

About the Performance

From the grasslands of Mongolia to the high mountain of Yunnan, master musician **Shaw Pong Liu** takes audiences on a musical journey through historical and contemporary China. Her suitcase packed with languages and musical instruments, Shaw Pong weaves history, geography, the Mandarin language, and Chinese folk music in a dynamic exploration of China.



About the Artist

Shaw Pong Liu is a violinist who is fluent in both western and Chinese musical traditions. She is also a composer, a teaching artist and an activist. She engages diverse communities with creative music and social dialogue by innovating the audience experience of live music. Collaborating with artists from a wide range of disciplines, Shaw Pong creates genre-defying performances which interplay written and improvised music with narration, storytelling and movement. She is a member of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble and was the 2016 City of Boston Artist-In-Residence.

Program Learning Goals

1. To introduce the concept of a tonal language.
2. To explore the four tones of Mandarin, the official dialect of China.
3. To demonstrate the traditional Chinese instrument the erhu.
4. To understand how music can help us understand different places and cultures.

Essential Questions

1. How do we use language to communicate? Can we also communicate with music?
2. How are language and music similar? How are they different?
3. How can music help us understand different places and cultures?

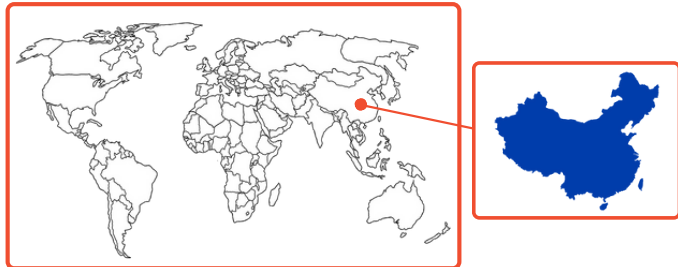
Vocabulary

- **Dynasty:** a series of powerful leaders from the same family
- **Tonal Language:** a language in which different tones create different meanings
- **Tone:** the traits of a musical sound such as pitch, length, or strength
- **Mandarin:** a group of languages spoken across most of northern and southwestern China
- **Character:** a written symbol that represents a spoken word in Chinese
- **Stroke Order:** the specific order of brush strokes used when writing a Chinese character
- **Erhu:** the traditional Chinese two-string instrument using a horse-hair bow

Key Facts and Context for Students

Where is China?

This program explores the music, language, and geography of contemporary and historical **China**. It is the largest country in **East Asia** and home to over 17% of the world's population.



Instruments Featured in this Performance



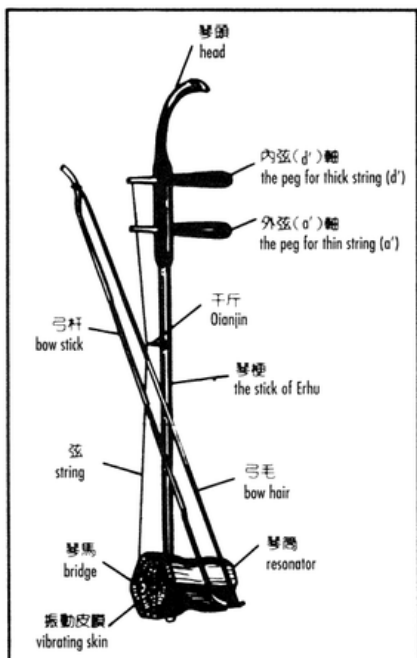
Violin



Erhu

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Key Facts and Context for Students, continued



About the Erhu

The **erhu** (pronounced “are-hoo”) is an ancient Asian instrument brought to China during the Han dynasty (around 140 BCE). This two-stringed instrument is played with a bow between the strings with a push-pull stroke. The sound box is covered by a snake skin which gives the instrument its distinctive tone, mellow yet bright. Its low notes are deep and rich, the middle notes are gentle and soothing, while high notes are clear and bold. These changes in character make it possible for the erhu to perform music with a variety of moods. In classical Chinese music, the erhu is melodic, haunting, ever-changing and alive. The traditional style of playing is full of ornamentation, giving the music a three-dimensional quality. The erhu is extremely popular for both solo and orchestral performances.

Erhu Musical Notation

This is an example of erhu music in both western and Chinese notation. This is the beginning of the famous piece **A Moon Reflects on the Er-Chuan Spring**.

Chinese notation uses numbers to represent the relationship between notes. The number one means the primary note in a piece of music.

The number six, which begins this piece, means the sixth note away from the primary note. The rhythm, or timing, of each note is shown by the horizontal lines under the numbers. No line means one beat, or pulse, of the music. One line means half of a beat, two lines means one quarter of a beat, and so on. Rests, or pauses, are indicated by the number zero. The symbols above the numbers tell the musician which fingers to use, what direction to move the bow, which string to play, and other techniques.

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Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What do you know about China? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?
- What language or languages do you and your family speak? In which parts of the world are these languages spoken?
- Compare the violin and the erhu (see page 2). What similarities do you notice between these two instruments? How would you play these instruments? What kinds of sounds do you think each one will make?

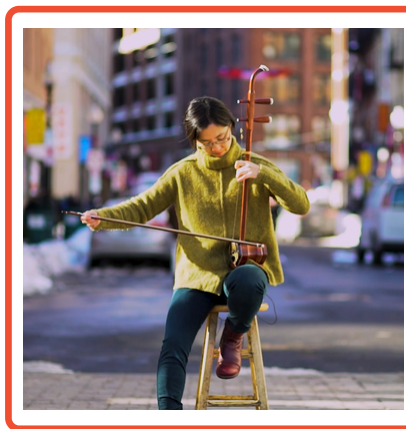
Pre-Performance Activity: Exploring China

Learning Goal:

To understand the basic geography, population, and history of China.

Materials:

Globe or world map, maps of China,
“Exploring China” worksheet (see page 5),
“History of China” handout (see page 6),
dried beans or coins to use as counters,
markers



Directions:

1. Discuss what students know about China without doing any research. Where is China located? How many people live there? What languages are spoken there? What kinds of food do people eat?
2. Locate China on a globe or world map. Note the distance between United States and China.
3. In small groups, have students complete the “Exploring China” worksheet. Note that each group will need access to a map of China, markers, and dried beans or coins to use as counters.
4. As a large group, read through the “Exploring China” handout. Compare the timeline of China’s history to United States history and world history.
5. Discuss what students learned about China. What would they still like to know?

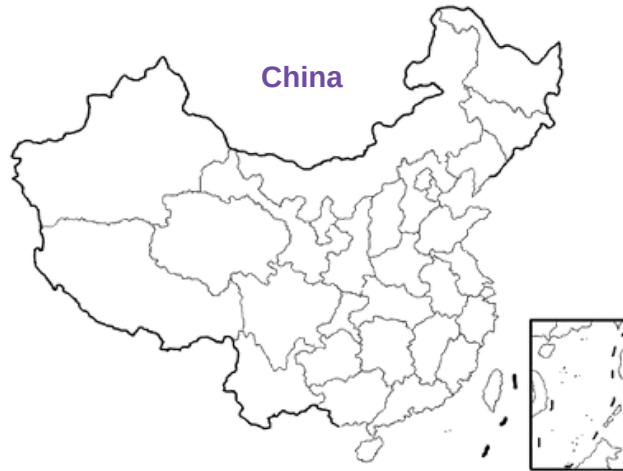
Name: _____

Exploring China

Geography: Find and color each province/region on the left on the map of China below.

Provinces/Regions:

-  Beijing (the capitol city)
-  Nei Meng Gu
-  Yunnan
-  Zhejiang



Population: China and the United States are about the same size geographically. But in terms of population (the number of people who live in a country), China is much bigger.



Landmass: 3,600,000 square miles

Population: 1,400,000,000 people



Landmass: 3,500,000 square miles

Population: 335,000,000 people

Try this: Use dried beans, pennies, or other counters to compare the size of China's population to that of the United States. If one bean represents 100,000,000 people, how many beans do you need to represent:

- China's population of 1,400,000,000 people? _____
- USA's population of 335,000,000 people? _____

Name: _____

History of China



China is one of the world's first civilizations. Each historical era has brought language, philosophy, art, technology, and culture that still influences the world today. Many Chinese people can count back up to **4,000 years** that their ancestors have lived in the land we now call China. That's as many as **160 generations** of great-great-grandparents!

Directions: Use the timeline below to learn about some of the different eras of China from the Bronze Age to today.



Think About It: What was happening in the US during each of these time periods? What was happening in the rest of the world?

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What did you learn about the history, geography, languages, and culture of China?
- What instruments did Shaw Pong use in her performance? How were they played?
- What music, dance, or language is important in your culture?

Post-Performance Activity: Creative Writing in China

Learning Goals:

- To explore the geography, history, and culture of a region of China.
- To create an original story.

Materials:

Map of China, “Learning About China” worksheet (see page 8), vetted websites and books about China (see resources on page 10), “Story Map” worksheet (see page 9), art supplies



Directions:

1. Discuss the performance and review the four locations featured in the program: Yunnan (mountainous province), Beijing (capital city), Zhejiang (province of the Butterfly Lovers), and Nei Meng Gu/Inner Mongolia (grasslands, home of horses and ancestors of bowed string instruments).
2. In small groups or alone, have students choose a setting from one of those four places and fill out the “Learning About China” worksheet about that location with the help of maps and resources about China.
3. Have each student fill out the “Story Map” worksheet to plan a short story set in the region that they researched. Brainstorm at least two characters and a conflict that can be resolved.
4. Have students write their original stories based on their story maps and China research. Be sure to include details about the region to bring the story to life.
5. Illustrate the stories with drawings or maps.
6. Share the stories with the class.
7. Discuss students’ stories as well as the similarities and differences between the different regions featured in the stories.

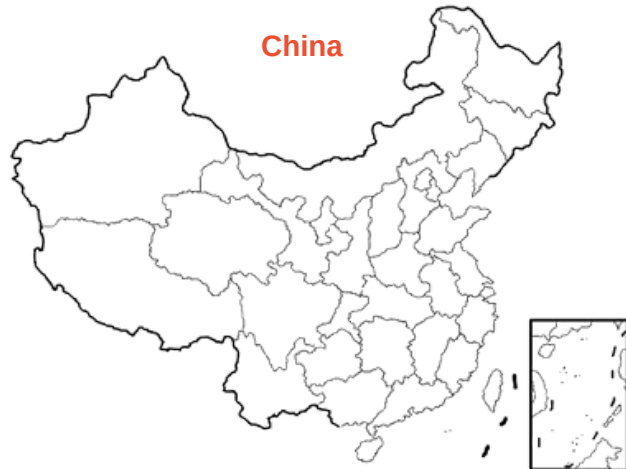
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Learning About China

Directions: Pick one Chinese region from the performance. Color it on the map and answer the questions below.

Pick one:

- ☐ **Beijing:** capitol city
- ☐ **Nei Meng Gu:** province of the Butterfly Lovers
- ☐ **Yunnan:** mountainous province
- ☐ **Zhejiang:** grasslands, home of horses and ancestors of bowed string instruments



How many people live in this region? _____

What is the landmass size of this region? _____

What are three foods that people eat in this region?

What are two geographical features of this region?

What is one important historical event that happened in this region? When?

What is something interesting that you learned about this region?

Shaw Pong Liu

*Exploring China: The “Middle Kingdom” Through
Music & Story*

Educational Guide, Grades K-8



Name: _____

STORY MAP

Directions: Draw and/or describe the elements of the story in each box.

Setting:

A large, empty rectangular box with a purple border, intended for drawing or describing the setting of the story.

Main Characters:

A large, empty rectangular box with a purple border, intended for drawing or describing the main characters of the story.

Plot:

A rectangular box with a purple border, containing a small circle with the number '1' in the bottom-left corner. It is the first of six boxes for plotting the story.A rectangular box with a purple border, containing a small circle with the number '2' in the bottom-left corner. It is the second of six boxes for plotting the story.A rectangular box with a purple border, containing a small circle with the number '3' in the bottom-left corner. It is the third of six boxes for plotting the story.A rectangular box with a purple border, containing a small circle with the number '4' in the bottom-left corner. It is the fourth of six boxes for plotting the story.A rectangular box with a purple border, containing a small circle with the number '5' in the bottom-left corner. It is the fifth of six boxes for plotting the story.A rectangular box with a purple border, containing a small circle with the number '6' in the bottom-left corner. It is the sixth of six boxes for plotting the story.

Further Resources

- [Shaw Pong Liu Artist Website](#)
- **Chinese History and Geography:**
 - [“China” by Encyclopedia Britannica](#)
 - [“History of China” by China Highlights](#): a brief overview of periods and dynasties in Chinese history
 - [Geography Puzzle of China’s Provinces](#)
- **Chinese Music and Art:**
 - [The Kennedy Center's Digital Chinese Arts Collection](#)
 - [“Erhu Facts for Kids” by Kiddle.co](#)
- **Chinese Language:**
 - [“The Story Behind Chinese Characters” by Yoyo Chinese](#)
 - [Learn Chinese Everyday](#): practice writing, reading, and saying words in Chinese
 - [Chinese Etymology](#): an online dictionary with visual history of each Chinese character (searchable by Chinese character input)
- **Bilingual Children's Books:**
 - Hu, Ying-Hwa: *Ten Blocks To The Big Wok*, Children's Book Press (2022)
 - Hsiung-Blodgett, Amanda: *Little Bun: A Bilingual Storybook about Feelings*, Miss Panda Chinese (2022)
 - Law, Queenie: *Chinese For Kids: First 50 Characters*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (2018)

Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Music and Visual Arts

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (M.Cr.01, V.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (M.Cr.02, V.Cr.02)

Performing

- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. (M.P.06, V.P.06)

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (M.R.07, V.P.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (M.R.08, V.P.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (M.R.09, V.R.09)

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Curricular Connections, continued

Arts Standards: Music and Visual Arts, continued

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (M.Co.10, V.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (M.Co.11, V.Co.11)

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Reading

- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. (R.PK-12.4)

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)

History and Social Science

K

- Topic 1: Civics: classroom citizenship (HSS.K.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography: connections among places (HSS.K.T2)
- Topic 3: History: shared traditions (HSS.K.T3)

Grade 1

- Topic 1: Civics: communities, elections, and leadership (HSS.1.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography: places to explore (HSS.1.T2)
- Topic 3: History: unity and diversity in the United States (HSS.1.T3)

Grade 2

- Topic 1: Reading and making maps (HSS.2.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography and its effects on people (HSS.2.T2)

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Curricular Connections, continued

History and Social Science, continued

Grade 6

- Topic 1: Studying complex societies, past and present (HSS.6.T1)

Grade 7

- Topic 1a: Physical and political geography of Central and South Asia (HSS.7.T1a)
- Topic 2a: Physical and political geography of East Asia (HSS.7.T2a)
- Topic 2b: Early East Asian societies, religions, and cultures Ancient China, c. 1600 BCE-500 CE (HSS.7.T2b)

World Languages Standards

Communication

- Engage in, negotiate with, and improvise with cultural norms, etiquette, and nonverbal cues. (S.4.e)

Linguistic Cultures

- Analyze and evaluate variations among products and practices and how they relate to perspectives in multiple cultures and communities. (S.5.a)
- Analyze and evaluate the contributions of various cultural influences in the development of identity. (S.5.b)
- Investigate, explain, and reflect on the nature of culture through comparisons of diverse target-language cultures and their own (S.6.a)

Lifelong Learning

- Research, analyze, evaluate, and hypothesize about diverse perspectives and distinctive viewpoints found in authentic materials from target-language cultures. (S.7.b)
- Apply cultural and linguistic skills to participate in the school, local, and global community (S.8.a)

