



## Music Around the World

### Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading

Music is a timeless form of expression. There are many ways to define music, but one definition is *a pleasing organization of sounds*. Music in some form has been a part of culture throughout history. For this particular program, we will examine music traditions from three different continents: Africa, Europe, and South America. Because there is a wide variety of music found in any given place, we will be more specific in our focus of each continent. In Africa, we will learn about the west coast, while in South America we will visit Argentina, and in Europe we will talk about England.

### **Africa**

Long ago, the people of Africa told stories about their environment, in other words, the flora and fauna around them. Eventually, they began telling the stories through song, which became the music of their culture. Instruments were created using natural resources. The music of early Africa was based on where the people lived.

There are many instruments native to Africa including the mbira, the shekere and the djembe, each used to help tell a story. Of the many instruments, the African talking drum was especially suited for communicating messages.

The talking drum is an hourglass shaped instrument that is unique in its ability to mimic the tone, rhythm, intonation, and stress of human speech. The unusual design of the drum in combination with the tightening and loosening of the strings is what creates the variations of sound. The drummer holds the drum under his arm and manually tightens or loosens the strings while using a curved stick to beat on the face of the drum. This manual tightening of the drum strings allows the drummer to change the tone while playing, thus allowing more detailed messages to be sent over long distances.





The talking drum was first used by traveling poets and storytellers known as griots in West Africa. Later uses for the talking drum included religious rites and traditional ceremonies. It continues to be a popular instrument for musicians today.

## England



Morris dancing is a form of dance that became popular in England many years ago. It is considered to be a folk dance because it was danced by the folk people who lived in villages. People made up dances that represented life in their particular village. The dancers wore particular costumes and carried implements to further depict life in their area. Dancers were usually accompanied by an ensemble of local musicians playing folk music. During the Industrial Revolution, Morris dancing became especially popular as a way to alleviate the boredom associated with factory work and as a way to perhaps make a little bit of money during performances.

Dating back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Border Morris is a style of dance that originated around the Wales – English border. Border Morris is danced in two lines, with dancers participating musically by tapping sticks together. The music that accompanies the Border Morris is usually a traditional English folk tune. However, the instrumentation for the ensemble can vary depending on the troupe that is dancing.

Border Morris is unique in the Morris dancing tradition because the dancers wear black face paint. This tradition of black face paint originated from the working conditions of the musicians and dancers in the local coal mines. The miners would finish their work still dirty from the black coal and then proceed to the street where they would perform with the local Border Morris troupe. Their tattered black clothing and sticks were also meant to represent working in a coal mine.



## Argentina

Although developed in Germany, the bandoneon made its way to Argentina at the turn of the century. Considered to be part of the accordion family, a bandoneon is smaller and does not have a keyboard. Instead, it has buttons that produce individual sounds when pressed. The player uses button combinations to make chords. Both hands are used to play melody and accompaniment music.

Other features which set the bandoneon apart are its particularly long bellows and almost square sides often with beveled corners.



The bandoneon was named after its designer Heinrich Band who was a music dealer and teacher in Germany. In the 1840s, Band experimented with improvements to the German Konzertina (Concertina), which included significantly extending its range of tones. He named his design – the bandoneon. The bandoneon soon became a favorite folk instrument all over Germany, leading eventually to the development of the accordion which was easier to play.

European sailors and immigrants took the bandoneon to South America. The instrument found a new home in the cafés of Buenos Aires (Argentina) and even neighboring Uruguay. The bandoneon's arrival in Argentina coincided with the creation of a new dance called the tango. Thus, the bandoneon became the most characteristic instrument of the tango orchestra.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in the blanks based on the reading.

1. Music in Africa began as stories about \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The African talking drum is unique because \_\_\_\_\_.
3. How does the drummer change the tone of the drum as he beats it?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Why is each Morris dance unique? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What type of music is played for Border Morris Dancing? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Why do Border Morris dancers paint their faces black? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How is a bandoneon different from an accordion? \_\_\_\_\_
8. The bandoneon was invented by a man from what country? \_\_\_\_\_
9. How did the bandoneon get to South America? \_\_\_\_\_
10. The style of music most associated with the bandoneon is \_\_\_\_\_.





## Music Around the World

### Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading Questions **KEY**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in the blanks based on the reading.

1. Music in Africa began as stories about their **environment/flora and fauna**
2. The African talking drum is unique because **its ability to mimic the tone, rhythm, intonation, and stress of human speech.**
3. How does the drummer change the tone of the drum as he beats it? **The drummer holds the drum under his arm and manually tightens or loosens the strings while using a curved stick to beat on the face of the drum.**
4. Why is each Morris dance unique? **People made up dances that represented life in their particular village.**
5. What type of music is played for Border Morris Dancing? **Traditional English folk tunes**
6. Why do Border Morris dancers paint their faces black? **To represent working in a coal mine**
7. How is a bandoneon different from an accordion? **Smaller, buttons rather than keys**
8. The bandoneon was invented by a man living in which country? **Germany**
9. How did the bandoneon get to South America? **sailors and immigrants**
10. The style of music most associated with the bandoneon is **tango.**