



Lesson 2.4 “Abenaki Culture and Music”

Unit 2: The Abenaki Before 1600

Lesson Objectives

- Students will develop mind maps to organize their thinking about music in their lives and in Abenaki traditions.
- Students will watch, listen to, and analyze video clips of Abenaki music to learn more about its qualities and instrumentation.
- Students will read a traditional Abenaki story and reflect on its lessons.

Lesson Competencies

- I can organize my ideas by stating reasons that support my opinion and using facts and details to say more about each reason. (ELA 6)
- I can interpret and use information delivered orally or visually and respond by asking relevant questions, summarizing key points, or elaborating on ideas. (ELA 7)
- I can analyze primary and secondary sources and draw appropriate conclusions. (Moose SS)
- I can determine the central message/lesson/theme of a text and support my interpretation (saying why my evidence is accurate and convincing). (ELA 2)

Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire come to be the way it is?
How has New Hampshire been shaped by many voices?

Focus Questions

How did Abenaki traditions reflect their way of life and beliefs?

Estimated Time

One 40-minute class session

Materials & Equipment

Class set of “Music Mind Map”
Chart paper or whiteboard for recording discussion
“Comparing Music” chart available for reference
Access to “[Keeping Abenaki Culture Alive](#)” online video
Access to “[NH Abenaki Heritage Weekend 2016](#)” online video
Class set of “Quick Connect: Abenaki Music”
Class set of “Story of the Drum” worksheet



Educator Introduction & Rationale

Intertwined with the processes the Abenaki developed over millennia to hunt, fish, build dwellings, and make tools and clothing are cultural traditions of storytelling, spiritual belief, decorative arts, and music. Music was an essential form of expression for the Abenaki, who developed a number of means of making music from animal and plant materials. Hand drums made with stretched skins, rattles made of dried hollow gourds, and wooden flutes were joined by the human voice to create songs that served a variety of ceremonial and joyful purposes. As it continues to be today for all of us, the music of the Abenaki of long ago was a conduit for traditions and maintaining a strong sense of community. Greetings, gatherings, giving thanks, and honoring those who died: music was part of all of these. Reference the [Educator Overview](#) for more information.

This is the fourth lesson in Unit 2: The Abenaki Before 1600. The lesson can stand alone from the unit; however, completion of the learning objectives in lesson 2.1 “People of the Dawn” is recommended before students move through the activities in this lesson so that students are familiar with the basic aspects of the Abenaki people. Please note, unit vocabulary and definitions are at the end of this document. You may wish to preview them with your students.

The learning activities in this lesson focus on musical traditions of the Abenaki, particularly the creation and use of drums. Students reflect on how music influences and functions in their own lives before learning more about the purpose of music throughout the year in a Woodland period Abenaki community. Students investigate Abenaki music using a variety of primary resources including video and audio clips of contemporary Abenaki people singing and playing music and photographs of instrument makers.

This may be a student’s first time experiencing any kind of Native American music and so this lesson includes a Quick Connect framework for navigating the investigation with respect for both the art form and the student’s perspective and prior knowledge. Students complete the lesson with an independent reading activity using an Abenaki story about the drum.

Two reinforcement activities are suggested for students who will benefit from more opportunities to engage with the main concepts of the lesson. Two extension activities are recommended for students who are ready to expand upon the concepts of the lesson. Please adapt the material in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom.

Learning Activity

Activation

Music mind map. Provide each student with a copy of “Music Mind Map.” If students are already familiar with the mind map process, they can create their own on a blank piece of paper. Ask students to think about the word in the center circle: music. Allow students to take several minutes to branch off of that word with ideas and images inspired by what that word means to them.

Teaching tip: If prompts are needed, consider posting questions like these where students can read them:

- When do you listen to music?
- How do you make music?
- What songs do you know by heart?
- How does music make you feel when you hear it or make it?

Direct Instruction

Watching and listening to Abenaki music. As a whole group, discuss the contents of the mind maps. Create a list on a piece of chart paper or white board of the common ideas and themes that arise during the discussion.

Teaching tip: Consider using a two-column chart with Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How categories that compare “Music for Our Class” with “Music for Abenaki Communities.” A sample chart is provided for reference.

Explain to students that they will analyze two audiovisual primary sources to learn more about the meaning of music for Abenaki communities. They will watch short clips from videos of Abenaki people today sharing the musical traditions that have been passed down for hundreds of years.

Provide each student with a copy of “Quick Connect: Abenaki Music.” Preview the tasks on the sheet and explain that students will fill in their responses as they watch and will also have time to add more after they watch.

Introduce and project the following clips. If you do not have time to include all of them, we recommend the first clip with the Bruchacs and half of the second one.

1. [“Keeping Abenaki Culture Alive”](#) (3 clips)

Joseph Bruchac and his son Jesse Bruchac made this hour-long presentation at Brattleboro High School in Brattleboro, Vermont, as part of a multi-day event organized by Gedakinna, Inc., in February 2020. Both of the Bruchacs are highly regarded Abenaki storytellers and educators. In the following segments, students will watch them share a greeting song, explain different types of instruments, and share a song of thanks.

- Greeting Song: 3:35 to 6:18
- Introduction of Instruments: 55:25 to 58:35
- Song of Thanks: 59:27 to 1:00:59

2. "[NH Abenaki Heritage Weekend 2016](#)" (1 clip)

This video shows a variety of groups playing music at this annual gathering hosted by the Abenaki Nation of New Hampshire in Milton. Events like these, often called pow wows, are open to all but are especially important for those who wish to celebrate their indigenous heritage, whether or not that heritage is Abenaki. In the following segment, students will watch people in a variety of traditional dress dance along to the drumming and singing of Bryan Blanchette, a member of the Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe, and his group, the Black Hawk Singers. Remind students that while what they hear is traditional music, they will see a lot of evidence of the 21st century in the environment (including microphones, cell phones, and metal folding chairs). Students should focus on the style of singing, the instruments used by the musicians, the way people are dancing to the music, and any instruments used by the dancers.

- Black Hawk Singers: 22:09 to 25:29

**Student
Reading**

Music in Abenaki Culture. Supplement the Direct Instruction by having students read Unit 2: Learn It! "[Abenaki Culture](#)," page 6.

**Independent
Practice**

Independent reading: Story of the Drum. Provide each student with a "Story of the Drum" worksheet. After students read the story and complete the questions, review and revise answers as appropriate for the students in your classroom.

Reflection

Revisit the mind maps. Ask students to return to the mind maps they created at the beginning of the lesson. With a pencil or marker in a different color, students should update the map with new information they have learned about Abenaki music traditions. Using that new color, students should circle items they wrote earlier that connect to the Abenaki and create new branches with new details about Abenaki music. Then, as a whole group, complete the "Comparing Music" chart with student discoveries about Abenaki music.

Reinforcement

1. **Examine and make drums.** Share the “Hand Drum Workshop” photo gallery at <https://uicsl.org/hand-drum-workshops/>. Explain that this event was organized by the Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake for people of indigenous heritage to learn how to make a traditional hand drum using traditional materials. Ask students if they can identify the materials being used to make the drums. Students can make their own simple hand drums:

- Create a circular frame by slicing sections from a cylindrical box like an oatmeal container.
- Stretch a balloon, with the narrow part cut away, over the frame.
- Secure the balloon top with a rubber band.

Use the drums together. Practice keeping rhythm to sing a familiar song together.

Extension

1. **Write a song for a special purpose or occasion.** Ask students to think about an upcoming special occasion or event. Work together to create a song that explains and celebrates the event. Consider the style of songs shared by the Abenaki musicians. Will there be lines sung together? Will some lines be sung by a leader and repeated by a group? Students can make instruments or use familiar instruments to accompany the song.
2. **Compare traditions.** Compare Abenaki drumming to another drumming tradition (e.g. West African or Indian drumming). A variety of resources are available online and in libraries about the musical traditions of other cultures. Consider partnering with a music teacher to expand this investigation. Students can create displays and presentations about the similarities and differences between the traditions.

Supporting Materials

Clips 1–3: “Keeping Abenaki Culture Alive,”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beFf402nnAA>

Excerpt of video of event sponsored by Gedakina, Inc., at Brattleboro High School in Vermont on February 4, 2020, featuring Joseph and Jesse Bruchac. Minutes 3:35 to 6:18 are a greeting song; from minute 55:25 to 58:35 they explain what different instruments are made of; minute 59:27 to 1:00:59 is a song of thanks.

Clip 4: “NH Abenaki Heritage Weekend 2016,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=-olzDIEUNSM

Video shows various singing and drumming groups performing during this annual powwow in Milford, NH. Black Hawk Singers are from 22:09 to 25:29.

Abenaki Legend: Story of the Drum, www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/TheStoryofTheDrum-Abenaki.html

“Resources for Teaching the Music of Native American Peoples,” Article from *Pass It On: The Journal of the Children’s Music Network*, Fall 2015. Contains Visual Thinking Strategy-based suggestions for introducing and analyzing Native American music. Aligns with Minnesota state standards. Used in designing additional questions for music for Quick Connect worksheet, <https://journal.childrensmusic.org/pass-it-on/features/resources-for-teaching-the-music-of-native-american-peoples.aspx>.

Standards

“Moose on the Loose” Content:

- ✓ Students will understand that the Abenaki inhabited the area that became known as New Hampshire for thousands of years before European settlement. They will understand that the Abenaki interacted with the environment and used its resources to meet their needs. (3-5.T1.2)
- ✓ Students will understand that the Abenaki had a unique way of life characterized by customs, beliefs, and values. (3-5.T1.3)

“Moose on the Loose” Skills:

- ✓ Gathering, Interpreting, and Using Evidence (3-5.S1.1, 3-5.S1.2)
- ✓ Effective Historical Thinking (3-5.S3.1)

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ US / NH History: Contacts, Exchanges & International Relations (SS:HI:4:2.1)
- ✓ US / NH History: World Views and Value systems and their Intellectual and Artistic Expressions (SS:HI:4:3.2, SS:HI:4:3.3)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 1: Culture
- ✓ Theme 3: People, Places, and Environments

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Human-Environment Interaction: Place, Regions, and Culture (D2.Geo.4.3-5)
- ✓ Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.2.3-5)
- ✓ Historical Sources and Evidence (D2.His.10.3-5, D2.His.11.3-5)

Common Core ELA Grade 3:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Literature (RL.3.1)
- ✓ Phonics and Word Recognition in Foundational Skills (RF.3.3)
- ✓ Fluency in Foundational Skills (RF.3.4, RF.3.4a)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.3.1, SL.3.1b, SL.3.1c, SL.3.1d, SL.3.2)

Common Core ELA Grade 4:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Literature (RL.4.1)
- ✓ Integration of Knowledge and Ideas in Reading Literature (RL.4.7)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.4.1d, SL.4.2,)

Common Core ELA Grade 5:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Literature (RL.5.1)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.5.1d, SL.5.2)

Lesson Vocabulary

Abenaki	(noun) Name used to refer to the indigenous people of the land now called New Hampshire
indigenous	(adjective) When something grows or occurs naturally in a place
indigenous people	(noun) The first people who lived in an area before people from other cultures arrived
natural resources	(noun) Something found in nature that is used by people, such as animals, plants, or fossil fuels
tradition	(noun) A well-known belief or custom shared by a group of people over many years