



# NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERTS

HOW AMERICA FOUND ITS  
SOUND

NATIVE AMERICAN

# HOW AMERICA FOUND ITS SOUND

## NATIVE AMERICAN

Grades 5 - 8

### STANDARDS

5.GM.P1.C, 5.GM.R1.A, 5.GM.R1.B, 6.GM.R1.A, 6.GM.R2.A, 6.GM.Cn2.A, 7.GM.P1.D, 7.GM.R1.C, 7.GM.R2.A, 8.GM.P1.D, 8.GM.R1.C, 8.GM.R2.A

### OBJECTIVES

**Students will identify** the historical purposes of Native American music.

**Students will identify** instruments used in Native American music and dances.

### TIME NEEDED

45 - 60 minutes

### MATERIALS

- Video: [Apache Sunrise Ceremony](#)
- Video: [Men's Grass \(Group 2\) | SNL San Manuel Powwow 2025](#)
- Video: [UCLA Pow Wow - Native American Jingle Dance](#)
- Resource: [Native-Land.ca | Our home on native land](#)
- Digital Platform of choice: ex: [Padlet.com](#)

### GENRE OVERVIEW

Indigenous music in North America represents the diverse traditions of hundreds of Indigenous nations, each with its own languages, histories, songs, dances, instruments, and cultural practices. Music is often connected to much more than entertainment, it can be used for **healing, ceremony, celebration, coming-of-age, community, connection to the land, storytelling, and personal expression.**

Dance and music are often closely connected. For example, the **Jingle Dance**, associated with Ojibwe and the **Grass Dance**, associated with Plains traditions, is connected to land, preparation, and community. Instruments and sound-producing elements can include **drums, shakers, flutes, and jingles** worn as part of dance. Indigenous music is a living tradition that continues to evolve while maintaining connections to culture, community, and history

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### PROCEDURES:

1. **Say:** “When you hear the words *Native American music*, what comes to mind? What instruments, sounds, or types of music do you imagine?”

Allow students to share initial ideas.

**Teacher Note:** *Explain that there is no single type of “Native American music.” There are hundreds of Indigenous nations, each with distinct languages, histories, traditions, instruments, songs, and dances.*

2. **Discuss:** Explore an interactive Indigenous nations and languages map such as Native Land Digital ([Native-Land.ca](https://native-land.ca) | [Our home on native land](#))

**Ask:** “Who are the Indigenous people connected to the place where we live?”  
“Why might knowing the people and history connected to a place be important when learning its music?”

(Emphasize that Indigenous musical traditions are **living traditions**, not simply music from the past.)

3. **Say:** “In many Indigenous traditions, music and dance have a purpose beyond entertainment. Let’s explore three examples.”

- [Jingle Dance](#) – **Healing:** Traditionally associated with Ojibwe/Anishinaabe peoples. The dance is connected to healing and can represent physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and community healing.
- [Apache Sunrise Ceremony](#) – **Coming of Age:** A ceremonial tradition marking a young woman’s transition into womanhood and recognizing growth, strength, family, community, and cultural identity.
- [Grass Dance](#) – **Land & Community:** Traditionally connected to Plains Indigenous traditions, including those of the Omaha people, the Grass Dance is associated with preparing and honoring the land for community gatherings.

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**4. Say:** “What do you notice about the relationship between music, movement, and purpose?”

Ask students to think → pair → share.

**Think:** Why might a community use music to heal, celebrate, or mark an important moment in life?

**Pair:** Compare these traditions with events in your own life where music is important.

**Share:** Discuss how music can help people remember, connect, celebrate, or heal.

**5. Say:** “What instruments and sounds help create Indigenous music?”

Introduce several examples:

- **Drums:** Hand drums, large community drums, and water drums are found in different Indigenous traditions. Their construction and purpose vary by nation.
- **Shakers:** Gourds and other natural materials can create rhythmic sounds through movement.
- **Jingles:** Metal jingles attached to dance regalia create percussion as the dancer moves.
- **Flute:** Indigenous flute traditions vary by nation. The flute has been associated with personal expression, courtship, reflection, and calming.

**(Ask:** “How can a dancer become part of the music?”

*Discuss how dancing can create sound through jingles, shakers on the body, but also how movement itself can contribute to the music)*

**6. Say:** “Think about a song that immediately brings back a memory or changes your mood.”

Allow students to share examples.

Discuss how music can carry **memory, emotion, identity, community, and meaning.**

Explain that traditional Indigenous songs are learned through listening, repetition, practice, and cultural knowledge.

**7. Activity:** Create a “Digital Sound Board”:

Have students use **Padlet, Flip, Google Slides, or another digital platform** to create a short response to the question:

**“How does music communicate something that words alone cannot?”**

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STEPHAN WHITEEAGLE PERFORMING  
THE PRAIRIE CHICKEN DANCE

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THE DINEH TAH' NAVAJO DANCERS  
PERFORMING THE BOW AND ARROW DANCE

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FAWN GALVIN OF THE PAIUTE NATION  
PERFORMING THE SOUTHERN BUCKSKIN DANCE

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GRADY JONES OF THE CHEROKEE NATION  
PLAYING THE TRADITIONAL WOOD FLUTE

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ZEKE REEDY OF THE MUSKOGEE NATION  
PERFORMING THE GRASS DANCE

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Native American powwow drum (also called a powwow-style drum)

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**Image Credit:** Tennessee Technological University, provided by Sayota Knight, Coordinator of International Programs.