

Lesson #2 Egypt I

Lesson Overview

With this lesson, students will be introduced to the music of Ancient Egypt and will discuss the social roles of musical production. The students will discuss the role of artifacts and talk about how one might construct a history of music from those artifacts. Students will be exposed to images of musicians and ancient musical instruments. They will also listen to contemporary Egyptian music that has been influenced from constructed histories of ancient Egypt. In addition, the students will discuss the political and religious order of ancient Egypt and music's relationship to those particular structures.

In addition, students will analyze the relationship between physical geography and settlement patterns. They will be introduced to the role of the Nile River and its delta in relation to the development of urban centers and agricultural production. Students will examine why certain environments influence settlement patterns. They will also address the role of climate and the importance of precipitation and flooding in the human development of the region.

The geography of Egypt is important in understanding why the Egyptians centered their culture around the Nile. The Nile Valley can be separated into two parts, the River Basin and the Red Desert land. The river basin of the Nile was rich with wildlife, depending on the flooding cycles of the Nile. The Red Desert was flat and dry area and empty of most life and water.

The Nile in its natural state goes through cycles of flooding. The flooding was the time of greatest fertility for Egypt. As the banks rose, the water would fill man-made canals and would water the crops. However, if the flooding was above or below normal, it could have huge consequences upon Egyptian lives and the economy.

The students will investigate images of ancient musicians and instruments of the time, and talk about what it might have been like to be a musician in Egypt. What might have been their role as musicians? For whom might that have played their music? For what purpose might have they been asked to play their music?

Although music existed in prehistoric Egypt, the evidence for it comes after 3100 BCE (Have the students locate the date on the timeline). Music formed an important part of Egyptian life, and musicians occupied a variety of positions in Egyptian society. Music

found its way into many contexts in Egypt: temples, palaces, workshops, farms, battlefields and the tomb. Music was a part of religious worship in Egypt.

Professional musicians existed in various social levels in ancient Egypt. The highest status belonged to temple musicians. The title of "musician" (shemayet) to a particular god or goddess was a position of high status and usually held by women. Musicians who played with the royal household were held in high respect. Gifted singers and harp players were also highly respected. Low on the social scale were the musicians who were entertainers for parties and festivals. Quite often they were accompanied by dancers.

Percussion instruments included drums, rattles, and bells. The sistrum was a rattle used in religious worship. Hand clapping was used as a rhythmic accompaniment. Wind instruments included flutes and trumpets. Stringed instruments included harps, lyres, and lutes. Male and female voices were used in Egyptian music.

The key to this lesson is to allow the students the opportunity to begin to investigate the importance of history and its artifacts, the influences of the past on contemporary culture, and the societal role of musical production. They also need to become aware of the details of the geography of a specific region and the affect it has on settlement.

Objectives

- a) Students will discuss the political, economic, and religious structures of ancient Egypt and explore the role of music and musicians in Egyptian society.
- b) Students will analyze the geography of Egypt and investigate relationships between the physical environment and human settlement.
- c) Students will identify different functions of music in other cultures.
- d) Students will communicate ideas about the importance of music in everyday life.

Standards

- a) Ancient Civilizations Standard 6.2: Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilization of Egypt.
- b) National Geography Standard 4: The Physical and Human Characteristics of Places.
- c) National Geography Standard 12: The Processes, Patterns, and Functions of Human Settlement.
- d) National Geography Standard 15: How Physical Systems Affect Human Systems.
- e) National Geography Standard 17: How to Apply Geography to Interpret the Past.
- f) Visual and Performing Arts: Music Standard 3.2: Listen to and describe the role of music in ancient civilizations.
- g) Visual and Performing Arts: Music Standard 4.3: Identify aesthetic qualities in a specific musical work.

Materials

- 1) CDs with music examples: Ancient Egypt [sound recording] / composed and performed by Ali Jihad Racy. Flûtes du monde [sound recording] = Flutes of the world. Published Boulogne, France : Playa Sound ; [France] : Distribution, Auvidis, 1996
- 2) Overhead transparencies of images of instruments and musicians with copies for students.
- 3) Egypt: The Habit of Civilization directed by Spry-Leverton, Peter. Published [S.l. : s.n.], 1991
- 4) Maps of the physical geography of Egypt.

Maps can be downloaded from: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/index.html>

The University of Texas Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection also has maps for downloading:
<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/index.html>

If maps from the UT Library are used, then you must attach the following acknowledgement: “Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.”

Preparation/References

General history:

<http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/lecture3b.html>

Teacher's Guide:

http://www.internet-at-work.com/hos_mcgrane/egypt/egyptintro.html

Downloadable Maps:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/index.html>

General geography:

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/egypt/dailylife/geography.html>

<http://www.rom.on.ca/egypt/case/about/environ.html>

The importance of the Nile:

<http://carbon.cudenver.edu/stc-link/AE/culture.html>

Nile flooding and agriculture:

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/egypt/dailylife/geographyandagriculture.html>

<http://www.civilization.ca/civil/egypt/egcgeo1e.html>

<http://www.civilization.ca/civil/egypt/egcgeo2e.html>

<http://www.civilization.ca/civil/egypt/egcgeo3e.html>

Music in ancient Egypt:

<http://nefertiti.iwebland.com/timelines/topics/music.htm>

<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/kelsey/galleries/Exhibits/MIRE/Introduction/AncientEgypt/AncientEgypt.html>

Life in ancient Egypt:

<http://www.kent.k12.wa.us/staff/dbishop/egypt/life.html>

Growing up in ancient Egypt:

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/egypt/dailylife/genders.htm>

Egyptian jokes, tall tales, and life in ancient Egypt:

<http://members.aol.com/Donnclass/Egyptlife.html#KATHRYN>

Procedure/Sequence

Students will view a video of the region, at which point a discussion concerning geography and settlement should be implemented. Have the students refer to the map of Egypt. They will discuss how histories might be constructed from artifacts. Discuss with them how a contemporary musician might be facilitated by archaeological discoveries when composing their own “music of ancient Egypt.” For example, if a musician wanted to play some music that might be authentic to the time, would it be helpful if he or she saw some of the old instruments that have been recovered? Could they perhaps make music that sounded like the music of ancient Egypt on a replication of those old instruments? By seeing the old instruments, could the musician get a better idea of the sounds that they might have made? There is no recording of the music of Ancient Egypt, and all the musician has to work with are the artifacts.

1) Introduction

Tell the students that they will look at a map of Egypt and talk about the physical geography and settlement of the region. In addition, they will view a video, listen to some music and talk about what it might have been like to be a musician living in ancient Egypt.

2) Using the map

Using the classroom map, have the students describe the map of Egypt:

- 1) What shape is Egypt?
- 2) What kind of boundaries does it have?
- 3) What are the political boundaries?
- 4) What are the natural boundaries?

Have them look closely at the settlement patterns of Egypt and discuss the role of the Nile River:

- 1) Why are most of the cities along the river?
- 2) What is so important about the river?
 - a) Transportation
 - b) Renewal of fertile soil
 - c) Water for irrigation
- 3) Why are there very few cities away from the river?
- 4) What kind of environment do you think is away from the river, in the interior?
- 5) How and why does the Nile River flow north, up the map?

3) Video

Show short video, *Egypt: Habit of Civilization*.

Ask the students to pay close attention certain points of the video. For example:

- 1) How large is the river?
- 2) What type of musical instruments do you see?
- 3) How did people make a livelihood using the Nile River?

Have the students talk about what they saw. Ask them what they think it might be like to live in Egypt.

4) Discussing images of musicians and musical instruments

Hand out copies of images of musicians in ancient Egypt. Help interpret what it is the students are looking at. What can we tell from looking at pictures? (*At this point it will help to talk about artifacts and how we collect history and record what we think we know about ancient civilizations.*)

Can we tell anything about their lives?

What their social status might be?

A helpful source is: <http://nefertiti.iwebland.com/timelines/topics/music.htm>.

Hand out copies of images of musical instruments from ancient Egypt. Again, it is important to stress that all our information comes from artifacts and that the Egyptians recorded their history using a written language of hieroglyphs instead of the alphabet of symbols that we have today. Have the students discuss what sounds the instruments might produce, and pay special attention to whether it would have been a pitched or un-pitched sound and whether it would have been a melodic or percussive instrument.

- 1) Are the instruments similar to any of those we have today?
- 2) What can we tell about the instruments?
- 3) Out of what material do you think they are made?
- 4) Where do you think the material most likely came from?
- 5) How do you think the instruments sounded and why?

Look specifically at some of the instruments and discuss the following:

- 1) What type of sounds do you think this instrument can make?
- 2) Can this instrument play a melody or not? (*melody*)
- 3) Is it a melodic instrument? Why, or why not? (*melodic*)
- 4) What type of timbre do you think these instruments have? (*timbre*)
- 5) Is this a pitched instrument or not? (*pitch*)
- 6) Do you think this instrument is very resonant or not? (*resonance*)

Ask the students which instrument they would have liked to play if they had lived in ancient Egypt.

5) Listening to Music examples on an audio CD

Have the students listen to some musical sample from an audio CD.

Example 1: Flute

“Lélital” (from *Flutes of the World*.)

This is an example of the Ancient Egyptian flute, the *ney*.

The word *ney* is derived from the old Persian word for ‘reed’, and can be interpreted as an abbreviation of ‘reed flute’. The *ney* is also used as a generic term in Arabic for several types of folk flutes. The Egyptian use of the *ney* is dated back to the 3rd millennium BC and is still played today. The *ney* is also used in traditional music in Turkey, Central Asia, and in all Arab countries.

- 1) What type of timbre do you think these instruments have?
- 2) Is this a pitched instrument?

Example 2: Strings

“The Land of the Blessed” from *Ancient Egypt* performed and composed by Ali Jihad Racy.

The long solo is played by the *buzuq*, a long-necked lute with frets.

- 1) Discuss different string techniques (plucking, bowing etc.)
- 2) How many instruments can you hear playing in this piece?

6) Have the students write a short, one-paged autobiography as a musician in ancient Egypt

Assessment

- 1) What is the importance of rivers in human settlement?
- 2) How does the natural environment affect social structures such as religion and economics? How does it affect daily life?
- 3) What can we learn from the artifacts that are left behind by ancient civilizations? Why are they important to preserve?
- 4) How does geography have an affect on trade and what affect does trade have on the development of civilizations?
- 5) What is a melody? What is timbre? Pitch?
- 6) What are some of the roles music plays in ancient society? How are they similar to today? How are they different?
- 7) How might some instruments be more resonant than others? Why?