

EAST MEETS WEST-CHINESE TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS
LESSON PLAN for 9th -12th Grade
(UNIT 1-lesson 1: Timbre and the Chinese Instrumental Palette)

Class/Age: 9th-12th Grade
Lesson Time: 45 minutes

Leading Questions: What creates timbre and how does it impact Chinese music and aesthetics?
How does timbre color aesthetic and emotional content?
How does timbre express culture?
What are the timbral characteristics of Chinese traditional instruments?

Objective: Students will recognize traditional Chinese instrument timbres and correlate these to Western instrumental timbres.

Unit Critical Vocabulary: timbre, tonal color, organology, envelope, chordophone, membranophone, metallophone, aerophone, idiophone, Hornbostel-Sachs index.

Content Standard:

- **New York State Standard #1.** Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts. Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the art
- **National Standard #2.** Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
- **National Standard #6:** Listening to, analyzing, and describing music
- **National Standard #7:** Evaluating music and music performances

ELA Standards:

- **Standard RL:** Craft instruction; determine meanings through figurative use of language.
- **Standard L:** Use of knowledge of language and conventions.

National Standards for Music: 2. Performing with voice, instrument, alone or with others, a varied repertoire of music.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing and describing music.
9. Students will improvise with instruments and voice.

On Board: Objective worded as “How do Chinese instruments sound and how do they compare to instruments I know?”; Do Now; Picture of black-note pentatonic keys; Standard definition of chordophone, membranophone, metallophone, aerophone, idiophone.

Do Now: Students working in pairs will experiment with keyboards and pitched percussion provided in classroom using pentatonic black-note keys to synthesize simple melodies. Students then translate these simple melodies from one instrument class to another. Students will turn and talk to compare and collate their reactions to the changes in effect, feeling, or mood created by the various timbres. One or several pairs will share their findings to the whole class.

Lower-order thinking prompts: How can we enrich music by varying and combining diverse timbres? What is the effect of altering instrumental timbre? Do certain cultures use specific kinds of timbres? Can we recognize where a piece of music emanates from based on the timbres utilized?

Higher-order thinking prompts:

How do certain timbres evoke a certain ethos or have the power to shape mood, tone, and aesthetic?

What other features in music express ethos or cultural aesthetic and how?

Students turn and talk focusing on these prompts. Substantiate your hypotheses with supporting details and back these up with secondary proofs speaking to the various elements, which constitute timbre.

Procedure:

1. Self-selected students share their melodies highlighting the timbral contrasts between various instrumentations.
2. Teacher plays traditional Chinese melody “Spring Rain” on keyboard/piano and pitched percussion and solicits students’ observations about the ethos of the melody and how it transforms through various instrumental timbres.
3. Teacher plays video of erhu, pipa, and zither versions of the same traditional melody asking students to notate what they notice regarding timbre of the respective instrument and how the same tune metamorphoses in a new instrumental timbre.
4. Students break into groups of four and choose one instrument featured in the videos on which to focus discussion. How does this instrument correlate to any specific Western instrument. Cite similar and differing features between the Chinese and Western instrument.

Ongoing Peer-to-Peer and Self Assessment in Instruction:

1. In pairs, students will evaluate the success of their own and their partners’ improvised work in the do now.
2. Small groups model their improvised phrases to small group, to teacher, and then finally in selected share-backs to class.
3. Self-selected students perform for class and based on teacher assessment of individual group work.
4. Class reflection on impact of timbre in music and especially as germane to Chinese traditional repertoires.

Written Reflection: For homework, write a reflection of two well-reasoned coherent and substantiated paragraphs on the benefit or impact of timbre with the melody “Spring Rain” and in music at large.

Ongoing Assessment in Instruction:

- 1) How can you use timbre to project your melody with different moods or cultural registers?
- 2) How can we transform the melody through changes in timbre?

Materials: Piano/keyboards, pitched percussion/drums, drumsticks, videos in Powerpoint of Chinese traditional instruments.