrote that inspired his compositions on the seasons and the English translation of the Chinese folk song), and discuss why the seasons are a common theme for people of different cultures and geographic regions. Students will then listen to two of the movements from Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*, identifying which is in quadruple or triple meter, followed by listening to the “Four Seasons” folk song and identifying that the song uses both quadruple and triple meter. As a final activity, students will demonstrate their understanding of quadruple and triple meter by adding bar lines to a given rhythm in one of the meters and performing the rhythm in small groups.

Suggested Grade levels: 6–8

Subjects: General Music, Vocal Ensemble (choir), or Instrumental Ensemble (band, orchestra)

Corresponding National Standards:

- NAFME PK–8 General Music Standards: MU:Pr4.2.6b, 7b, 8b; MU: Pr4.2.6c, 7c, 8c; MU:Re7.2.6b, 7b, 8b; MU:Re7.1.7a
- NAFME Ensemble Music Standards: MU:Pr4.2.E.5a, MU:Re8.1.E.5a

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

- Investigate the World: Identify, observe, and interpret a variety of domestic and international works of visual or performing art, materials, and ideas, and determine their relevance to globally significant themes.

Essential Questions:

- Why might the seasons be a concept that people from different parts of the world can relate to and that composers from a variety of cultures use as a theme in their music?
- What are common ways composers group beats together in their music?
- How does meter affect the feel of a song?
- How does it affect the feel of a song when composers mix two meters together in the same composition?

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate reasons why the seasons are a theme in music from different cultures.
- Students will learn the most common ways that composers group beats together.
- Students will be able to identify whether a song is in quadruple or triple meter.
- Students will understand that the strongest beat of a measure is on the first beat, and will be able to demonstrate this by clapping/patting/bouncing a ball on the strongest beat of the measure.
- Students will be able to demonstrate their understanding of how to group beats in triple and quadruple meter by adding bar lines to a given rhythm pattern in both meters.

Materials:

- Enough tennis balls, or similar type of ball, for each student.
- Links for YouTube videos of the listening examples (embedded in lesson plan)
- [“Four Seasons Medley: Four Seasons/Dark Ocean Waltz” lyrics](#)
- [Four Seasons Text Comparison PDF](#)
- [Exploring Triple and Quadruple Meter Handout PDF](#)
- Audio/visual equipment to play listening examples

Background Information for the Educator:**Introduction to “The Four Seasons” by Antonio Vivaldi**

Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741) was an Italian composer of the Baroque era. His four-concerto work *the Four Seasons* is generally considered his masterpiece. More information can be found about his life and compositions in any standard book of Western music history and at baroquemusic.org.

Introduction to “Four Seasons” folk song

The “Four Seasons,” also known as “Song of the Four Seasons,” “Four Seasons Song,” or “Seasons,” is a Chinese folk song from the Qinghai province of northwestern China. The Qinghai’s population is largely Han and Tibetan. Like most Chinese folk music, “Four Seasons” uses a pentatonic scale, known as the Yu scale in China, which corresponds to a minor pentatonic scale in Western music (A, C, D, E, G); essentially, a natural minor scale without the second and sixth degrees. In this case, the song also includes a B (the second scale degree), which can be thought of as a passing tone in the song that occurs when the melody descends back to the tonic (A). For more information, see this article on [Seven Tunes Heard in China](#) and [The Naming of Modes and Scales in Chinese Music](#). In this arrangement of the song, there is an addition of a waltz/triple-meter section in the middle of two quadruple-meter sections of the traditional folk song. The guzheng instrumentation of the waltz was written by Wu Fei and the lyrics and sung melody were written by Abigail Washburn.

*This lesson plan was created by Karen Anne Richardson of Durham Academy Middle School as part of the 2019-2020 World View Global Music Fellows Program
For more information about the program, please visit <http://worldview.unc.edu/>*

For information about the artists:

- Abigail Washburn’s website: <http://abigailwashburn.com/>
- Wu Fei’s website: <http://www.wufeimusic.com/>

For information about the instruments used in the recording:

- Abigail Washburn discusses the banjo: [Banjo Basics with Abigail Washburn](#)
- Wu Fei introduces the guzheng: [Guzheng Showcase with Wu Fei](#)
- Short and thorough explanation of the guzheng: [An Introduction to the Guzheng](#)

Lesson Plan/Student Learning Activities (45 minutes)

(This lesson can be extended to two or more days by incorporating the learning extensions suggested on pg. 4)

Activity 1 (5 minutes)

- Let students know they are going to be exploring meter today. Ask for a definition or give one, for example: “Meter is the way beats are grouped to organize music in time and we are going to explore meter using music from different parts of the world.”
- Ask students what they know about meter. Answers will vary, but lead students to the point where they can reference time signatures and ask them what time signatures seem to be common in the music they hear/sing/play inside and outside of school. Reference some of the music they may be using in class. If students do not volunteer the following options, mention that 4/4 is the time signature they are most likely to hear in music and that the second most common time signature they are likely to encounter is 3/4, often called waltz time.
- “Another way to talk about any meter that has four beats in a measure is to call it quadruple meter. What do you think we would call meter that has three beats in a measure?” (Triple meter.) “I’m going to count in groups of four and I invite you to pat your knees every time I say “1” in each group. Ready?” Count a few measures of four and make sure students can follow the beat. Do the same thing with counting to three. Alternate back and forth between both meters.

Activity 2 (5–7 minutes)

- “In a moment, we are going to explore quadruple and triple meters through some music. All of the music you will hear has a similar theme, and that is the seasons. Before we listen to the music, we are going to explore the text of the pieces we are going to listen to.”
- Pass out the [Four Seasons Text Comparison PDF](#) to each student. Ask students to look at the text of the folk song they will hear and compare it to the sonnets that Vivaldi wrote to inspire his Four Seasons concertos. Have students annotate themes, words, and ideas that stand out to them.
- Discussion questions:
 - What do the texts of these two works have in common? How are they different?
 - What are the themes that you notice in each of the texts?
 - Discuss why the seasons are a theme used in music across different cultures and genres?

Activity 3 (10 minutes)

- We are going to listen to two pieces written by an Italian composer from the Baroque era named Antonio Vivaldi. These pieces were written in 1723 for a small orchestra and violin soloist. They are from Vivaldi’s work “The Four Seasons.” The work is divided into four concertos, one for each season, and each concerto has three movements.
- Depending on time and previous knowledge of the students, you may want to elaborate on Vivaldi,

the Baroque era, concerto form, etc.

- “I am going to play two of the movements from The Four Seasons. Each movement is about three minutes long. Your job is going to be to bounce the ball on the strongest beat of the measure and figure out the meter for each song.” Pass one tennis ball to each student.
- Play [“Spring, 1st movement, Allegro”](#) (quadruple meter) and have students do the ball-bouncing activity.
- Play [“Summer, 3rd movement, Presto”](#) (triple meter) and have students do the ball-bouncing activity.
- Observe whether students can demonstrate the meter by bouncing the ball on the strongest beat of each measure.

Activity 4 (8–10 minutes)

- Tell students they are going to listen to the next piece, also called “Four Seasons.” This song is a Chinese folk song. Have students listen for the following things: the meter the song is in, and any differences or similarities in the music between this song and the Vivaldi pieces. Hand out [Exploring Triple and Quadruple Meter Handout PDF](#) to each student to record their thoughts as they listen.
- Depending on the length of your class, include as much or as little information as you wish about the performers and their instruments using the background information above.
- Play audio or [video](#) of “Four Seasons.”
- Ask students to share their observations.

Activity 5 (10–15 minutes)

- Ask students to complete the remainder of the Exploring Triple and Quadruple Meter Handout PDF, inserting bar lines in the appropriate places to create one triple meter rhythmic phrase and one quadruple meter rhythmic phrase, helping where needed. Give students a few minutes to practice these patterns in small groups, using clapping and/or simple classroom percussion instruments to emphasize the strongest beat in each measure.
- Ask students to comment on how the rhythmic phrase feels depending on whether it is in triple or quadruple meter.

Learning Extensions:

- Have students compose their own mixed meter rhythm using quadruple and triple meter.
- For those with a classroom autoharp, explore this instrument as part of the zither family, along with the guzheng.
- Add Orff instrumentation (A minor pentatonic) to play borduns along with the song, emphasizing the difference between the triple and quadruple meter sections.
- Compare the lyrics of “Four Seasons” to “The Seasons,” a traditional English tune recorded by Canadian Celtic harpist and vocalist Loreena McKennitt, and perhaps compare the banjo, guzheng, and Celtic harp (also known as a lever harp).
- Compare the Abigail Washburn/Wu Fei arrangement of “Four Seasons” with Bright Sheng’s “Seven Tunes Heard in China”, which includes this folk song. Yo Yo Ma has a recording of this work.
- Explore music of multiple genres in 3/4 time: classical waltzes, pop music, folk songs, etc.
- Add movement to a song in 3/4 time by teaching students a basic waltz step and contrast it with movement for a song in 4/4 time.

Bibliography

- 2centsmusic. "The Naming of Modes and Scales in Chinese Music." *The Naming of Modes and Scales in Chinese Music*, 4 Mar. 2015, 2centsmusic.blogspot.com/2015/03/the-naming-of-modes-and-scales-in.html
- "ABIGAIL WASHBURN." *ABIGAIL WASHBURN*, abigailwashburn.com/
- "Banjo Basics with Abigail Washburn." *Youtube*, CBC Music, 7 Dec. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzPxMq56qzQ&feature=emb_logo
- "Common Music Time Signatures." *Dummies*, www.dummies.com/art-center/music/piano/common-music-time-signatures/
- "'Four Seasons' - Abigail Washburn & Wu Fei." *Youtube*, Abigail Washburn, 31 Oct. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bgd1ebFX5V4
- "The Four Seasons." *VIVALDI: "Four Seasons" Sonnets Texts in Italian & English*, www.baroquemusic.org/vivaldiseasons.html
- "Guzheng Showcase by Wu Fei." *Youtube*, Wu Fei, 31 May 2007, www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=20&v=9FluDmpYAvE&feature=emb_logo
- "An Introduction to the GuZheng." *Youtube*, LessonsGoWhere, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDMg01S603Q
- "Joshua Bell - The Four Seasons 'Summer' III. Presto (Video)." *Youtube*, SonymasterworksVEVO, 24 Nov. 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=laGT9IB2bFo
- Kang, Chiao-Hsuan. "Understanding of Authentic Performance Practice in Bright Sheng's Seven Tunes Heard in China for Solo Cello." *Louisiana State University*, 2016.
- "Qinghai." *Qinghai - New World Encyclopedia*, www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Qinghai
- "Vivaldi, The Four Seasons, Spring (La Primavera), 1st Movement." *Youtube*, Classical Concert Chamber Orchestra, 16 June 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3nSvliBNFo
- Washburn, A. and Wu, F. (2020). "Four Season Medley: Four Seasons/Dark Ocean Waltz" [Lyrics]. Retrieved from <http://www.abigailwashburn.com/lyrics/>.
- Washburn, A. and Wu, F (2020). *Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn* [Album]. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.
- "Wu Fei." *Wu Fei*, www.wufeimusic.com/