

**Title:** *Partner Song Creative Movement with “Water is Wide/Wusuli Boat Song”*

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, creating, contextual relevance

**Featured Song:** “Water is Wide/Wusuli Boat Song”

**Overview:** Students will listen to and analyze a partner song in order to create their own interpretive movements while working together in small groups. Students will use the knowledge they’ve gained about the cultures of the people to influence their creative process.

**Suggested Grade levels:** 3-5

**Subject:** General Music

**Corresponding National Standards:**

- MU: Cn11.0.3a, MU: Cn11.0.4a, MU: Cn11.0.5a: Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.
- MU: Cr2.1.3a, MU: Cr2.1.4a, MU: Cr2.1.5a: Demonstrate selected musical ideas for a simple improvisation or composition to express intent, and describe connection to a specific purpose and context.

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

- Investigate the world
- Recognize perspectives
- Communicate ideas

**Essential Questions:**

- What might be the composer’s purpose for these folk songs?
- What might be the significance of putting these two folk songs together and what might that mean to the performers (Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn)?
- How might the daily life/culture of people inform the creation and performance of folk songs?
- How might other art forms and disciplines such as dance be influenced by the culture of a people?
- How might folk songs be similar or different in other cultures?

## Lesson Objectives:

- Students will identify a partner song in their own words.
- Students will examine the lyrics of both texts to influence their creative process.
- Students will be able to collaborate, design and perform creative movement for “Water is Wide/Wusuli Boat Song.”

## Vocabulary:

- Folk song
- Partner song
- Composer’s purpose

## Materials:

- Dance props (scarves, ribbons, fans, etc.),
- Movement card visuals
- Google maps
- “[Water is Wide/Wusuli Boat Song](#)” video featuring Wu Fei and Abigail Washburn
- “Water is Wide/Wusuli Boat Song” Lyrics
- The picture book “Beyond the Great Mountains: A Visual Poem About China” by Ed Young
- “[Traditional Chinese Dance and Creative Movement](#)” video by Arts Connection: \_
- [SQUILT Music Appreciation \(Super Quiet Uninterrupted Listening Time\) website](#)

## Student Activities:

### Day 1

1. Start with listening to the song “Water is Wide/ Wusuli Boat Song”. Prompt students to listen for specific things such as mood, instrumentation, tempo, patterns, etc.  
Questions to consider:
  - Is the music fast or slow?
  - Is the music loud or quiet?
  - What timbres do you hear? Metal, woods, strings...
  - Does the music sound happy, sad, calm, etc.?

\*\*\*Teachers may use listening guides such as SQUILT (Super Quiet Uninterrupted Listening Time). More information can be found at the following website: <https://www.squiltmusic.com/> by Mary Prather.
2. Students may write/draw in a journal as they listen or close their eyes and imagine what they hear. After listening, students will turn and talk to their neighbor before teacher leads class discussion.
3. Watch the YouTube clip of Abigail Washburn and Wu Fei performing “[Water is Wide/Wusuli Boat Song](#)”. Explain the use of banjo and guzheng in the video as string instruments and how that may create a specific timbre.
4. Identify a partner song. List or play examples of famous partner songs that may be familiar to your students as a point of reference. For example: “This Train” and “When the Saints Go Marching In”.  
\*\*A partner song is when you take two or more independent melodies and put them together creating a nice harmony when performed at the same time. Students may think of partner songs as

being similar to “mashups” in pop music culture.

5. Have the students come up with a definition of a partner song in their own words. (Might use as an exit slip at the end of day 1.)
6. Listen to the partner song “Water is Wide/ Wusuli Boat Song” again but with a purpose of retelling the stories within the text. Compare the lyrics and English Translation to drive discussion.  
Questions to consider:
  - “What languages do you hear?”
  - “What words do you recognize/what do you think the songs are about?”
  - “Why would someone be singing this/ what may be the composer’s purpose?”
  - “Are there any musical elements that you hear that may help tell the story?”
7. Post a visual of the Water Wusuli Lyrics Breakdown Sheet. Compare the two lyrics in English and find similarities in culture/social connections (i.e. mothers sing lullabies, both sets of lyrics are a form of poetry, etc.). Look for commonalities or differences between meanings.

## Day 2

1. Begin with creative movement using Visual Prompt Cards. Play music and have students create shapes or interpretive movements with their bodies that represent the images on the cards. Encourage creativity with different shapes and levels (highs and lows) and allow students to add props if desired (scarves, ribbons, fans). Movement visual prompt cards can be specific images that the teacher finds, cue words, or can be abstract images.

### **Movement Visual Prompt Cards:** [\(see an example here\)](#)

Teacher starts with simple prompts (i.e. images of basic shapes like: an x, circle, triangle, square) and then progresses to more complex prompt cards (i.e. words like: spiral, fly, rocking, and flowing or images of mountains, water, baby, boat, or fish, etc.)

\*\* Prompt cards are just to get the kids moving initially and to get them to think out of the box. They will later be encouraged to create their own movement ideas in collaboration with their groups once they have learned more about the history of the songs and reviewed the text.

2. After initial movement activity, lead a discussion on the movements that were explored.  
Questions to consider:
  - “Did the shapes you make tell a particular story?”
  - “How can we narrate the story of what is happening in the songs without speaking?”

3. Define the term folk song.

Folk Song: a song that is traditionally passed down orally through generations and has a cultural significance to a group of people from a specific region. “A song of the people”.

You typically cannot trace the original author of a folk song as it has been passed down through generations and there are typically multiple versions in existence.

4. Use Google Maps to show the students the regions where the two songs are believed to have originated (The British Isles and China). Find the Wusuli River (also known as the Ussuri River) on the map. The Wusuli is a long river that provides a natural boarder between the northeastern part of China and Russia.

5. Give a little background/history behind each of the partner songs and the people who made them to help students develop their movement stories.

--**"The Water Is Wide"** gets its origins in Great Britain as with many other American folk songs. The Scottish folk tune originally titled "O, Waly, Waly" has many variations with different lyrics. The song is believed to date back to the 1600's and has travelled from Scotland ("O Waly, Waly"), England, Ireland ("Carrickfergus") and to the United States ("The Water Is Wide"). Older versions of the song are widely thought to be about unrequited love but some American versions of the song are sung as a lullaby. People can interpret the lyrics literally or as a metaphor. If the lyrics are literal, it may suggest that the loved one is across a large body of water and that the woman wants to take her child and row across to her beloved. Though the "Water Is Wide" originates in Britain but it is still considered an American Folk Song since America was colonized by the British.

-- **"The Wusuli Boat Song"** is believed to have come from the Hezhen people of northeast China where people use songs to express their love of country and traditions of the past. The Hezhen people of northeastern China are an ethnic minority that live in the Heilongjiang Province of China where there are lots of mountains, forests and rivers. These people are known as skilled fishermen and hunters. Men, women and children use simple tools like forks, hooks and nets to catch fish. When the Wusuli River is frozen over the fishermen cut a hole in the ice using skills they have passed down through generations dating back to their ancestors. The Hezhen people offer raw fish to their guests and loved ones as a sign of welcome. Gathering fish is a way of life for the Hezhen people. It is not only their food but is also used in their clothing material such as fishbone buttons and fish skin boots that are water resistant. They build singular boats out of birch bark and commonly travel by boat. Boats are typically made to carry one or two people for hunting. The Hezhen sing songs about their dog sleds and boats such as the "Wusuli Boat Song".

6. Have students compare the cultures of the Hezhen people to their own culture/daily lives. Turn and talk and then share with class.

### **Day 3** (may take more days to prepare for performance-based assessment)

1. Divide class into groups of 4 or 5. Each group will be assigned to create interpretive dance for either the "Wusuli Boat Song" or "Water is Wide" portions of "Water is Wide/Wusuli Boat Song".
2. Provide students with paper to brainstorm so that they can keep track of their ideas. Give students ample time to study lyrics and create their own movements for the songs.
3. Students can explore movements to tell the story by changing shapes and using different levels. Students may choose to use props to help illustrate the story as may be done in more traditional Chinese folk dance.\*\*Be sure to tell students that props are supposed to be the "cherry on the top" so as not to take away from their creative process. Some may get too caught up in the props.
4. Play the song multiple times as students work through their creative movements with their teammates.
5. Students communicate with each other to work through the creative process but for the final rehearsal instruct them not to speak so that they can tell the story through movement only.

### Performance based Assessment:

Combine student dance groups to correspond with the partner song aspect of their performance. For instance, if group A created movements based on the lyrics of “The Water Is Wide” then let them perform the “Water Wusuli” song with group B who created movements based on the translation of “Wusuli Boat Song”.

### Extensions:

- Read the picture book “Beyond the Great Mountains: A Visual Poem about China” by Ed Young. The book paints a picture of what the mountainous region looks like. Students may use this to influence their creative process when designing movements for the lyrics of the Wusuli Boat song.
- Students watch the Vimeo video “[Traditional Chinese Dance and Creative Movement](#)” by Arts Connection. This is a video on traditional and creative dance in Chinese culture. It may provide more cultural awareness and open the door to more discussion of how dance is a cultural art form that evolves over time. What are the differences between traditional forms of dance as compared to creative dance.
- Play the game “Telephone” to demonstrate for students how message/folk songs may have changed throughout the passage of time. Students sit in row and sing a phrase of a song into the ear of the person in front of them to pass down the ‘telephone line.’

### Explorations and Reflections:

Post three columns on the board (KWL)

“I Know...”	“I Wonder...”	“I Learned...”

Students will write their thoughts and responses on post-it notes and place them in the appropriate column based on the discussions and activities done in the lesson. This can be done at the beginning of the lesson and as a reflection at the end. See if most of the pot-it notes move to the “I Know” column by the end of the lesson or if it leads to more questions for the “I wonder column”.

Students review initial thoughts on the definition of a partner song. Post the essential questions to prompt a thoughtful discussion.

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