



Performer Spotlight Engagement Guide:

Vân Ánh Võ

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Cal Performances Department of Artistic Literacy Staff:
Rica Anderson, Interim Director of Artistic Literacy

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How to use this Engagement Guide

If you have photos or lesson plans to share, please let us know! Use #VanAnhVo@cal

This engagement guide is organized around 4 key artistic practices (as identified by the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards at <http://nccas.wikispaces.com/>)

Investigating: Questioning, exploring and challenging.

Imagining: Opening the door to what's possible, and even to what seems impossible.

Creating: Making artistic choices with a work of art in mind.

Connecting: Reflecting on both process and product and making connections to other aspects of life and study.

This Engagement Guide invites exploration before and after viewing the video, giving each student tools to make personal and meaningful connections as they watch. You'll be able to link to specific subjects that you or your students may want more information about.

We've included engagement activities to lead your students through before they view the video, and a post-viewing activity for artistic practice and reflection. By no means should you feel limited by these suggestions! Go, make art, learn more...and share your experiences where you can.

Arts Engagement: More than learning basic information about a performance, we think real arts engagement starts with having the skills and knowledge you need to connect meaningfully with works of art. Through these engagement guides, we aim to give you and your students a glimpse into the artistic process, and the opportunity to work on the same kinds of challenges the artists strive to solve creatively. We hope the next time you see a performance you'll use the insights you gained exploring the artist's process to connect with a work of art, and thus deepen your experience as an audience member.

Student audiences engaged in the arts come to understand that every artist draws from a core set of concepts skillfully chosen and applied in performance to create a work of art both unique to the artist, and connected to other works of art.

And along the way, we hope that students of all ages—and their teachers and adult mentors—will be inspired to experiment with artistic decision-making and creativity themselves. *Enjoy the performances in this video!*



About Vân Ánh Võ

A fearless musical explorer, Vân-Ánh Võ is an award-winning performer of the 16-string đàn tranh (zither) and an Emmy Award-winning composer who has collaborated with Kronos Quartet, Alonzo King LINES Ballet, and Yo-Yo Ma. In addition to her mastery of the đàn tranh, she also plays the monochord (đàn bầu), bamboo xylophone (đàn t'rung), traditional drums (trống) and many other instruments to create music that blends the wonderfully unique sounds of Vietnamese instruments with other genres, and fuses deeply rooted Vietnamese musical traditions with fresh new structures and compositions.

Coming from a family of musicians and beginning her study of the đàn tranh from the age of four, Van-Anh graduated with distinction from the Vietnamese Academy of Music, where she later taught. In 1995, Vân-Ánh won the championship title in the Vietnam National Đàn Tranh Competition, along with the first prize for best solo performance of modern folk music. In Hanoi, Vân-Ánh was an ensemble member of Vietnam National Music Theatre as well as a member of the traditional music group Đồng Nội Ensemble, which she founded and directed. She has since performed in more than fourteen countries and recorded many broadcast programs in and outside of Vietnam.

Since settling in San Francisco's Bay Area in 2001, Vân-Ánh has collaborated with musicians across different music genres to create new works, bringing Vietnamese traditional music to a wider audience.

Her productions are unique in that they often include a community component leading up to her performances, including community workshops that engage participants in the topic that has inspired Vân-Ánh to create these productions. Under President Obama's administration, Vân-Ánh was the first Vietnamese artist to perform at the White House and received the Artist Laureate Award for her community contributions through the arts.

Notes on the Music

The Trouble

Composed, arranged, and performed by Vân-Ánh Võ. Instruments include the đàn T'rưng (Vietnamese xylophone) đàn bầu, đàn tranh and Ohira Daiko drum. Backing track: recorded by Robin Whitehouse & Vân-Ánh Võ with Jimi Nakagawa on taiko drum set, Gary Haggerty on tar Hu, and Vân-Ánh Võ on temple blocks, Vietnamese traditional drum set.



Vân-Ánh Võ on *The Trouble*:

“The Trouble is inspired by the kind of singing created by street buskers (someone who performs on the street for money.) The đàn bầu was invented by beggars, and originally the instrument wasn’t accepted within the royal court ensemble (musicians who play for the king and queen) because it was associated with the lowest class of society. Of course, in later periods the royal court ensemble did include this beautiful instrument.

The song’s lyrics tell the story of a beautiful lady whose husband had to follow the king’s call to protect the country. Although he promises to be home soon, time passes and she doesn’t hear from him. Eventually, her hometown is invaded by the enemy and to avoid being taken prisoner, she blinds herself and becomes a busker. She travels with her mother-in-law to find her husband and feeds and supports them both through her playing.

The courage of the woman in the story inspired me to write the song. My collection, *Songs of Strength* is about women’s empowerment and the sharing of voices, especially the voices of immigrants.

When I create music, I look for ways to share more than just the lyrics and the melody as that’s just one dimension of the song. I give each of my instruments a solo, they each represent a voice telling their story, and each of their voices adds to the collective voice making the message bigger and stronger.

While I play the song by myself in the video, when I play live I like to play with my ensemble members, of course. In performance, we extend the solo parts, so each ensemble member can share their own voice and express the ‘trouble’ they identify with. This way it almost becomes a different song, and goes beyond the border of Vietnam to include different cultures, and different stories.”



Gnossienne No. 3

Composed by Erik Satie, transcribed and arranged for đàn bầu and performed by Vân-Ánh Võ. Backing track: Vân-Ánh Võ on bass đàn tranh.

Vân-Ánh Võ' on *Gnossienne No. 3*:

“When I like someone’s music and it stays with me, I want to find a way to express it, to play it. As an instrumentalist and composer, I look for ways to reinterpret a piece of music, and share how I feel when I hear it, especially if it is by a famous composer, or was written long ago.

But my principle is to transcribe and arrange a song only if it provides a vehicle for me to share the beauty of the (Vietnamese) instruments, and my voice. If a song is beautiful but doesn’t have that quality, then I’ll just enjoy it myself.

I love the music of Erik Satie because there are unexpected turns in it, and he takes me to different lands, new corners of the world I never knew about. It’s like reading a good book, and turning the page and discovering something fascinating that you didn’t expect. When I heard this piece I felt I had to transcribe and rearrange it for the đàn bầu.

One great challenge for this piece was that I didn’t want to just adapt the arrangement for the piano, that would be the easy way out. So, I first studied the arrangement for the piano, and transcribed it for my bass đàn tranh, then from there I was able to transcribe and arrange it for the đàn bầu.

While his musical arrangement for the piano flows very nicely, the reason you feel a sense of mystery and discovery is that he uses a lot of accidental notes – a lot of sharps and flats, and it jumps everywhere. This is fine for the piano where there are lots of notes, but on my đàn tranh I only have certain strings, and it’s only built for a pentatonic scale (a scale with five notes in each octave.)

But I love the piece so much that I had to rearrange it in a way that kept the spirit or soul of the arrangement, and sounded like it was arranged for the đàn bầu. I instilled what I felt about the song into the melody, and found a way to show the singular pairing of the đàn bầu with this piece. You come away feeling that only the voice of the đàn bầu can express the nuances of this piece in ways that no other instrument can, and that the piece highlights the sound of the đàn bầu to its best effect. It feels very natural, as though Erik Satie arranged the piece for this instrument.”

Queen of The Night

Composed, arranged, and performed by Vân-Ánh Võ. Backing track: Vân-Ánh Võ on the following instruments, in the order played:

- Cồng (nipple gongs)
- Sáo một lỗ (one hole flute)
- Đàn Mỏ (lip-pluck made from an artillery shell)
- Sanh Tiền (coin clapper)
- Chén (tea cups)
- Vietnamese traditional drum set
- Đàn Tranh (zither)
- Electric bass

Vân-Ánh Võ on *Queen of the Night*:

"I created this song to perform with the Kronos Quartet at the London Olympic music festival in 2012. The song is inspired by the spiritual music we have in northern Vietnam (Hát chầu văn), and is based on a folk song. I was fascinated with the music in the song, so when Kronos asked me to share a new piece that would energize the audience, I thought of this song. There are both written and improvisational parts, and I tried to emphasize different images, the different sounds of the instruments, and to give other artists the opportunity to express themselves when performing the piece.

In Vietnamese culture, we have a spiritual ceremony in which people can connect with loved ones who have died. A "shaman" – always a man dressed as a woman to channel the female aspect or spirit – sings and dances as the participants all around them shout encouragement.

The song praises a goddess or "saint". In Vietnamese culture, there are different kinds of saints, different characters, but the most popular one is the firstborn child. The firstborn is often the most highly regarded in the family because it's their responsibility to take care of their siblings and parents. The lady in this song is regarded as the firstborn child, she's generous and strong, and a role model we admire and try to imitate.

The song's lyrics tell of how beautiful the lady is, how she comes back to take care of all of us, and that we thank her for always being there. The shouting between the phrases represents the participants shouting encouragement like, "You dance very nicely, can you continue?"

This ceremony is very interesting to me on many different levels, and I hope to hold it locally someday. It shows that long ago our culture recognized LGBTQ identity, as a transgender presence is at the core of this ancient ritual. And I appreciate that there are both energetic and quiet sections within the ceremony."



About the Instruments



The Đàn T'rung

The Đàn T'rung or T'rung is a popular musical instrument from the Central Highlands of Vietnam and is closely associated with the spiritual life of the ethnic minority groups in that region, the Bahnar, T'Sedan, Giarai, and Ede, among others. Đàn T'rungs vary in size and are made of short bamboo tubes of different sizes, with a notch at one end and a slanted edge at the other. The large, long tubes produce low-pitched tones while the short small ones make high-pitched tones. The tubes are arranged lengthwise horizontally and attached together by strings.

History of the Đàn T'rung

One of the earliest instruments developed in Central Vietnam, the Đàn T'rung was often played alongside the flute and pan-pipe. After a day of farm work, villagers might gather around a fire in the communal Rong house to sing, dance, and play instruments. With its bright upbeat sound, the instrument is often played at weddings, ceremonies, and festivals alongside drums and gongs, as the community sings and dances to traditional songs.

Over the years, the Đàn T'rung has evolved to hold as many as 48 tubes in multiple layers, and musicians are able to perform intricate traditional and modern songs upon it. Some performers hold a stick notched at both ends to produce two sounds at the same time, heightening the complexity of the instrument's sound. The Đàn T'rung is also one of the only traditional Vietnamese instruments upon which you'll hear the chromatic scale (usually found in Western music.)

The Đàn Bầu

If a sound were chosen to evoke Vietnam, for many it would be the sound of the đàn bầu, one of two traditional musical instruments that originated in Vietnam. The đàn bầu is a monochord, or single-stringed instrument. (Đàn, means a stringed instrument, and bầu means gourd, because the instrument was originally made with a dried gourd.)



Instrument Description

Originally, the đàn bầu was a tube zither -- a stringed musical instrument with a tube that functions both as an instrument's neck and its soundbox (the hollow chamber that forms the body of a stringed musical instrument and provides resonance or heightens the sound.) It was made of just four parts: a bamboo tube, a wooden rod, a dried gourd or coconut shell half, and a silk string. Strung across the bamboo, the string tied to one end of a rod that sat upright on the bamboo

tube. The coconut shell or gourd was attached to the rod, serving as a resonator (the hollow part of a musical instrument.)

Over the years, a wooden soundboard has replaced the bamboo tube, a metal string is used instead of the traditional silk string, and the rod is made from buffalo horn. A decorative wood piece has replaced the gourd. A tuning peg made of wood or bamboo is located toward the bottom of the soundboard, inside the frame. The metal string threads through a small hole at the end of the instrument and attaches to the tuning peg. Musicians may also pluck the string with a pointed stick of bamboo or rattan.

History of the Đàn Bầu

While the earliest written records date the đàn bầu's origin to 1770, scholars estimate it to be at least one thousand years older than that. According to legend, long ago when farmers worked in fields with baskets strapped to their backs, after work they would tie their baskets to stalks of bamboo. During the night when the wind blew, the baskets' strings would vibrate and the tuneful sounds that arose inspired them to create stringed instruments with silk threads and hollow bamboo.

Another origin legend about the instrument tells of a blind woman who played it in the marketplace to earn a living for her family while her husband was at war. Whether the story is true or not, the đàn bầu has historically been played by blind musicians.

Often played solo, the đàn bầu is central to Vietnamese folk music, which is still popular in the country today. Traditionally, the instrument also accompanied poetry readings. Today, electronic amplifiers help project the instrument's delicate sound, and the đàn bầu is played in a variety of musical ensembles, including contemporary Asian pop and rock groups.

Playing the Đàn Bầu

While playing the đàn bầu can look easy, it actually requires considerable precision. With a wooden pick, the musician plucks the string with right hand, touching it lightly at certain points with the side or heel of the hand to produce harmonies. The left hand bends, presses, releases and vibrates the flexible rod thereby varying the tension of the metal string. This causes the pitch to rise or fall, notes to be lengthened or shortened, and allows the musician to play trills.

The Đàn Tranh

The đàn tranh is a plucked zither from Vietnam, believed to be descended from the Chinese guzheng, and similar to the Japanese koto, and the Korean gayageum. It has a long wooden soundbox with steel strings, movable bridges and tuning pegs positioned on its top. (A bridge is a device that supports the strings on a musical instrument and transmits the vibration of those strings to another part of the instrument— typically a soundboard, such as the top of a guitar or violin—which transfers the sound to the surrounding air.)



The soundbox consists of a curved top plate, a flat bottom plate, and six side-pieces. Steel strings tuned to the pentatonic scale and consisting of varying diameters run the length of the soundbox. Bridges for each of the strings sit across the middle of the box. Musicians usually wear picks made of metal, plastic, or tortoise-shell to pluck the strings.

History of the Đàn Tranh

The original đàn tranh of the 13th and early 14th centuries had 14 strings, but by the 19th century it had evolved to 16 strings. In the mid-to-late 20th century a 17-stringed đàn tranh came into common use and has since become a preferred form of the instrument throughout Vietnam. However, larger instruments with 22, 24, and 25 strings have been created since the 1980s.

Today, the đàn tranh remains a popular Vietnamese musical instrument and is played in solo performance, to accompany a singer, or as part of various instrumental ensembles.

Playing the Đàn Tranh

Musicians pluck đàn tranh strings on one side of the instrument's bridges with their right hand to produce a melody, and on the other side of the bridges use their left hand to "bend" the notes, allowing for subtle tones with a quiet and delicate sound that reverberates through the hollow wooden box.

In traditional music, performers use 2 or 3 fingers (thumb and index, or thumb, index and middle fingers) to pluck the strings. However, in newer compositions, musicians may use four or five fingers on each hand to pluck the strings. In these new works, the musician may also use their left hand to play two simultaneous parts.

At times, the đàn tranh is played with a bow, traditionally the musician bows the strings to the right of the bridges with their right hand, while the left hand presses the strings on the other side of the bridges to vary the pitch and vibrato.

Learn more about traditional Vietnamese music: <https://medium.com/@aiminguyen7/short-guide-to-authentic-traditional-vietnamese-music-and-dance-for-tourists-459ed4375d9e>

About Vietnam

From National Geographic Kids:

<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/countries/article/vietnam>



Geography

Vietnam is a long, narrow nation shaped like the letter s. It is in Southeast Asia on the eastern edge of the peninsula known as Indochina. Its neighbors include China to the north and Laos and Cambodia to the west. The South China Sea lies to the east and south. The mountains of the Annam Cordillera rise over most of the western side of Vietnam, while a thousand-mile (1,600-kilometer) coastline dominates the east.

At its narrowest point, Vietnam is only 30 miles (48 kilometers) wide. Two of Vietnam's largest rivers, the Mekong in the south and the Red in the north, end at the South China Sea in huge swampy plains called deltas. These regions are home to most of the country's people and provide fertile ground to grow rice and many other crops.

People & Culture

Most Vietnamese people live in the countryside, mainly in the river delta regions of the north and south. Recently though, people have begun to move to the main cities of Ho Chi Minh (formerly Saigon) and Hanoi.



The most popular sports in Vietnam include soccer, table tennis, volleyball, and martial arts.

Vietnamese food is a blend of Chinese and Thai styles and features seafood and homegrown fruits and vegetables.

As a communist country, Vietnam has no official religion. But people are free to worship if they want to, and many follow what's called the "Three Teachings" of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

FAST FACTS

OFFICIAL NAME: Socialist Republic of Vietnam

FORM OF GOVERNMENT: Socialist republic

CAPITAL: Hanoi

POPULATION: 97,040,334

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE: Vietnamese

MONEY: Dong

AREA: 127,123 square miles (329,147 square kilometers)

MAJOR MOUNTAIN RANGE: Annam Cordiller

MAJOR RIVERS: Mekong, Red, Ma, Perfume

Nature

Vietnam's mountainous terrain, forests, wetlands, and long coastline contain many different habitats that support a great variety of wildlife. Some 270 types of mammals, 180 reptiles, 80 amphibians, and 800 bird species reside in Vietnam. Many rare and unusual animals live in Vietnam, including giant catfish, Indochinese tigers, Saola antelopes, and Sumatran rhinos. The government has set up 30 parks and reserves to protect its animals, but their survival is in doubt because much of their habitat has been cleared for lumber or to grow crops.



Vietnamese farmers plant rice in terraces carved out of the hills.

Tropical forests once covered most of Vietnam, but over the past few hundred years, logging has reduced the forest cover to only about 19 percent. The government has launched a replanting program in an attempt to restore these woodlands.



Government & Economy

Vietnam is a socialist state governed by the Communist Party of Vietnam. A president, chosen by the National Assembly, is head of state and commander of the armed forces. An appointed prime minister runs the government.

Vietnam's main exports include crude oil, seafood, rice, shoes, wooden products, machinery, electronics, coffee, and clothing. Between 1975 and the late 1980s, Vietnam traded mainly with other communist countries, but since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, it has expanded trade with other nations.

History

Vietnam's first civilizations arose in the Red River Valley some 5,000 years ago. These northern tribes flourished until 207 B.C., when their region was conquered by a Chinese lord, who established a kingdom called Nam Viet.

In 111 B.C., Nam Viet became part of the Chinese empire, which ruled the north until A.D. 939, when a Vietnamese commander named Ngo Quyen organized a revolt that drove the Chinese out. Later dynasties renamed the country Dai Viet and gradually extended their territory south. By the mid-1500s, Dai Viet was divided between rival kingdoms: the Trinh in the north and the Nguyen in the south.

In 1802, a Nguyen lord, with the help of the French, defeated the Trinh and renamed the country Vietnam. By 1890, however, France had taken over Vietnam.





Japan took control briefly during World War II, and when the war ended with Japan's defeat in 1945, Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the Vietnamese Communist Party, declared Vietnam an independent nation. French attempts to retake Vietnam led to war with the communist Vietnamese, called Viet Minh. Fighting ended in 1954 with the partition of the country into communist North and non-communist South Vietnam. In 1957, communist rebels in the south, called Viet Cong, rose up. War between the North and South ensued, and other countries, including the United States, Russia, and China, soon became involved. The fighting lasted until 1975, when the communists overran the south and took its capital, Saigon.

Engagement Activities

Engagement Activity #1 (Before viewing the video)

MAPPING TOGETHER: *Where My Family Is From*

Overview

Time needed: 20-30 minutes (can be extended with layers of exploration).

Students will reflect about where their families' roots are and how the stories, songs, foods, and traditions from those places might still be part of their lives.

Guiding Questions

As far back as your family knows, where did your people come from?

How many countries are represented amongst us?

Artistic Tool Box

Attentive listening. Close Observation. Multiple Perspectives. Cultural Stories, Songs, Foods and Traditions.

Supplies and Prep

- Large map of the world
- Sticky notes or removable tape
- Writing materials (journal, paper, writing implements)



Instructions

Growing up in Vietnam, Vân-Ánh Võ attended a conservatory of music where she was trained in Western classical music. But feeling something was missing, at around age 12 she began to seek out masters who taught her traditional genres of Vietnamese music, like folk songs, and music connected with spiritual practice. Are there songs your parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents have taught you that tell you about the culture and traditions they were raised in?



Step 1 **Homework Assignment:** Ask students to interview family members (a grandparent, parent, aunt, uncle or guardian) to discover where their ancestors came from and where other family members might still live.

Students should also ask:

- What traditional, folk, or even just older songs does your family member(s) remember from when they were young?
- What kinds of foods did they eat?
- What are some cultural or family traditions (or rituals) they had or still have?
- What were some favorite sayings in their families?

Students may record the interview with their family member, but should also write key points down. (They'll return to these notes later.)



Step 2 **Display a large map of the world** and ask students to indicate where their ancestors came from, and mark that on the map with the students' names on post-it notes, or different colored markers. This can be from within the U.S. (e.g., parents moved from Ohio), or from anywhere in the world.

Step 3 **Songs.** Ask students to write the titles or short descriptions of songs they've learned from parents, grandparents, or other elders individually in their journals, or together in groups on large sheets of paper.

Step 4 **Look at the map** with your students and reflect together on how this one classroom contains so many journeys.

Step 5 **Share** some of the song titles or descriptions students wrote about. Invite volunteers to sing some of the songs they've remembered.

Step 6 **Reflect together** on what you heard and learned from each other.



Engagement Activity #2 (Before viewing the video)

Music Travels With Us and Within Us

Overview

Time needed: 30-60 minutes (can be extended with layers of exploration).

Students will reflect on their family's songs, stories, foods, and traditions, share them in small groups, and seek both what is shared across cultures and what is unique and different among them.

Guiding Questions

How does music and other cultural traditions move with us through our lives?

What do we have in common through the music, food, stories and traditions we have from our families?

Artistic Tool Box

Attentive listening. Multiple perspectives. Cultural Traditions.

Supplies and Prep

- Writing materials (journal, paper, writing implements)
- Chartpad or large paper or whiteboard for each group to take notes.
- Different colored markers for each student within a small group.

Instructions

Step 1

Warm Up

- Physical warm up and vocal expressiveness.
- Shabooya Roll Call or other familiar call-and-response

Step 2

Introduce theme

If I say to you music travels with us, what does that mean to you?

There are few things that distinguish who we are and where we come from more than music and the comfort food of home. These are two things we carry with us wherever we go. Music can be both food and spiritual nourishment. After a terrible earthquake in Haiti years ago, a woman who was trapped under rubble for 7 days kept her hope alive – and was found – through her singing:

<https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/one-year-later-singing-quake-survivor/1921812/#:~:text=One%20year%20ago%2C%20an%20LA,t%20be%20afraid%20of%20death.%22>

In Chile, 33 miners trapped underground for 69 days, continued to sing their national anthem to keep their spirits up, and to help rescuers find them:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/27/trapped-chilean-miners-video>

Music speaks for us and to us, and sharing it is part of what keeps us connected to one another. Now, let's explore the song traditions, food traditions and other cultural traditions of your families and communities.

Step 3

Individual Reflection

- Ask students to sit for a few minutes and revisit the notes they took from their interview with an elder family member. What were the songs, the foods, the cultural traditions that their elders shared?
- Now, ask students to identify in writing (or drawn images) at least two songs, two foods, two cultural or family traditions, and two sayings that they remember people in their family using.
- Model this first, saying then writing on a board to share songs, food, traditions, and sayings in your family. Choose things you are comfortable sharing with your classroom.

Step 4

Small Group Work

- In groups of 3-5, ask students share with one another their interview notes, and what they just wrote down.
- As they discuss one another's contributions, ask them to notice where they have things in common with another person, and where they have things that are unique for just one person.
- Take a moment to celebrate what's shared and what's different – they both are opportunities to enjoy other people.



Step 5

Everyone's Contributions

- After all students have discussed their traditions, give each group a large piece of paper and be sure that each student within a group has a different colored marker, so that each student's contributions will be visible in the color marker they are using.
- Ask each group to write on the shared piece of paper the things that they shared in common, each student using their marker to make their contributions.
- Then, ask each person to write in their marker what was the one thing in their list that made them unique. Remind students to enjoy the things that make them unique.

Step 6

Whole Group Reflection

Ask each group to share what they discovered from one another: what they had in common, and what was unique. Celebrate the process and the discoveries.

Step 7

Back to the Map

- Give each group a unique color of yarn or removable tape. One group at a time, ask students to go back to the map and connect all the places where people in their group came from. Whatever shape this creates, this color line represents their group.
- Take time to notice and name all the different connections. Ask each group what they particularly notice about the way their group intersects on the map. When completed, celebrate the color and creative chaos of the map. Consider leaving this map up as a representation of the diversity of the class.



Optional Musical Activity:

- In their groups, ask students to choose one of the songs an elder family member shared.
- After doing some research on that song (listening to versions of it online, reading about it) ask students to return to their groups and sing some or all of the song together.
- Now, invite them to add or change some elements of the song. They might consider including:
 - A section where they rap
 - Call and response
 - Adding body rhythms, or different rhythms
 - A section where they improvise
 - Changing the melody in a section of the song
 - Adding another or different harmony
 - Repeating a section of the song

Encourage them to experiment, and be as creative as they wish!

- After rehearsing a few times, ask each group to share their song with the class. Consider recording these songs and continuing to work on them even after students have seen the video featuring Vân-Ánh Võ.

Engagement Activity #3 (Before viewing the video)

Sound Envelopes

In musical sound, an *envelope* describes how a sound changes over time. For example, when Vân-Ánh Võ plucks a string on the đàn tranh or đàn bầu, we immediately hear the note, follow the sound for a period of time, then hear it gradually decrease in volume and fade into silence, or be replaced by another note. Sound envelopes contain what are called the *attack*, *decay*, *sustain*, and *release* of each sound.

The attack describes the initial build up of a sound, from when we first hear a note, to when the sound is almost at its most intense. Although we usually understand the word decay to refer to

something rotting, in music it refers to when the sound has reached its peak to the time the sound's volume begins to fade. Sustain is the period of time when we continue to hear a sound even as it decreases in volume. And release refers to the final fading of the sound into silence.

Every musical instrument has its own unique attack, decay, sustain, and release pattern, as you can hear when Vân-Ánh Võ demonstrates each of her instruments. We'll explore the idea of a sound envelope and its elements of attack, decay, sustain, and release.

Overview

Time needed: 30-60 minutes (can be extended with layers of exploration).

Students will examine the elements in a sound envelope using their bodies, and through homemade instruments.

Guiding Questions

How do we hear a note or sound from start to finish?

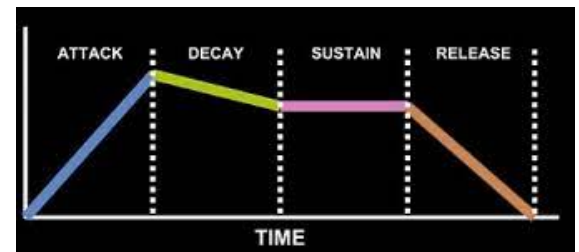
What may influence the pitch and volume of sound on instruments (even simple instruments we can make at home?)

Artistic Tool Box

Attentive listening. Movement expression. Experimentation. Deconstructing sounds.

Supplies and Prep

- Space to move around
- Rubber bands of various lengths and widths
- Empty tissue box or paper/plastic cup
- Computer and internet access to watch sound envelope video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-ot9AaJx-Y>



Instructions

Step 1

Warm Up

- Stretch the parts of your body you need to move or stretch right now. You can reach your arms up, reach out to your sides, bend over and touch your toes, roll your hips, etc.
- Standing up straight, quickly punch your arm into the air and at the same time say the word, "Attack". Freeze in place for a moment with your arm still in the air.
- A few seconds later unfreeze and begin moving while saying the word, "Decay".
- As your arm drifts slowly down to your side, say the word, "Sustain".

- And when your arm has relaxed and completely stopped moving, say the word, “Release.”
- Your body has now experienced the four stages of a sound envelope. (Naturally, we slowed down the time it normally takes from when we hear a note struck to when it fades into silence.)

We’re going to physicalize attack, decay, sustain, and release again, but this time let’s make a sound to go with our gesture.

- *Attack*: Think of a strong, quick gesture you can make with your hand(s), as well as a sound to accompany it. On the count of three make your gesture and sound: 1...2...3 – Gesture and sound!
- *Decay*: Hold your gesture and keep your sound going for several seconds. Then, unfreeze your gesture and begin to move (your movement can drift down or float up.) Simultaneously, begin slowly lowering the volume of your sound.
- *Sustain*: Slowly move out of your gesture and decrease the volume of your sound.
- *Release*: Make your body absolutely still, and your voice completely silent.
- Reflect together:
 - How did it feel to experience a “sound envelope” with your body?
 - What did you notice about each of these stages of a sound envelope?

Step 2

Listening for Attack, Decay, Sustain, and Release

We’re going to make very basic musical instruments out of rubber bands, paper cups and tissue boxes. Then, we’ll listen for attack, decay, sustain, and release in the notes we’ll make with our instruments.



- You’ll need an empty tissue box or a plastic or paper cup, as well as rubber bands, preferably of different widths and lengths.
- If you’re using a tissue box wrap a few rubber bands of different sizes around the box so they stretch lengthwise around the box.
- If you’re using a cup, stretch two rubber bands of different sizes so they cover the opening and the bottom of the cup.
- Now, pluck one of the rubber bands. As you make the note, listen for the attack, decay, sustain, and release of this sound. What do you notice?
- Try it with a different rubber band. What do you hear now? How is the attack, decay, sustain, and release different from the last note?
- Keep experimenting, and begin to listen for different things. For example, which rubber bands make a higher or lower sound (called pitch in music.) Are some louder than others? Notice the qualities of the rubber bands, how do these qualities help shape the sound that’s made?
- Reflect together:
 - What did you hear when you made notes with your rubber band instruments?

- How did you hear attack, decay, sustain, and release differently with notes made from each rubber band?
- What was each note's timbre (characteristic quality of sound)?
- Complete your session on sound envelopes by watching *What is the envelope of a sound?*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-ot9AaJx-Y>
- When you watch Vân-Ánh Võ's video, notice how and where you hear attack, decay, sustain, and release in the music she plays. (Notice also how she vibrates the notes, especially on the đàn bầu and đàn tranh, to sustain the sound longer.) Then, discuss together, sharing what you heard and observed in her performances.

Continue your explorations in sound and making instruments by visiting the following websites:

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/tune-up-your-rubber-band-guitar/>

<https://www.thecrafttrain.com/paper-cup-music-crafts/>

https://pbskids.org/designsquad/pdf/parentseducators/DS_TG_Unit2_Sounds_full.pdf

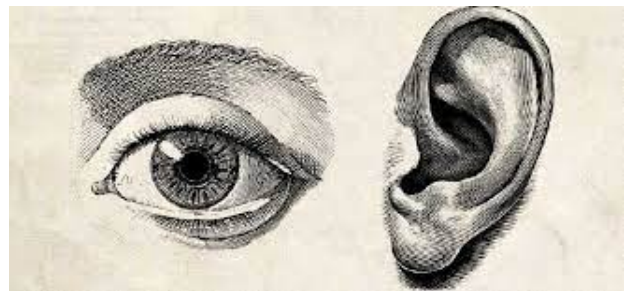
Engagement Activity #4 (After viewing the video)

REFLECTION: LISTENING AND OBSERVING

Overview

Time needed: 20-30 minutes (can be extended with layers of exploration.)

Students will reflect on Vân-Ánh Võ's performance pieces in the video through individual reflection and group discussion to understand how an artist's choices influence our experience of a performance.



Guiding Questions

How does separating what our eyes and ears experience during a performance from our interpretations and feelings about that performance help us to see how artists' choices evoke a specific response?

How does Vân-Ánh Võ bring together Vietnamese musical traditions with other genres of music?

How does Vân-Ánh Võ evoke each instrument's unique sound in the course of her performance?

Artistic Literacy Tool Box

Attentive observing. Categorizing aural and visual information. Listening and responding.
Musical genres or styles.

Supplies and Prep

- Writing materials for students (journal, paper, writing implements)

Instructions

Step 1 **Think back** to Vân-Ánh Võ's performances in the video and jot or sketch some of your memories.





- What were melodies, spoken sections, and instruments you heard?
- What stood out, or was most memorable to you?

Step 2

What did you See and Hear?

In order to understand more about the composers' work, and the choices made by the musician (and even those of the videographer who filmed and edited the video) it helps to understand the actual elements of the performance, not what we may be interpreting or projecting that we heard or saw using our imaginations.

- Before you jump into sharing your impressions of the performance, try to remember what you actually saw. (Not what was in your imagination or "mind's eye", but what visual information your eyes took in.)
- Share with others the images and elements you saw in the performance.
- Now, think back to what you actually heard. (Again, not the impression the music made on you, but the sounds your ears actually took in.)
- Share with others the sounds and music you heard.

SEE 	HEAR 
THINK 	FEEL 

Step 3

What did you Think and Feel?

Now let's talk about how the choices of what music to include and what to show visually, brought up certain thoughts and feelings for you.

- What do you remember thinking as you watched Vân-Ánh Võ perform?
- What did you wonder about? What other impressions, images or even stories came to mind when you were watching?
- And how did you feel as you watched Vân-Ánh Võ perform? What emotions came up as you heard the songs and saw her perform on the different instruments?

Step 4

Discuss:

- Describe the music you heard. What seemed familiar, and what was unfamiliar to you? Was there a moment you experienced both something familiar and unfamiliar at the same time? (For eg. a familiar melody played on an unfamiliar instrument.)

- What did you notice about your listening as you watched Vân-Ánh Võ perform? Were there moments when you listened more attentively? If so, why?
- What surprised you about the performance? Did you have an expectation at the beginning that changed as you watched the video?

Suggestion for Teachers: Notate for the class what your students saw, heard, thought, and felt.

You might consider seeking curricular connections in history, science, or literature. If you design a lesson that you'd like to share, please let us know! We'd like to include it future teacher resources.

Resources

Vân-Ánh Võ's web site: <https://www.vananhvo.com/>

Vân-Ánh Võ's NPR Music Tiny Desk Concert:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y02Rv8sQzw>



Articles

Vân-Ánh Võ Transforms a Refugee's Odyssey into a Musical Performance:

<https://www.kqed.org/arts/11260223/van-anh-vo-transforms-a-refugees-odyssey-into-a-musical-performance>

Vân-Ánh Võ: Meaningful Conduits: <https://www.innerviews.org/inner/vo.html>

From Vietnam to America: Q&A with Musician and Composer Vân-Ánh Võ:

<https://caamedia.org/blog/2016/01/20/from-vietnam-to-america-qa-with-musician-and-composer-van-anh-vo/>

Online Resources

Short Guide to Traditional Vietnamese Music and Dance For Tourists:

<https://medium.com/@aiminguyen7/short-guide-to-authentic-traditional-vietnamese-music-and-dance-for-tourists-459ed4375d9e>

An Overview of Vietnamese Traditional Music: <https://www.govietnam.tours/vietnamese-traditional-music/>

Examples of Traditional and Folk Music of Vietnam:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvpmcx90I7Q>

Books

- *Viet Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present*, by Ben Kiernan
- *Vietnam – Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture*, by Culture Smart! and Geoffrey Murray
- *The Vietnam War: An Intimate History*, by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns

Children's Books

- *All About Vietnam: Stories, Songs, Crafts and Games for Kids*, by Phuoc Thi Minh Tran, Dong Nguyen, et al.
- *The Land I Lost: Adventures of a Boy in Vietnam*, by Quang Nhuong Huynh and Vo-Dinh Mai
- *Water Buffalo Days: Growing Up in Vietnam*, by Huynh Quang Nhuong, Jean Tseng, et al.
- *Goodbye, Vietnam*, by Gloria Whelan
- *Song of the Mekong River: Vietnam* (Global Kids Storybooks), by Na-mi Choi and Sinae Jo
- *Vietnam War: Discover the People, Places, Battles, and Weapons of America's Indochina Struggle*, by DK Eyewitness Books





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