As a music teacher, I am always looking for good cross-curricular connections. Music, because it is something that all children enjoy to some degree, is a great way to open new doors to a subject area. Students can be introduced to musical expressions of their own culture and to specific regions of the United States. Music is an integral part of every culture, and so it can be part of any unit of study on a foreign country or distant continent. In addition, music can be a motivating part of a lesson in geography, history, cultural anthropology, and many other aspects of social studies. 

Serving as music specialist in a 100-student parochial school, I move in and out of each of our classes, kindergarten through grade six, at least twice a week, and I have found this a unique opportunity to make useful connections between aspects of music and the content of various other fields of study. For example, I used music as the foundation for lessons about seven different cultures. These lessons included activities on geography, science, math, literature, art, physical education, and cultural foods. These curricular connections were devised to incorporate several of the thematic strands in social studies, especially CULTURE; PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS; and INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS. I have had the opportunity to work with various teachers, developing school-wide multicultural units of study at several different grade levels, but the effort to enhance a standard lesson with music and sound does not need to be as grand or time consuming as that. A short activity linking music and social studies might be found for many topics of study at any particular grade level.

Each teacher in our school (we have one classroom at each grade level) chooses a culture to study in depth during the month of January. For example, kindergarten used the Latin American unit of study; the first grade teacher chose a unit on cultures in Africa, second grade studied life in Asia, and fourth graders studied Native Americans. An outline of the unit of study on Native Americans is shown below.

I provided to each teacher a standard format, a basic outline, for each unit of study. I also provided additional information such as recipes, words to songs, and folklore, as requested by individual teachers. Each of the units was designed to be flexible, so that the regular classroom teacher and the music specialist could use them in whatever setting was most effective. For example, the music teacher introduces songs and literature during regular music classes, or the classroom teacher can use them at Circle Time. Some activities work best when students gather in small groups, such as writing stories or poems, doing crafts, or playing games. Music can also be taped from recordings for classroom-only use in a listening center. In addition to presenting traditional music from each culture, I taught some basic phrases in relevant languages. For example, each class also learned to sing “hello” in four languages besides English, including Spanish, Japanese, German, and Swahili.

Teachers and students’ families can provide additional resources relating to their own cultural traditions if they wish. Educational websites, local libraries, and community organizations are other sources of information and additional activities. Our school librarian was especially helpful in locating literature selections and informational books on various cultures for each class.

Each teacher developed lesson plans by expanding and adding resources of his or her own, including Internet sites. For example, the fourth grade teacher chose various books on Native Americans from the school library to read and share in literature circles. This class also studied Central American rain forests while learning about the Mayas. For science, they learned about organisms in the rain forest and the impact destruction of rain forests is having on global ecology. For an art project, they turned their classroom into a “rain forest,” with a leafy canopy overhead, birds perched in the branches, and monkeys hanging from vines.

Second graders studied Japanese culture. They did several art projects, including weaving full-sized zafutons (floor mats) with paper strips. One day they sat on the floor, with shoes off, in Japanese style.

The third grade teacher selected Ireland from the unit options because she is of Irish heritage and wanted to share some of her own cultural background with her students. Together, they explored poems by Eleanor Farjeon and made posters of various Irish quotes and blessings.

The fifth and sixth graders studied Germany, building a “castle on the Rhine” from boxes in their classroom. This class also wrote reports and made posters on German contributions to world culture, from famous classical composers to German automakers.

Families were involved in a culminating Multicultural Fine Arts Night at the end of the month. Each family was invited to bring a snack or dish that reflected a culture that was studied. (Teachers sent home simple, suggested recipes.) Samples of student
### Native Americans: An Outline for an Interdisciplinary Unit of Study

#### Geography
- Location of tribal groups
- The origin of geographic names with Indian roots
- Tribal lands today

#### Music (and sources)
- “Navajo Happy Song” (1, p.20) or (3, p.65, Grade 2)
- “Hopi Butterfly Melody” (1, p.27)
- “Ho Ho Watanay” (2,p.5) or (3, p.65, Grade 2)
- “Cayuga Lullaby” (2, p.39)
- “The Owl Sings” (2, p.5)
- “Iona” (2, p.39)
- “Land of the Silverbirch” (2, p.6)
- “Canoe Song” (2,p.7) or (3, p.49, Grade 4)

**Sources**

#### Math
- Drumming patterns (division, fractions)
- Musical Notation of rhythm

#### Science
- Animal and plant life
- Tracking animals

#### Arts and Crafts
- Beadwork
- Drawing on “skins” (from brown paper bags)
- Sand painting
- Making rattles and drums

#### Anthropology
- Shelter and climate
- Matriarchal families
- Hunter-gatherers
- Uses of the buffalo

#### Literature
- *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*
- *The Huron Carol*
- *The Gift of the Sacred Dog*
- *An Algonquian Year*
- *The Legend of the Sleeping Bear*
- *The Legend of the Loon*

#### P.E./Movement
- Grinding Corn (rock game)
- Hoop Dance
- Duck Dance
- Stick Passing Game

**Source**
See Burnett, M. *Dance Down the Rain, Sing Up the Corn.*

#### Food/Nutrition
- Popcorn
- Dried cranberries and raisins
- Fry-bread
- Pemmican/ Jerky
- The “Three Sisters”: Corn, beans, and squash


Color and Learn; Aztec, Inca, Maya. New York: Dover, 2002. Reproducible coloring pages for classroom use, with history and background information. Cultural: Early Elementary. See also Color and Learn: Native America.


Heyge, Lorna Lutz and Audrey Sillick. Musikgarten: Music-Makers Around the World, Greensboro, NC: Music Matters, 1995; rev. 2001. Teacher’s guide includes songs, lyrics, suggested dances, games, and activities. CD included. Music, Music Makers materials are a user-friendly source for teachers who may not have a lot of music background. They are available from MusikGarten, 800-216-6864. They also include good story-telling materials and movement activities.

Hirschfelder, Arlene, and Yvonne Beamer. Native Americans Today. Resources and Activities for Educators Grades 4-8. Englewood, CO: Teacher Idea Press, 2000. A detailed (242-page) guide for teachers that provides specific lesson plans on topics such as communication, economics, and “a day in the life” of Native Americans. Elementary and middle school.

Joffers, Susan. Brother Eagle, Sister Sky. New York: Dial Books, 1991. Illustration of historic speech by Chief Seattle given when his people were forced to sign the treaty putting them on a reservation. This speech sums up the Native American reverence for the land, and encourages our own good stewardship. Drawings show various Native American tribes. Cultural and Informational: Early Elementary.


Note

Suggested Books on Native Americans


artwork, writing, and other projects were put on display in the school gym. In a short program, each class presented one or two songs from its culture, followed by the opportunity for everyone to sample the foods brought for the multicultural potluck.

Parents enjoyed that special evening, and teachers were very enthusiastic about these multi-cultural thematic units of study, something we had not done in our school before. Plans are being made to take a similar approach in the coming school year. Shall we hear the sounds of Polynesian, Russian, or French-Canadian people in our classrooms? It’s an unexpected question that’s useful for starting conversations between teachers and a great way to open new doors to a subject area.
Explore different cultures through music education. Ideas for elementary school children. See more ideas about Music education, Music classroom, Elementary schools.

Music Around the World - Books. Planet Jams: An Exploration of the World's Rhythms and Percussion Instruments. Planet Jams An Exploration of the World's Rhythms and Percussion Instruments By Mark Burrows Book and CD 32 pages Grades 2 - 6 Each unit in this book focuses on a different culture and includes geographic information, introduces the instruments, focuses on basic techniques for playing 1 or 2 of the instruments, presents characteristic rhythms, gives an ensemble piece and highlights special aspects of a particular. Sing 'Round the World. Every culture in the world has its own form of music that is enjoyed by all ages on every continent. Although each culture is different, music unifies all races and has been used throughout history for different occasions and for enjoyment purposes. To learn why music is important to world cultures and continues to be created over the decades, there are a few important facts to understand. 1. It Makes it Easy to Celebrate. Music is played at every type of celebration, which includes weddings, graduations, and birthday parties. Music is never stagnant and continues to change and transform in each time period. New artists who earn an online masters of music education often learn various melodies and sounds from historic music and alter it to make it contemporary. 5. It's an Art Form.