

Shaw Pong Liu: *Painting the River: The Art of Chinese Writing Educational Guide, Grades K-8*

About the Performance

In a vivid sonic and visual journey, Shaw Pong invites listeners to draw pictures as she performs Chinese and original music on the violin and erhu. Following each song and creative drawing, Liu shares the visual history of each Chinese character based on the same subject - river, flower, and horse - showing how each character evolved from an ancient drawing over thousands of years. Liu joyfully shares the physical pleasure - and precision - of writing each Chinese character, as students have the chance to try writing Chinese themselves. Listeners will end the journey with a set of their own hand-made drawings and Chinese written characters!



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. Understand how written Chinese uses characters
2. Understand the pictographic origins of Chinese characters
3. Learn to write 4 different Chinese characters
4. Learn the name and sounds of the traditional Chinese instrument, erhu

Essential Questions

1. How is Chinese writing different from English writing?
2. What are some ways that animals helped humans develop technology? (Hint: with musical instruments as well as how Chinese writing evolved)

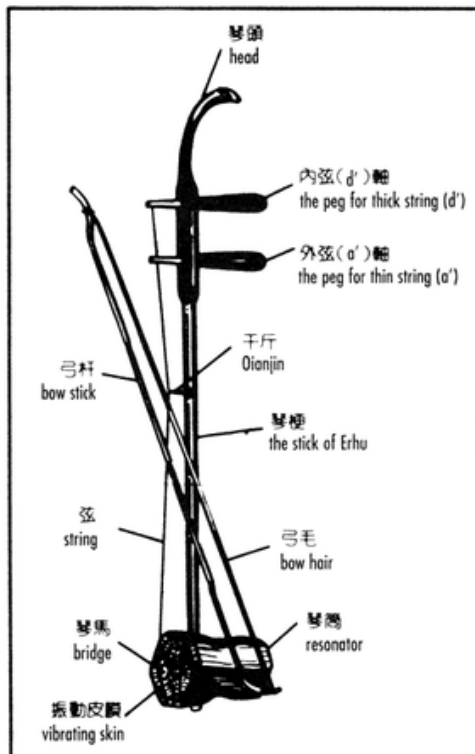
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Vocabulary

- Character - written symbol that represents a spoken word in Chinese
- Erhu - traditional Chinese two-string instrument using horse-hair bow
- Stroke Order - specific order of brush strokes used when writing a Chinese character

Key Facts and Cultural Context for Students

Anatomy of the Erhu



The Erhu is an ancient Asian instrument, brought to China during the Han dynasty (~140 B.C.). It is a member of the huqin family. Bowed instruments became popular in China during the Sung dynasty (A.D. 960-1279). The Erhu is one of the most widely used bowed instruments in China. This two-stringed instrument is played with the bow between the strings in a push-pull manner. The sound box is covered by a serpent skin which gives the instrument its distinctive tone of color.

Throughout its history, the Erhu has been constantly improved, so that its tone is now mellow and bright, similar to the violin, yet more soulful and expressive. Its lower tones sound forceful and lavish. The mid-tones are gentle and touching, while high tones turn clear and bright. This changeful character makes it possible for the Erhu to perform music with a variety of moods.

Played with a variety of techniques, it is now extremely popular for both solo and orchestral performances. In classical Chinese music the Erhu is melodic, haunting, ever changing, and alive. The traditional style of playing is rich in ornamentation, giving the music a deep, three-dimensional quality.

Here is a great source for more! [Erhu Facts for Kids](#)

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ERHU MUSICAL NOTATION

Shown here 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 gives relative pitch compared to the tonic or key: numbers indicate the note pitch value. The number 1, for example, means the note 'G' if the piece is in the key of G. The number 6, which opens the piece below, means the note "E" which is a 6th above G, and so on. The timing of each note is indicated by the horizontal lines beneath the numbers.

二 泉



The image shows two examples of Erhu musical notation. The first example includes a Western staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#), with a tempo marking of quarter note = 48-58. Below the staff is Chinese notation consisting of numbers (0, 6, 5, 8, 4, 3) with horizontal lines underneath indicating note duration. Above the numbers are various symbols: a 'n' with a tilde, a '2' with an accent, another 'n' with a tilde, '1' with a tilde, '12' with a tilde, and a '3' with a 'v' above it. Dynamics markings 'p' and 'mp' are placed below the staff. The second example shows a similar notation with a 'p' dynamic marking and a 'mf' dynamic marking.

No line means a quarter note (with extensions to longer values indicated by a single quote mark), one line means an eighth note and so on. Rests are indicated by the number 0. A dot between note numbers indicates the equivalent of a dotted note in western music. The symbols above the numbers indicate fingering (via numbers in Chinese writing), bowing, various techniques and ornamentations and which string to play.

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Pre-Show Activity: Secret Message Chain

In this activity, we will explore languages spoken by students in the classroom, and experiment with creating symbols to represent a word.

Materials:

- physical marker for a mountain (chair or table)
- physical marker for a river (piece of blue cloth or paper)
- paper and writing utensil for students

Steps:

1. Divide the students into 2 teams (seated in proximity to one another).
2. Designate one part of the room as the mountain, and one part of the room as the river, with physical markers (or signs saying the words in English)
3. Tell students: You are on an important mission and must find a way to get an important secret message to your international team about where to meet: at the mountain, the river. Pretend that your teammates don't all speak English, so you need a secret language that is somehow understandable without using English.
4. Brainstorm as a class all the ways to have a secret message.
5. What about a different language than English? Does anyone speak another language? Say the word "mountain" or "river" in different languages spoken by the students. Teacher can write these words on the board, encourage everyone to practice each language shared.
6. Uh oh, all the teams know the same languages right now. How about a written secret message?
7. Have each student draw two symbols - one representing a river, the other representing a mountain. Fold each paper in half to keep it secret!
8. Secret message chain: Each message is only good for one pass. Teacher (or someone on each team designated by the teacher) decides where each team should meet, and passes their secret message to the next person. After reading the message, the next person passes their OWN message on to the next person, etc. Make sure you pass the correct message!
9. Testing the message: Last person in line has 10 seconds to quietly, stealthily get to your meeting place (Lights out/or play a short song/count-down 10 seconds)

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Post-Show Activity: Chinese Message Chain

In this activity, you will review the four characters learned in *Painting the River*, as well as practicing ancient Chinese character writing.

Materials:

- Slides provided by the artist with ancient Chinese characters as well as animated videos of the modern characters.
- 4 small pieces of paper for each student, and a drawing or writing utensil.

Steps:

1. Divide into 4 groups.
2. You are on an important mission and must find a way to get an important secret message to your team about where to meet: at the mountain, the river, at the garden or at the stable. You must use Chinese characters to avoid being detected.
3. Designate one part of the room as the mountain, and one part of the room as the river, one part of the room as the garden, one part of the room as the stable with physical markers (or signs saying the words in Chinese)
4. All: Practice writing one ancient character as well as the modern character for each of the four words: 山, 江, 花, 馬. Fold each paper in half to keep it secret!
5. Secret message chain: Each message is only good for one pass. Lights out, total silence. One person on the team decides where to meet and passes their secret message to the next person. After reading the message, the next person passes their OWN message on to the next person, etc. Make sure you pass the correct message!
6. Testing the message: Last person in line for each team can quietly, stealthily get to your meeting place (count-down 10 seconds)

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Further Resources

- [The Story Behind Chinese Characters](#) - Excellent 6-minute YouTube video by Yoyo Chinese
- [Chinese Etymology](#) - an online dictionary with visual history of each Chinese character (searchable by Chinese character input)

Curricular Connections

Visual Art K-8

Creating

1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. Generate artworks that integrate ideas with new materials, methods, and approaches. (V.Cr.01)
2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. Organize and plan an idea using a variety of self-selected strategies (e.g., sketches, prototypes, rough drafts). (.V.Cr.02)
3. Refine and complete artistic work:
 - a. Refine an artistic work by making changes to specific elements, such as color, form, or space. (.V.Cr.03.a)
 - b. Investigate and invent new techniques and approaches using two- and three-dimensional materials. (V.Cr.03.b)

Presenting:

6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. Formally present a piece of artwork (i.e., personally speak about the artwork, as opposed to just having the work displayed) that makes connections to other disciplines. (V.P.06)

Connecting:

10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. Describe and demonstrate personal artistic style and preferences. (V.Co.10)
11. Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. Identify influential works of art from different periods and their impact on the artistic world. (V.Co.11)

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Curricular Connections

Music K-8:

Responding

- 7. Perceive and analyze artistic work. (M.R.07)
- 8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (.M.R.8)
- 9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. Demonstrate active listening as an audience member (e.g., noticing details, making connections). (M.R.09)

Connecting

- 10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. Make connections between personal experience and a musical work. (M.Co.10)
- 11. Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. Identify how musical ideas and traditions migrate with the people who originated them to affect other cultures, historical periods, and musical genres and styles (e.g., immigrant European folk music). (M.Co.11)