

# ANCHORAGE MUSEUM

## MUSIC: COMPOSING AN ORIGINAL SONG



### Native Alaska Man with Guitar

Paper, ink

Lu Liston Collection, Anchorage Museum, B2015.007.34

ANCHORAGE  
MUSEUM

## UNIT AT A GLANCE

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Students will create their own musical composition using different instruments to collaborate with one another and make a song.

## STANDARDS

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### Alaska Art Standards

MU: PR6a-2 Perform music for a specific purpose with expression and technical accuracy  
MU: CR3a-2 Interpret and apply personal, peer, and teacher feedback to revise personal music

## MATERIALS

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### Close-Looking

*Native Alaskan Man with Guitar*, Lu Liston collection, Anchorage Museum, B2015.007.34  
*Maurice Akres Banjo*, Anchorage Museum; B1989.016.720  
Accordion, Anchorage Museum; 1987.045.249

### Music

Orff instruments  
Writing materials  
Paper

## KEY TERMS

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|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <i>genre</i>              | a category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter |
| <i>style</i>              | a distinctive quality, form, or type within music  |
| <i>cultural diffusion</i> | the spreading out and merging of material, ideological, or ethnographic aspects from different cultures                        |
| <i>rhythm</i>             | a repeated pattern of movement or sound  |
| <i>meter</i>              | rhythmic pattern of beats into regular patterns or bars  |
| <i>4th note</i>           | a fourth or quarter note is one fourth of the length of a whole note   |
| <i>k'eli</i>              | a general Dena'ina term for song   |
| <i>angaachaŋilix</i>      | a general Unangaŋ term for song  |
| <i>at shi/ shi</i>        | a general Lingit term for song   |

## CLOSE-LOOKING

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**TIME FRAME** Approximately 45 minutes

**MATERIALS** *Native Alaskan Man with Guitar*, Mary Barr Jackson Collection, Anchorage Museum, B2015.007.34  
*Maurice Akres Banjo*, Lu Liston collection, Anchorage Museum; B1989.016.720

Accordion, Anchorage Museum; 1987.045.249

## DIRECTIONS

1. Begin by looking closely at provided photographs. Use the questions below to guide discussion.

[30 min.]

**CLOSE-LOOKING:** Look closely, quietly at the objects for a few minutes.

**OBSERVE:** Share your observations about each photograph.



**Native Alaskan Man with Guitar, Mary Barr Jackson Collection, Anchorage Museum; B2015.007.34**

**ASK:** *What do you notice first?  
What stories does this image tell?  
Why do you think this image is significant?  
Why do you think this image was taken?  
What more can you find?*



**Maurice Akres Banjo, Lu Liston collection, Anchorage Museum; B1989.016.720**

**ASK:** *What do you notice first?  
What kind of person may have made this object?  
What words would you use to describe this object?  
Why might this object look the way that it does?  
Why do you think this object is in the Anchorage Museum?  
What else does this remind you of?  
What more can you find?*



**Accordion, Anchorage Museum; 1987.045.249**

**ASK:** *When do you think this object was made?  
Why do you think this object is significant?  
What does this object remind you of?  
What materials can be found in this object?  
What more can you find?*

**DISCUSS:** Use the [20 Questions Deck](#) for more group discussion questions about the photographs.

2. As a class, discuss the ways people make music. Encourage students to share experiences with musical instruments, song composition, or playing with sound. Next, ask students what they have had with creating a song.

[15 min.]

## COMPOSE AN ORIGINAL SONG

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### TIME FRAME

Approximately 2 class sessions

### MATERIALS

Orff instruments  
Writing materials  
Paper

### DIRECTIONS

1. As a class, briefly discuss what students know about the song-making process. Ask students what parts of a song they know and what they need to compose one.

[5 min.]

**2.** Place students into an even number of small groups, providing each with different instruments. If you do not have enough instruments for every group, students can clap, stomp, or snap as their predominant form of making music.

[5 min.]

**3.** Invite students to name their group as a band and allow them to generate a four-measure song, consisting of simple beats such as quarter, eighth, sixteenth notes, and rests. Give each group a few minutes to practice their song, with each student writing down a copy of the song at the top of a piece of paper.

[15 min.]

**4.** Have the groups “meet” one another. Allow each small group to perform to another, sharing their song with a second group. After sharing their songs, invite students to trade a measure of their music, swapping one of their measures with their partner group. Record the transaction on a piece of paper and allow each group to practice their new song. Have students write down the new song beneath their original on their piece of paper, and record which group they met with.

[10 min.]

**5.** Have the small groups “meet” with a new group and share their new songs with one another. This time, have one of the students trade instruments with the partner group. This should result in one new instrument being added to each group. Have students record on their papers what instruments were added to their growing ensemble.

[10 min.]

**6.** Repeat Steps 3 and 4 a few more times, allowing the songs and instruments evolve and change fluidly between groups.

[40 min.]

**7.** After students have met and exchanged musical phrases and instruments several times, give them one last opportunity to practice their song before sharing it with the class. For each group, discuss the journey that they took before arriving at this finished song. Encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings about changing instruments and patterns with other groups as they reflect on the changes to their songs.

[10 min.]

## ASSESSMENT

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Students will be assessed based on participation in class discussion and song performance.

## LEARN MORE

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### **Musical Exchange in Alaska**

Original Alaskan music belongs to the Alaska Native people. In the nineteenth century, Russian, English, and Irish immigrants introduced various instruments and musical styles to Alaska Native peoples. The resulting melding and borrowing of musical styles and instruments continues to this day. In Alaska, musicians have created all kinds of music, across various genres, in many languages.

One genre-defying Alaska Native band is Pamyua, who describe their style as Inuit Soul and Tribal Funk music. Pamyua uses traditional cayat (drums), electric guitars, and an acoustic drumset to make their music. They sing in English and Yup'ik and they perform sometimes wearing hand carved, wooden masks and in Yup'ik qasperet (parkas).

Some notable voices of the Alaska Native hip-hop scene are Ukila (Byron Nicholai), Air Jazz, and Aku Matu, who rap in Yup'ik, Lingít, and Iñupiaq respectively. Indigenous language rappers are an integral part of keeping language alive and inspiring the youth to take pride in their Indigenous languages and cultures.

#### **WATCH**

Indie Alaska - [Marge Ford Has a Squeeze Box](#)

Anchorage Museum- [We Up: Indigenous Hip Hop of the Circumpolar North](#)

Pamyua - [Bubble Gum](#)

Byron Nicholai - [Tangersugamken \(I Want To See You\) w/subtitles](#)

TED-Ed - [Test yourself: Can you tell the difference between music and noise? - Hanako Sawada](#)

#### **READ:**

Alaska Department of Education - [Koyukon Athabaskan Dance Songs](#)

Unangam Tunuu Language Tools- [Songs from the Aleutian and Alaska Peninsula](#)