



Music In Our Schools Month® General Music: 4th Grade 2022–2023

“Navajo Freedom Song: Exploring 6/8 Time and Creating a Soundscape for a Desert Poem”

Song: *Shí Naashá* (“I Am Going in Freedom”)

Lesson by Deborah Beninati, University of Utah Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program, Salt Lake City, Utah; Western Division Representative for General Music, National Association for Music Education (NAfME). Special thanks to Ann Marie Sherman, elementary educator and member of the Navajo (Diné) Nation, for her assistance in creating this lesson. Special thanks also to Brenda Whitehorse, member of the Navajo (Diné) Nation and Bilingual Education Director, Native American Education Programs, San Juan School District, Blanding, Utah, for her guidance and feedback.

Overview

Students will sing an authentic Navajo freedom song and play rhythmic ostinati on unpitched instruments. Additionally, students will apply knowledge and understanding of the geographic area where the Navajo Nation is located to create a musical accompaniment to the poem “In the Desert.”

Prerequisite Skills

For students to be successful in this unit, they will need knowledge of and experiences with the following:

- Beat and rhythm awareness
- Pitch matching and basic singing skills
- Experience playing a variety of nonpitched classroom rhythm instruments.

Instructional Goals/Objectives

Launching Point 1: Students will sing a Navajo freedom song, *Shí Naashá*, while playing a rhythmic ostinato on unpitched rhythm instruments.

Launching Point 2: Students will read the poem “In the Desert” and create an accompanying soundscape that enhances the spoken-word experience of the piece.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS (2014)

CREATING (Launching Point 1):

Anchor Standard: MU:Cr1.1.4b

Generate musical ideas (such as rhythms, melodies, and simple accompaniment patterns) within related tonalities (such as major and minor) and meters.

Essential Question: How do musicians generate creative ideas?

Enduring Understanding: The creative ideas, concepts, and feelings that influence musicians’ work emerge from a variety of sources.

CONNECTING (Launching Point 1):

Anchor Standard: MU:Cn10.0.4a

Demonstrate how interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.

Anchor Standard: MU:Re7.1.4a

Demonstrate and explain how selected music connects to and is influenced by specific interests, experiences, purposes, or contexts.

Essential Question: How do musicians make meaningful connections to creating, performing, and responding?

Enduring Understanding: Musicians connect their personal interests, experiences, ideas, and knowledge to creating, performing, and responding.

CREATING (Launching Point 2):

Anchor Standard: MU:Cr1.1.4a

Improvise rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic ideas, and explain connection to specific purpose and context (such as social and cultural).

Essential Question: How do musicians generate creative ideas?

Enduring Understanding: The creative ideas, concepts, and feelings that influence musicians' work emerge from a variety of sources.

Anchor Standards:

MU:Cr2.1.4a

Demonstrate selected and organized musical ideas for an improvisation, arrangement, or composition to express intent, and explain connection to purpose and context.

MU:Cr2.1.4b

Use standard and/or iconic notation and/or recording technology to document personal rhythmic, melodic, and simple harmonic musical ideas.

Essential Question: How do musicians make creative decisions?

Enduring Understanding: Musicians' creative choices are influenced by their expertise, context, and expressive intent.

Anchor Standard: MU:Cr3.1.4a

Evaluate, refine, and document revisions to personal music, applying teacher-provided and collaboratively-developed criteria and feedback to show improvement over time.

Essential Question: How do musicians improve the quality of their creative work?

Enduring Understanding: Musicians evaluate, and refine their work through openness to

new ideas, persistence, and the application of appropriate criteria.

Anchor Standard: MU:Cr3.2.4a

Present the final version of personal created music to others and explain connection to expressive intent.

Essential Question: When is creative work ready to share?

Enduring Understanding: Musicians' presentation of creative work is the culmination of a process of creation and communication.

Assessments

Assessments are embedded throughout each Launching Point.

Materials and Library of Congress Resource Links for the Unit

- For links and recordings, see “Teacher Talk” section for each Launching Point.
- Shakers/ maracas, hand drums with mallets (or buffalo drums and gathering drums, if available), jingle bells or tambourines.
- Assorted unpitched rhythm instruments (shakers/ maracas, guiros, woodblocks, sand blocks, etc.)
- Assorted sound-effect instruments (thunder tubes, rain sticks, stir xylophones, etc.)
- Pitched instruments, as needed (glockenspiel, talking drum, recorders, etc.)

Teacher Talk—To the Teacher (Historically and Culturally Significant information)

Launching Point 1

Shí Naashá is a well-known traditional song among the Navajo—who refer to themselves as Diné (Din-neh), meaning “the people.” In the 1860’s, the United States Government forced about 8,500 Navajo men, women, and children off their lands. This 250–400-mile trek from their native land to the Bosque Redondo Reservation at Fort Sumner in eastern New Mexico is known

as The Long Walk. Many Diné suffered or died from lack of food, proper clothing, or exhaustion. After four years, the Diné were allowed to return. *Shí Naashá* is a celebratory song expressing their elation to be returning to their homeland and seeing Mount Taylor, their sacred mountain.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sh%C3%AD_naashá

<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/navajo/long-walk/long-walk.cshtml>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_Walk_of_the_Navajo

Map showing the geographic area encompassing native Diné land and the route of the Long Walk:

<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/navajo/pdf/navajo-sq1-long-walk-map.pdf>

Map showing the Navajo Nation today:

https://www.navajonationdode.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Navajo_Nation_Map.pdf

<https://indian.utah.gov/navajo-nation/>

The audio recording linked below features the lyrics provided by the pronunciation guide following this section. These lyrics might be easier for students to follow, rather than the written Navajo. The audio is unlisted on both Vimeo and YouTube and is only available to those who have the links. Please respect the author's privacy request. Thanks again to Ann Marie Sherman and her class of 4th-grade students for their assistance in creating the recording.

<https://vimeo.com/717321660/125b9250b1>

<https://youtu.be/XJ8w6dXPvsk>

Commercial recordings of *Shí Naashá* are available on various music streaming platforms. The recording that is closest to the version used in the lesson is performed by artist **Julia Begaye**.

Shí Naashá is also available for purchase on several websites.

Pronunciation Guide provided by Ann Marie Sherman:

Hey-neigh-ya

Shee-na-sha, Shee-na-sha, Shee-na-sha

Lah-day ho-zho-ni ay-yay, hay-nay-ya

Shee-na-sha, Shee-na-sha, Shee-na-sha

Lah-day ho-zho-ni ay-yay, hay-nay ya

ah-ha-la, ah-ha-la go-ni-sha (ga),

ah ha la, ah ha la go-ni-sha (ga)

Shee-na-sha, Shee-na-sha, Shee-na-sha

Lah-day ho-zho-ni ay-yay, hay-nay-ya

zho- like the word *show* but with a z sound

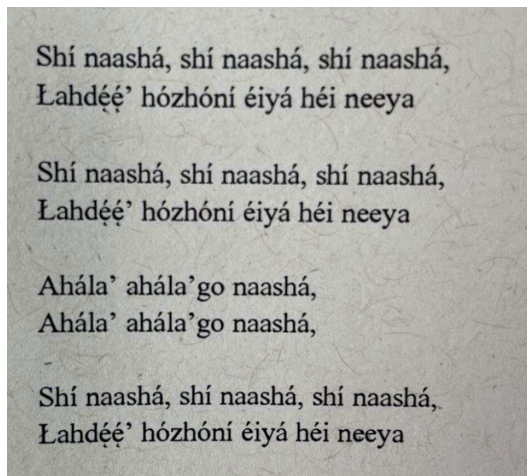
ni- like the word *nip* but drop the p sound

di- like the word *dip* but drop the p sound

yay- sounds like yeah

ay- long vowel a sound

Lyrics in written Navajo provided by the San Juan School District Heritage Language Resource Center, Blanding, Utah.



This translation is considered to be accurate and is accepted as such by the Diné (Navajo) people:

I am going in freedom
I am going, I am going,
I am going in beauty.
I am going, I am going,
I am going, beauty is all around me.

The Navajo lyrics and translation are referenced from these sites:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sh%C3%AD_naashá

<https://lyricstranslate.com/en/shi-naasha-i-am-going.html>

Another excellent resource for *Shí Naashá*, as well as various other examples of Navajo songs, can be found in this book—which includes a CD of authentic recordings:

McCullough- Brabson, Ellen and Help, Marilyn (2001). *We'll Be In Your Mountains, We'll Be In Your Songs: A Navajo Woman Sings*. University of New Mexico Press.

Launching Point 2 – The spoken-word poem “In the Desert” is provided below. **This poem is not a Navajo poem and does not represent the Diné people in any way!** Words in parentheses are suggested instrumentation, but it can and should be modified to fit your classroom needs, instrument availability, and students’ creativity:

“In the Desert”

By Debbie Beninati

In the desert, right at dawn,

A new day breaks.

Crickets chirp a final tune (*tiny frog guiro*),

Nocturnal animals follow the moon,

And the air is still.

In the desert morning light,

Sand gives way to life (*sand blocks*).

Small mammals explore (*woodblock*),

Raptors soar,

And the air begins to stir.

In the desert midday heat,

Sage and cacti thrive (*seed rattle or ratchet*).

Snakes sun (*maracas*),

Lizards run,

And the air is dry.

In the desert afternoon,
A storm is on the way (*recorder for wind*).
Thunder crashes (*thunder tube*),
Lightning flashes (*rain stick or ocean drum for rain*),
And the air comes alive.

In the desert evening light,
The sky turns to flame (*bell tree or finger cymbals*).
Jackrabbit hops (*split log drum*),
The wind stops (*recorder*),
And the air begins to calm.
In the desert nighttime sky,
Stars glitter and shine (*glockenspiel or jingle bells*).
Bobcats prowl (*talking drum*),
Coyotes howl (*voice*),
And the air is still.
The air ... is ... still.

The audio linked below is a sample recording of how the end product can sound. The recording is unlisted on both Vimeo and YouTube and is only available to those who have the links. Please respect the author's privacy request:

<https://vimeo.com/716132072/fb71cfd05c>

<https://youtu.be/nv3YGnQxWno>

LAUNCHING POINT 1

Objective: Students will sing a Navajo freedom song while performing a rhythmic ostinato on unpitched rhythm instruments.

Essential Questions: How do musicians generate creative ideas? How do musicians make meaningful connections to creating, performing, and responding?

Specific Performance Standards: Music of the Diné (Navajo) people is passed down through the oral tradition: Every version is slightly different. Therefore, it is generally not transcribed using traditional musical notation. The melody and meter vary from version to version. The meter itself can often be mixed within the same version. The song generally has a 6/8 feel so students can reasonably be expected to maintain the ostinato pattern on shakers/ maracas using that time signature.

Shaker ostinato:



Procedure

Begin the lesson by providing an historical background of the Navajo Long Walk and the origin of the song, *Shí Naashá*, using maps and references provided in Teacher Talk: *“To show empathy, I think students need to visualize the historical trauma the Long Walk created for the people, and the joy they must have felt to see their sacred mountain, Mount Taylor.”*—Brenda Whitehorse, Bilingual Education Director, Native American Education Programs, San Juan School District, Blanding, UT

1. Listen to an example of the song with the translation guide posted.
2. Ask students for feedback: What instruments did you hear? What voices did you hear? Were there any phrases that repeated? What were they?
3. During the second listening, post the pronunciation guide. Afterward, go through the guide with the students, working on proper pronunciation.
4. Invite the students to sing along with the recorded example, paying particular attention to the shaker.
5. Have students practice the shaker ostinato by holding the non-dominant hand, palm down, above one knee. Using the dominant hand, tap the quarter note on the knee and tap the eighth note on the palm of the hand above the knee as illustrated below:



7. Invite the students to sing along with the song while practicing the shaker part.

8. Divide the class in half: half of the students practice the shaker part while the other half practices tapping the steady beat on their knees while singing the song.

9. Switch parts.

10. Pass out shakers/ tambourines/ jingle bells to half of the class and hand drums/ buffalo drums/ gathering drums to the other half. Model how to transfer the shaker ostinato onto the actual instrument as shown below:



11. Use the assessment rubrics and sing the song together (without the recording) while playing the shaker ostinato and steady beat.

12. Switch parts.

Note: At some point during the lesson, it will be beneficial for students to see the actual written Navajo lyrics and compare them to those from the pronunciation guide.

Assessment: Students performing the ostinato can self-assess using this three-point scale. Teacher assessment of students' ability to play the ostinato accurately can be accomplished using the same rubric.

I played the ostinato accurately the entire time.	3
I played the ostinato accurately most of the time.	2
I need more practice.	1

Students performing the steady beat can self-assess using this three-point scale. Teacher assessment of students' ability to maintain steady beat can be accomplished using the same rubric.

I played the steady beat accurately the entire time.	3
I played the steady beat accurately most of the time.	2
I need more practice.	1

Extension: Students can explore the origins of other freedom songs and compare and contrast them musically (describe the voices, large ensemble or small, other instrumentation, lyrics, etc.) Songs suggested below are available on various music streaming platforms:

“We Shall Overcome”

“This Little Light of Mine”

“If I Had a Hammer” (a labor union song)

LAUNCHING POINT 2

Objective: Students will read the poem “In the Desert” and create an accompanying soundscape that enhances the spoken-word experience of the piece.

Essential Questions: How do musicians make creative decisions? How do musicians make creative decisions? When is creative work ready to share?

Specific Performance Standards: MU:Cr3.2.4a Present the final version of personal created music to others and explain connection to expressive intent.

Students will present their final interpretation of “In the Desert” in spoken-word-plus-accompaniment format to their classroom teacher, either live or via audio or video recording. They will explain the instrumentation choices they made and how those choices connect to the subject and the expressive intent.

Procedure

1. Read the poem “In the Desert” aloud to the students.
2. Ask the students why the poem might have been chosen to follow the *Shí Naashá* lesson.
3. Show the map of the current Navajo Nation and facilitate a discussion about the geographic area including climate, animal and plant life, terrain, etc.

4. **It is important to emphasize to the students that this poem is not a Navajo poem and is not intended to represent the Diné people in any way: It is just a poem about the desert.**
5. Facilitate a discussion about what phrases, if any, repeat; what phrases, if any, are almost the same; What phrases stand out as ones that could be enhanced with classroom musical instruments?
6. Facilitate a discussion about which classroom instruments would best represent those phrases. Why? Why not?
7. Choose which instruments will be used and where.
8. Introduce the rhythmic ostinato that will be played on tubano or similar drums:

Drum ostinato:



Sixteenth notes are “high” tones (played on the drum’s edge), and eighth notes are “low” tones (played on the drum’s center). Have students practice ostinato on laps before assigning drums. Ideally, hands should alternate for each drum strike.

7. Assign instrument parts in whatever way is customary for your classroom. You can choose a narrator, narrate the poem yourself, or have the whole class speak the poem as they perform their parts.
8. Before a first run-through, show the students the Creative Decisions Rubric and the Sharing Rubric. Let them know an audio or video recording will be made for two purposes: to evaluate their creative process and to evaluate their readiness to share/ ability to explain their choices to their classroom teacher.
9. Practice the poem as many times as the students feel is needed, then create the audio/ video recording.
10. After evaluating the recording using the Creative Decisions Rubric, either present the recording to the classroom teacher or perform it live. Students will explain their musical choices to their teacher.
11. Evaluate their sharing experience based on the Sharing Rubric.

Assessment:

Creative Decisions Rubric:

After Listening to the Recording:	Score
Our musical choices expressed the ideas in the poem creatively.	3
Some of our musical choices	2

These lessons are provided as a service to the music education community. Links to videos and sound recordings in these lesson plans are not endorsements of organizations, people, products, or places. Lesson plan sound recordings may be obtained through your favorite streaming platform. Copyright permission pending.

expressed the ideas in the poem creatively.	
We need more practice.	1

Sharing Rubric:

After Sharing Our Work:	Score
We were ready to share and could explain our musical choices.	3
We were almost ready to share and could explain some of our musical choices.	2
We need more practice.	1

Extension:

- This Launching Point can be undertaken using found sounds or vocal sounds instead of instrumental sounds.
- Body percussion can be substituted for the drumming ostinato.
- Using “In the Desert” as a template, students can create poems with accompaniment about other biomes.