



Smithsonian Folkways

American Indian Music: Navajo Culture

A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson

Designed by: Babette M. Wenerd

Summary:

Learn about Navajo music while gaining a cultural awareness. Learn to sing and dance to traditional melodies as well compose and improvise to an American Indian Song.

Suggested Grade Levels: 6-8

Country: United States

Region: North America

Culture Group: Navajo

Genre: American Indian

Instruments: Voice

Language: English, Navajo

Co-Curricular Areas: Social Studies

National Standards: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9

Prerequisites: Basic notation and reading abilities

Objectives

- Give students a cultural awareness of American Indians and their music
- Learn about the Navajo Culture
- Sing and perform the song/story “I Walk in Beauty”
- Compose and improvise a rhythmic accompaniment to an American Indian song

Materials:

- “Heartbeat: Voices of First Nations Women” performed by various artists, US, Canada 1995, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/heartbeat-voices-of-first-nations-women/american-indian/music/album/smithsonian>
- “Let ‘em Talk”
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/heartbeat-voices-of-first-nations-women/american-indian/music/album/smithsonian>
- “The Corn Grinding Song” by Joe Lee from Navajo songs (SFR), 1992, Track Catalog no. SFW40403_107
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/navajo-songs/american-indian/music/album/smithsonian>
- The Nick Page Sing with Us Songbook, Hal Leonard, 2008.

Lesson Segments:

- 1. An Overview of the American Indian National Museum** (National Standard 6)
- 2. Second Lesson Title** (National Standards 7, 8, 9)
- 3. Third if Applicable** (National Standards 1, 2, 4, 5, 6)

1. Lesson Segment Title

- a. Students view the movie on American Indians
- b. Students discuss the people and the music they heard, as guided by the teacher
- c. Students listen to the SFR of “Let ‘em Talk”; students determine the tone colors they hear in the music and discuss what they music may be used for in the culture

Assessment: Students will be assessed on their knowledge of the movie and music based on their ability to answer questions by the teacher.

2. An Overview of the Navajo Indians

- a. Students read the information presented in the “Navajo Indian Fact Sheet”
- b. Students work in groups and complete a graphic organizer
- c. Students create a partner/circle dance to “Let ‘em Talk”

Assessment: Students will present their 5 most interesting facts to the class. Students will perform their dance for the members of their class, based on a participation grade.

3. Performing a Song and Composing an Accompaniment

- a. Students will sing and perform “I Walk in Beauty’ as outlined in Nick Page’s book
- b. Students will improvise hand drum and shaker accompaniments
- c. Students will work in groups to compose an accompaniment based on standard musical notation after listening to the ‘Corn Grinding Song”

Assessment: Students performance of song. Students perform their accompaniments in groups to the class.

