

LESSON PLAN CRITERIA

Subject: Music

Year Level: 5 and 6

Topic: Music Across Cultures

Context:

The lesson takes place in a Year 6 classroom of 25 culturally diverse students (aged 10–12) in Melbourne’s western suburbs. Many speak languages other than English at home, providing a rich foundation for exploring music as cultural expression. Building on prior experience with rhythm, pitch, and simple composition, the lesson extends learning into intercultural listening and creative fusion. Aligned with Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, it connects students’ existing knowledge of place and identity with new musical and cultural contexts. Guided by the educator as facilitator, the inquiry-based approach encourages analysis of musical elements and co-construction of understanding within an inclusive and collaborative classroom environment, consistent with the aims of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2024).

Aims and Objectives:

The lessons are informed by the Victorian Curriculum content description:

Music – Level 5 and 6

Strand: Exploring:

Explore ways that the elements of music are combined to communicate meaning in music across cultures, times, places and other contexts including from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

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Learning Intentions:

- Explore how the elements of music (rhythm, pitch, timbre, texture) communicate meaning across cultures.
- Compose and perform short fusion soundscapes that combine musical ideas from different traditions.
- Reflect and discuss how music expresses identity, place, and cultural connection.

Success Criteria:

- I can describe and analyse how music from different cultures expresses ideas and meaning.
- I can create and perform a short fusion soundscape using sounds, symbols, and instruments.
- I can reflect on how music helps people connect and understand each other across cultures.

Potential Challenges/ Considerations

Potential challenges include differences in prior musical ability, which may require scaffolding for some students while offering extension for others; ensuring cultural sensitivity when discussing diverse traditions; and managing classroom dynamics during free exploration with instruments and found sounds. These will be addressed by clear co-created agreements (Cultural Connections Circle), structured prompts, and differentiated group tasks that allow all learners to participate meaningfully. Technology reliability (e.g., audio/video playback) and OH&S concerns (e.g., safe handling of percussion instruments and classroom objects) will also be monitored throughout. These considerations shape both the structure and pedagogy of the lessons to ensure an inclusive, engaging, and safe learning environment.

LESSON 1: Mapping Music and Culture

Resources and Setup for the Lesson

- Laptop or classroom computer, projector, and speakers
- Large world map
- Three Learning Centres arranged around the room:
 1. Balgijirr Songlines (Western Australia)
 2. West African Drumming
 3. Beijing Opera (China)
- Each centre includes visual posters (images/blurbs of instruments, performers, or landscapes) and Listening Prompts Cards with sticky notes for student reflection (see Appendix A)
- Venn Diagram and prompts template for comparing cultural music traditions (see Appendix B)
- Homework Task Sheet (see Appendix C)

Introduction (I do/We do)

Activity: Cultural Connections Circle

Time: 10 - 15 minutes

- Gather students in a circle around the world map.
- Introduce the 'Cultural Connections Circle' as a safe space for shared learning.
- Co-create simple rules together (e.g. listen respectfully, no cultural bias, every voice matters, respectful reflections). Record these rules on chart paper and keep for future lessons.
- Signal established: use a gong, shaker, or bell as a cue for students to gather in the circle whenever shared reflection begins.
- Introduce music as a way to connect to people, place, and values.
- Share learning goal: exploring how music connects across cultures.
- Invite students to share what kind of music connects them to their culture, family, or identity.

Reflections

I designed the Cultural Connections Circle drawing on social constructivist and sociocultural-historical theories of learning, which emphasise shared negotiation (eg: creating the rules) and the co-construction of meaning through interaction (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing, & Le Cornu, 2015). The reflective discussions will include inductive and deductive reasoning principles of grounded theory (Lyons, Arthur-Kelly, & Ford, 2015), encouraging students to move from personal observation to broader cultural generalisations, then refine these understandings through peer dialogue. Finally, I incorporated a consistent sound cue that draws on classical conditioning principles (Millacci, 2021) in a positive way, helping students associate the sound with calmness, inclusion, and readiness for reflection.

Body of the lesson (You do).

Activity: Musical Exploration & Shared Analysis Learning Centres

Time: 25 minutes

- The teacher introduces the three learning centres, explaining the cultural and musical context of each through short sound examples and simple demonstrations (e.g., clapping fast rhythms or mimicking texture with voice).
- Longer audio samples are then played centrally as groups gather at each centre.
- Students rotate through all three centres, listening carefully and recording their reflections on sticky notes using the prompts.

Reflections

I designed this activity with the idea of Learning Centres described by Groundwater-Smith, Ewing, and Le Cornu (2015), offering open-ended exploration where students rotate through cultural sound experiences and engaging to analyse, compare, and co-construct meaning through music.

This activity also reflects a decolonising approach to curriculum (Hughes & Fricker, 2024) by centring diverse musical traditions and positioning non-Indigenous learners as respectful listeners and collaborators. Inspired by Fiona, the educator I observed in my first case study, I sought to honour multiple cultural voices—Balginjirr Songlines (AIATSIS, n.d.), West African drumming (InRhythm, n.d.), and Beijing Opera (Asian Studies Association, n.d.)—to foster intercultural awareness and reflection on identity and place.

Closure of the lesson (We Do / Closure)

Group Activity: Shared Venn Diagram & Cultural Connections Circle

Time: 20 - 25 minutes

- Students gather around a large Venn diagram (butcher's paper or whiteboard) and place their sticky notes into:
 - Unique areas: what is distinct to each music tradition
 - Overlapping areas: shared or universal musical ideas
- The Cultural Connections Circle cue signals transition into a reflective dialogue. Through guided discussion, students explore:

Unique Areas:

- What makes this musical tradition distinct?
- Which elements (rhythm, pitch, timbre, texture) stand out?
- How does this music reflect its people, place, and values?

Overlapping Areas:

- What similarities or shared ideas can you find across the traditions?
- Are there universal qualities in how music expresses story or emotion?
- Finally students complete the reflection prompts:
 - Before: "At the start of the lesson, I thought music was just..."
 - After: "Now I think music is also..."

Homework Task (Next Lesson Preview)

- Introduce the next learning goal: combining different cultural sounds to create Fusion Soundscapes.
- Students complete a short Homework Task Sheet choosing one music tradition (from their family, today's lesson, or another culture).
- Students bring the completed sheet to the next lesson.

LESSON 2: Fusion Soundscapes

Resources and Setup for the Lesson

- Large world map
- Tuned percussion (xylophones, glocks, chime bars – pentatonic scale)
- Untuned percussion (clapsticks, drums, tambourines, shakers, claves, triangles)
- Arrange all instruments and found sound materials (normal classroom objects) around the room for exploration
- Classroom “found sounds” (desks, chairs, rulers, boxes, pencil cases, water bottles, etc.)
- Graphic Notation Sheets with example symbols (see Appendix D)
- Compass Points Reflection Cards (see Appendix E)

Introduction (I do/We do)

Activity/Task: Cultural Connections Circle

Time: 5 minutes

- Cue is given and students gather in the Cultural Connections Circle.
- Quick recap of Lesson 1 (mapping and listening across cultures) and share the new objective: today’s task is to combine cultural elements into short fusion soundscapes.
- Invite students to briefly share their chosen tradition or music (1–2 sentences). Each is pinned to the world map to broaden the class’s cultural journey.

Learning Activity: Introduction to Graphic Notation

Time: 10 minutes

- Explain that graphic notation is a creative way to represent sound using symbols, shapes, and colours, especially when music cannot be captured by traditional notation.
- Show and demonstrate the sound examples (refer to Appendix D):
 - Balgijirr Songlines – use steady horizontal lines for drone or clapsticks, curved shapes for vocal echoes or landscape sounds.
 - West African Drumming – use layered dots or patterns for polyrhythms and call-and-response rhythms.
 - Beijing Opera – use zigzags or rising lines for pentatonic pitch patterns and sharp bursts for percussive accents.
 - Body percussion – use body outlines or motion symbols (e.g., hands, feet, or circles for claps and stamps).
 - Found Sounds - Geometric shapes
- Invite students to suggest additional examples from their own cultural backgrounds or interests, incorporating these “on the fly” into the demonstration.
- End with a quick class demo: draw a short score together on the board, then perform it using claps, hums, and classroom objects.

Body of the lesson (You do).

Group Activity: Soundscape & Graphic Score Composition

Time: 25-30 minutes

Task:

1. Group Formation – Journey Teams

- Students form groups of 3–4.
- Each group is assigned the task of creating a 15-second fusion soundscape that symbolises a journey by fusing two or more cultural elements (from Lesson 1, homework, or their own experiences).

2. Exploration Phase – Sound Hunt (Timed Game)

- Each group has 30 seconds to explore the instruments and found sounds placed around the room and collect chosen items to bring back to their group tables.

3. Soundscape and Graphic Score Creation

- Groups begin composing their fusion soundscape, combining instruments, found sounds, and body percussion to represent their chosen cultural “journey.”
- Each group then creates a graphic score for their composition using colours, shapes, and symbols to represent musical events.
- Encourage students to experiment with layering (polyphony), contrast, and texture to illustrate interaction between cultures and enhance expressive depth.

Guiding prompts during composition:

- Which musical elements are you using?
- How does your soundscape show two cultures meeting?
- What story, value, or journey are you representing?

Reflections

I designed this activity using Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, where knowledge emerges through the transformation of experience. Students engage in concrete experience by experimenting with sound, reflective observation by interpreting how sound conveys culture and meaning, abstract conceptualisation through graphic notation, and active experimentation when performing and refining their fusion soundscapes. This process enables them to make meaning musically and visually, exploring how diverse cultural elements can coexist in creative harmony. The idea was inspired by my classroom observation in Assignment 1, where I adapted a group soundscape task into a cultural context to deepen students' creative and intercultural understanding.

Step 3 – Closure of the Lesson (I Do / We Do)

Time: 10–15 minutes

Activity/Task 1: Mini World Music Festival

- Each group performs their 15-second fusion soundscape for the class.
- After each performance, encourage brief peer comments celebrating what stood out (e.g., “I liked how you used...” or “That reminded me of...”).

Activity/Task 2: World Map Compass Reflection

- The Cultural Connections cue signals students to reform the Cultural Connections Circle.
- A large compass is drawn or placed on the class world map to symbolise reflection back to exploration and the global journey.
- Students place sticky notes (or share orally) at each compass point following the compass point prompts.
- Conclude with a shared reflection: By blending traditions, we didn’t just create new music- we created new ways of thinking, listening, and understanding each other.

Reflections

I drew on Harvard Project Zero’s Visible Thinking Routines (Project Zero, n.d.), which embed reflection and metacognition to create cultures of thinking. Using routines like Compass Points helps students articulate shifts in understanding and consider multiple perspectives, complementing the experiential nature of the lesson by fostering deeper reflection on how and why they create music.

Aligned with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), the lessons provide equitable access and learner agency through multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression (CAST, 2018). The integration of visual (graphic notation), auditory (sound exploration), and kinesthetic (body percussion and movement) elements creates multimodal sensory entry points for diverse learners. Students demonstrate understanding through varied forms—music, dialogue, and visual symbolism—fostering choice, collaboration, and cultural relevance. In doing so, the learning environment promotes inclusivity and autonomy, nurturing learners who are purposeful, resourceful, and strategic in their creative expression.

Final reflection

This two-lesson sequence also draws upon Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, recognising that meaningful learning occurs when students feel safe, respected, and empowered to express themselves. The Cultural Connections Circle establishes psychological safety and belonging through shared norms, trust, and mutual respect. Across both lessons, students' self-esteem and creative confidence are nurtured by valuing each learner's cultural knowledge and contributions. The final reflective and creative phases invite movement toward self-actualisation, where learners experience agency, curiosity, and intercultural understanding through music-making. In this way, the sequence supports students' holistic growth—social, emotional, and creative—within a culturally safe learning environment.

References

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Appendix A. Listening Prompts Card (Lesson 1 – Sticky Note Prompts)

While you listen, jot down or sketch your ideas.

🎵 Musical Elements

Rhythm – fast/slow? steady/layered?

Pitch – high/low? steps/jumps?

Timbre – voice, earthy, bright, metallic?

Texture – solo, call-and-response, many layers?

🌍 Cultural Lens

People – Who plays this music?

Place – Where is it from?

Values – What is important (celebration, ceremony, story)?

Language – Any words, sounds, or tone?

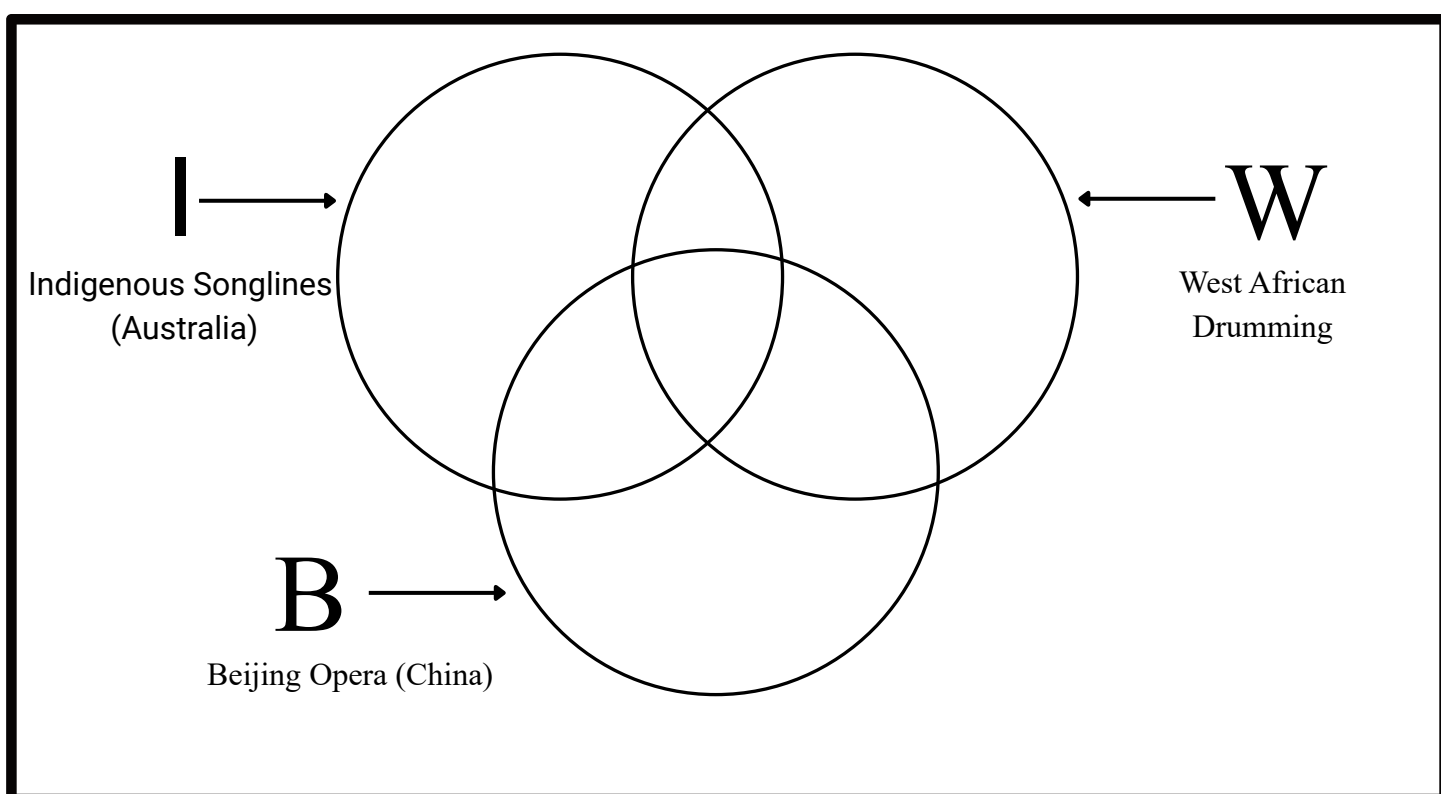
💡 Creative Extension

What new ideas or feelings did this spark?

Could it connect with music you know?

If you could add one new sound, what would it be?

Appendix B – Shared Venn Diagram Template



Appendix C – Homework Task Sheet

Instructions:

Choose one music tradition (from your family, today's lesson, or another culture). Complete the sections below and bring your sheet to the next lesson.

1. Culture / Place

Where is this music from? Who performs it?

2. Musical Elements

Select 1–2 key elements that stand out and briefly describe them:

- ☐ Rhythm – fast/slow, steady/layered
- ☐ Pitch – high/low, steps/jumps
- ☐ Timbre – voice/instrument, earthy, bright, metallic
- ☐ Texture – solo, layers, call-and-response

Description:

3. Meaning or Value

Tick one (or more) that best fits the music’s purpose and explain why:

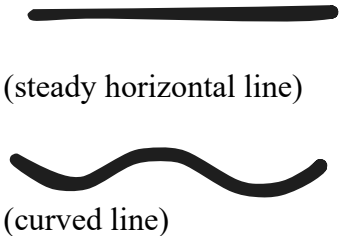
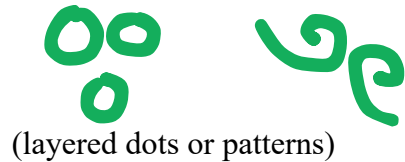
☐ Celebration ☐ Ceremony ☐ Storytelling ☐ Identity ☐ Other: _____

Explanation:

Extension (Optional):

If this music could be blended with another culture’s sound, which one would you choose and why?

Appendix D– Graphic Notation Guide + Example

Cultural Source / Sound Type	Visual Representation (Graphic Notation Symbol)	Meaning / Musical Element Represented
Balginjirr Songlines (Western Australia)	 (steady horizontal line) (curved line)	Steady drone or clapsticks Vocal echoes or landscape sounds
West African Drumming	 (layered dots or patterns)	Polyrhythms and call-and-response rhythms
Beijing Opera (China)	 (zigzag or rising line)	Pentatonic pitch patterns and sharp percussive bursts
Body Percussion	 (hand, foot, or circle symbols)	Claps, stamps, or clicks represented through motion symbols
Found Sounds (Classroom Objects)	 (geometric shapes or symbols for texture)	Everyday sounds such as tapping desks, shaking bottles, or brushing paper to create texture or rhythm

EXAMPLE

SOUNDSCAPE SEQUENCE

(Each box represents 1 second)

SOUND KEY

Balginjirr Songlines-
Clapstick



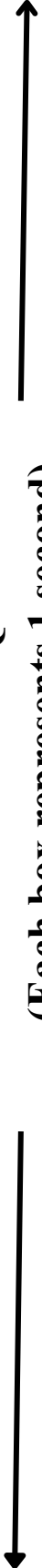
West African Drumming-
Polyrhythm

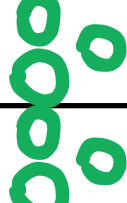
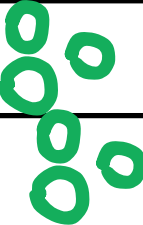


Found sound- pencil tap



Body percussion-
Footstomp



Appendix E – Compass Reflection Prompts (Lesson 2)

E (East = Exciting):

- What excites you about what we explored today?
- What was the most engaging or inspiring idea or experience?

W (West = Worrisome):

- What did you find confusing, uncomfortable, or challenging?
- What questions or uncertainties remain?

N (North = Needs):

- What do you still want to learn or find out about these musical cultures, traditions, or creative processes?
- What additional knowledge would help you understand them more deeply?

S (South = Suggestions):

- What is your current stance or takeaway from today's lesson?
- How might you continue exploring or applying what you've learned about culture, creativity, and connection through music?

Adapted from Harvard Project Zero's Visible Thinking Routine "Compass Points" (Project Zero, n.d.).