

**Listening to Learn: Learning to Listen  
Lessons from the Griot Families of Mali**

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**Abstract**

The lessons in these units are geared toward classes with a high percentage of English Learners at the elementary (2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade) level. Using lessons from the Griots, West African musicians and storytellers, teachers will be encouraged to add rhythm and music (call-and-response singing) to language instruction and daily routines. Students will analyze documentary footage of drum-making and the at-home music training of Griot children in Mali. They will make their own drum and write an explanatory essay on how it's done. Inspired by the Griots, there are lesson ideas for students to become documentarians themselves where they will transcribe and translate a story from one of their elders, preserving family history, home language, culture, and traditions.

**Keywords**

Elementary Education, ESOL, ESL, Els, Griot, drumming, documentary, home-language, Mali, Africa, music, Color Vowel Approach, language learning

**Content Objectives**

Writing this curriculum unit in the spring of 2021, after a year of online teaching, seems surreal but also quite hopeful. I write with the hope that we will be fully in-person again in the fall and that I will once again divide my time between working with small groups of beginning-level English Learners (ELs) and co-teaching with four different second grade teachers in our large multi-cultural school where 46% of our students are enrolled in the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) program. So much has changed because of this pandemic, and hopefully teaching will look quite different when we go back. All teachers and students have become more tech savvy and have discovered new platforms for delivering content and for students to present their thinking and learning. However, after more than a year of seeing each other only on a screen, I am surely not alone in feeling the need to engage all students in body, mind, and spirit in order to create a caring classroom community. Through these mini-units, I propose we do this by incorporating rhythm, music, and movement into our everyday routines and lessons.

The units presented here are based on what I've learned throughout the seminar, "Listening to Contemporary African Music: History, Politics, and Human Origins" with

Dr. Carol Muller of the University of Pennsylvania. My overarching goal is to introduce “Africa” in a culturally responsive and creative way to our elementary students in order to inspire curiosity about their own and other cultures. Students will learn that we are all “related” because we all come from Africa, and that across all cultures and time periods, humans have been making and responding to music. By learning about the musical families of the Mande people of West Africa called the *Jeli*, (Griot in French), students will be inspired to explore and share the stories and music of their own ancestors. Through incorporating drumming and call-and-response singing as a part of the daily classroom routine, teachers can create a learning community that gives every student, especially newcomers learning English for the first time, a chance to participate in their new classroom culture and to practice the sounds of their new language in a meaningful and non-threatening way.

To you, the teacher-reader, I encourage you to consider adapting any of these mini-units with your 2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade students. While all units were inspired by the coursework and curiosity of its creator, teachers can adapt the lessons to meet their own interests and those of their students.

**Problem Statement #1: How can we teach in a more culturally responsive way so that all students feel seen and valued?** As in many schools in Philadelphia, our students tend to associate with other students who speak the same language or look like themselves. During this divisive time in politics where we’ve seen an increase in overt racism toward Asians and other immigrant groups, and civil unrest due to continued institutional racism made more tragic by numerous police killings of innocent black citizens; our school, like many others, is *attempting* to make shifts in our thinking and our teaching so that we become more actively and intentionally Anti-Racist. Now more than ever we will need to engage students in ways that create safe learning communities with culturally responsive planning and teaching to help students feel they are seen, heard, and valued by teachers, administrators, and other students.

**Why teach about Africa?** If you were to ask any of the K-5th grade students at my large, urban, elementary school what they know about Africa, they may reply with the names of some animals that live there: elephants, zebras, giraffes, lions. A few may have seen images of children living in extreme poverty from television commercials appealing for sponsorship. Depending on what books they’ve read or movies they’ve watched, they might describe Africa as having tribal people living in huts and villages wearing grass skirts or brandishing spears. This

“constant association of Africa with animals, poverty and exotic behaviors affects the perception of African American and black heritage around the world. Such deficit images of Africa contribute directly to racism leading many black children in the U.S. to want to distance themselves from any association with their African heritage. (Randolph, B. and DeMulder, E.,

“I Didn't Know There Were Cities in Africa!” Teaching Tolerance 34, Fall 2008)

In order to counteract any “single story” of Africa (Adichi, C. N., “[The Danger of a Single Story](#).” TED Global, July 2009,) students must understand that Africa is a large continent with 54 countries. Students must become aware of the rich diversity in languages, culture, and music. Students also need to know that all of humanity descended from the same 1,000 people who left Africa nearly 70,000 years ago. We are all related in this way. We are all cut from the same genetic cloth. (Davis, W., “The Worldwide Web of Belief and Ritual,” TED talk, 2008.) Interwoven into that cloth are the threads of rhythm, melody, harmony, and dance, because music has a way of touching our soul, whether we are making it, dancing to it, or simply listening to it. “All cultures have music, and all human beings are capable of creating and responding to music.” (Wallin, Merker, and Brown, “The Origins of Music,” 1999.)

*Choosing a Focus – Lessons from the Griots.* Learning about the different regions of Africa through the lens of music has been a fascinating adventure. Choosing a focus for creating a curriculum unit has been challenging, as there has been so much from which to choose. As part of our coursework, Dr. Muller asked each teacher/learner to deeply explore one region of Africa in order to present a playlist to our colleagues in the seminar. I chose to explore the music of Mali, as I had a friend who had lived there doing Peace Corps work and whose son later received a Full-bright scholarship to study music there. I had heard their son play the kora (a 21-string calabash harp) and found the sound to be enchanting. However, what really sparked my interest was seeing the documentary film “Growing Into Music in Mali” filmed by Lucy Duran in 2009-2012. I wanted to know more about the Griot families and to explore how they transmit their musical knowledge to their children and preserve their culture orally through music.



NB. Griot is the French word for the Manding word **Jeli**, or **Jali** depending on the region. **Jaliyaa** is the craft of Griot. **Jeliw**, **Jalolu** is the plural form of the noun, and the feminine form is **Jelimuso or Jalimuso** (muso = woman) again, depending on the region. However, for the purposes of this paper, I will simply use the terms Griot(s) (masculine) or Griotte(s) (feminine).

Griots originated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Mande Empire around the time of Sundiata, the Lion King (see “References” for more information about the Empire of Mali and about the legend of Sundiata Kieta). Griots were a social caste that served the noble caste as counselors, praise-singers, diplomats,

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historians, genealogists, teachers, and more. This video clip from “Growing Into Music in Mali” does the best job of explaining the role of the Griot. [CLICK HERE](#)



The Griots only survived and prospered if the noble or warrior-family they served prospered. They kept track of all births, marriages, deaths, battles, and other tribal histories. Griots were also said to have the ability to see the future. As musicians, Griot families specialized in a particular instrument: the 22-key heptatonic balafon, the ngon (4-string lute), the kora, or the djembe drum.

Traditionally, only men and boys were taught to play these instruments in addition to singing, while the women were relegated being singers and dancers. The role of Griot was passed down from father to son, mother to daughter. You had to be born Griot. Today there are state-sponsored and private schools that teach Griot arts, however, they focus on the musical aspects and not the verbal skills.

***How can we teach and learn like Griots?*** Ethnomusicologist and filmmaker Lucy Duran has spent over 30 years travelling from the UK to Mali to do research on Griot families and to help top Griot performers record albums. She was curious to learn how the children in these Griot families become musicians. “Was this down to individual motivation, musical environment, nurtured development or natural talent, or a combination of these?” (Duran, 2015). She reports that most Griots feel a sense of duty to pass their knowledge and skills to their children. This struck a chord with me, as I, too, am from a musical family. Elders shared stories of the strict home environment in which they had learned music, sometimes even getting beatings from their fathers or teachers if they did not make progress.

My German grandfather was a violinist who made sure all four of his children learned to play a musical instrument. He, too, was strict in making sure his children practiced. My mother and her sisters all felt an obligation, a duty, to encourage their children to become musicians, and our Thanksgiving holiday, for all the years of my life, has always meant playing in the family orchestra after dinner. Eighteen years ago, after one Thanksgiving dinner, I announced that I was going to be adding a new member to our clan. I said, “I am going to have a violinist,” as we were bottom-heavy at the time since my grandfather, the violinist, had passed away, and a cousin violinist was living on the West Coast and not making it back to Philly for every Thanksgiving. Since I am a Suzuki-trained cello teacher in addition to being an ESOL teacher, I was eager to teach my daughter violin using this method.

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Shinichi Suzuki developed the “mother-tongue approach” to teaching music which stemmed from his belief that just as all children learn to speak their native language, so can they learn to make music. Listening, being *immersed* in the language of music, is essential in this approach, as it is in the Griot families. Having the parent as one part of the teaching triangle, making music, and teaching music at home, is also essential in this approach. Watching the footage of Griot parents teaching their children, promising a treat if they could just play a little longer, reminded me of the hours I spent encouraging my daughter to practice her violin.

In addition to parental involvement in the Suzuki method, weekly group lessons are a key component of instruction. In group lessons, students have *fun* with the songs they are learning, play with students who might be at a higher level, and prepare for a performance. Duran summarized what she saw as some of the keys to success in the Griot method of oral transmission:

“immersion in the music in order to absorb its grammar, before taking up an instrument; giving preference to correct movement over exact execution of notes, for example when hitting the keys of a balafon; learning through performance with a group of peers, not all of the same musical level, with minimal intervention of an expert adult; not stopping the music to correct mistakes, in the belief that the mistakes will gradually correct themselves; emphasizing confidence and group cohesion as the most important step to nurture budding musicality in each individual. Ultimately, this process is unselfconscious. (Duran, 2015)

As a musician and language teacher, I see many parallels between music and language: the importance of listening, both have structure, both have rhythms as English is a time-stressed language, and both language and music can be learned in the same ways. Five-time Grammy winner, American bassist, Victor Wooten, gave a TEDTalk called, “Music as a Language” where he described his experience of being born into the role of bass player because his four older brothers needed a bass player for their band, much the same way we needed a violinist in our family orchestra. He said he wasn’t “taught” music but learned it much the same way children learn their first language. Wooten says, comparing music to language learning, “Even as a baby, you’re ‘jamming’ with professionals all the time... to the point where you don’t even know you’re a beginner.” He said the first thing his brothers did was play music around him and then put a toy guitar in his hands. It wasn’t about the instrument, he was learning to play music, not the instrument. “A mistake music teachers make is teaching the instrument before kids understand music,” Wooten posits. He urges that we teachers “put [it] into context,” and context is what’s needed when teaching ELs. Teaching with visual cues and language geared toward “comprehensible input +1” ensures that all students have a basis for understanding; they already know something about the subject matter. Even though our students don’t speak

English, they already know so much about language. Wooten makes the point that children instinctively know what it means when a mother raises the pitch of her voice, or the father lowers his. We must always build on what students already know. They surely all know music; it's a universal language.

In addition to applying Griot/Suzuki-style music teaching techniques to language learning, through these mini-units I hope that teachers might find ways to incorporate more rhythm, movement, and music into their daily curriculum and routines. Brain studies on the impact of music on learning show a lot of promise. Brain studies on the Broca area link verbal fluency, phonological processing, attention in speech, grammar processing, and sentence comprehension with non-verbal functions, including processing sequential sounds, working memory, mirror neuron systems, motor inhibition, object manipulation, and music enjoyment (Bernal et al., 2015.) It goes without saying that activating more neurons, creating opportunities for more neural connectivity, means there's more learning occurring. In a more recent study, Hilda Israel of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University found that "the application of song and music as a teaching and learning tool showed that classroom motivation was affirmed, resulting in creative and enhanced language performance." If you are familiar with School House Rock, you may have experienced the ease of learning the Preamble to the Constitution or your three times-tables ("Three Is a Magic Number) because of the catchy songs and cartoon videos. These are the reasons why I am sharing lesson ideas for adding rhythm and song, especially geared toward ELs, starting with beginning-of-the-year instruction and routines.

***What can we learn from viewing and making documentaries?*** Through watching clips of "Growing Into Music in Mali," students will be able to identify the features of a documentary film and, over the course of several sessions of "viewing," they will use "close reading" skills to learn how to take notes from documentary footage with subtitles. They will use observation skills to think and talk about what they see, hear, think, and wonder. Students will compare and contrast two clips – one of a young boy learning to play the drum and one of a pre-pubescent girl who is learning to sing.

Each viewing will have questions that move higher up on Blooms Taxonomy, including synthesizing information from the two sources and using inferencing skills to make meaning of what they read in the subtitles and what they see and hear from the children. We can also identify some character traits of the two children based on what we see and hear in the documentary clips.

Rokia Kouyaté is shown learning to sing a jeli song about her specific jeli heritage. Our students could write and sing their own songs about their heritage. They could imitate the melodies found in the documentary or create their own melodies. They could show

photographs, if they have them, or draw pictures, to create an iMovie and share in Quick Time if they are too shy to sing in front of a live audience.

Through the documentary and other viewing/listening, they will learn how to identify the sounds of four essential musical instruments from the Mande culture: the 22-key heptatonic *balafon*, the *ngoni* (4-string lute), and the *kora* (21-string calabash harp) and the *djembe*, *jembe*. Students will broaden their view of what we can learn and know about a place and a group of people by studying their musical heritage.

In addition to learning about the musical instruments played by the Griot, students will have a chance to become documentarians themselves and report on a family story in their home language. Doing projects requiring students to use their heritage language is another way to remind students and stakeholders that there is so much value to be found in honoring the teaching that happens at home, the knowledge of the home language, and the knowledge our students and their families bring from other countries.

We also must encourage and celebrate our students and their families who are truly bilingual. Too often English supplants the home language, and children forget or never truly learn the language of their parents and grandparents. One reason this happens might stem from the harried, hard-working lives of our immigrant parents who often find little time to spend reading with their children or telling stories in the home language. It may also be because our young students often bridge the gap between their parents' country of origin and navigating life in Philadelphia by playing the role of interpreter in the family for phone service, electric bills, even with teachers. This gives younger students a sense of power, sometimes power they are not quite ready to assume. For younger siblings, the language of "Do your homework," "Go to bed," and general scolding becomes the home language, and English becomes the FUN language of the older brothers and sisters. Who wants to speak the bossy language of the parents? Sometimes, parents mistakenly think that speaking English at home will serve their children better. Yet so much is lost when the home language is forgotten, including a connection to the past, the wisdom of elders, and, potentially, our students' culture, heritage, and beliefs. Singing and knowing lyrics in another language could surely help students become, or remain, bi-lingual, and teachers can foster this in school by letting students share music from their home country to teach to the class. All students could learn songs in their classmates' languages, just as all students can learn a song, new for *all* of them, when they learn a children's song from Ghana. Depending on the interests of your students, you may want to pick a particular *kind of* song – like a lullaby – and learn it in all of the languages of the students.

Watching video footage from "*Growing Up in Music*," of parents teaching their children music at home will, hopefully, instill a pride among our own students in all that they can learn from their parents, grandparents, and other elders. Whether they're from Iraq, Bangladesh, China, or Brazil, our students bring a wealth of knowledge that must be highlighted and valued in school. As documentarians, they will use iMovie to create a

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digital story by recording the voice of a relative, speaking their home language and transcribe and then translate the story into English in order to add subtitles. Students will use Google Image, take pictures of family photos, draw their own pictures, or use a combination of images to illustrate their family story. It may be one of a celebration, a special memory, their immigration story, or a memory of music. (For the purposes of this curriculum unit, I am including a lesson plan on eliciting a story about music from a relative.) In addition to posting the stories to a class website, students could share their stories at an “Author’s Day” where parents and other family members would be invited to come celebrate our budding documentarians.

**Problem Statement #2: How can we encourage greater oral production of language among ELs in an all “push-in” program?** The School District of Philadelphia has, for the past six years, promoted more inclusion of ELs in the general curriculum by promoting “push-in” versus “pull-out” language instruction. Prior to 2015, all first-fifth grade newcomers and beginning level students scoring between a 1.0 and a 2.9 on the WIDA ACCESS test were taught in a “pull-out” program during the 120-minute literacy block. ESOL teachers provided sheltered instruction where they could teach basic interpersonal communication skills as well as the academic language needed in all subject areas so that students could return to the classroom for math, science, and social studies better prepared to learn. Students at a level 3.0 and higher received “push-in” instruction where an ESOL teacher would support the instruction provided by the general education teacher by going into the mainstream classroom and either co-teaching or pulling a group of students to work off to the side or in the back of the room. Classroom teachers and ESOL teachers often find it challenging to meet the needs of newcomers and beginning level students in an entirely “push-in” model. We know students need to move their bodies and have many chances to practice the sounds of English by chanting, singing or simply repeating words and phrases. This may be disruptive if done in the back of the class, or children may feel self-conscious if they’re the only ones moving and chanting. How can we encourage this kind of learning when we co-teach? Where are the opportunities?

According to author and long-time ESL teacher Judith Haynes: *English learners benefit when teachers are*

- scaffolding lessons so that they have a chance to shine amongst their classmates and participate in classroom instruction, discussions, projects, and assignments.
- immersing them in a continuous communicative experience with their monolingual peers in order to acquire English.
- implementing comprehensible input +1 so they can learn in their own setting.
- allowing them to stay in the classroom every day so they don’t feel “different” from their peers.

*Teachers benefit because they are*

- collaborating in planning lessons that include language, skills, and content goals ELs need to perform successfully.
- modeling best practices/strategies for ELs and for all learners.
- demonstrating what makes us language experts and what we can contribute to instruction.
- working in small groups after the lesson is delivered, just like teachers differentiate throughout the day.
- scaffolding so ELs can participate at every level of proficiency in accountable talk, academic conversations, and tasks.
- providing a continuity of instruction that is seamless for the learner.
- ensuring that our students' experiences are valued the same way as those of their monolingual peers (Haynes, J. Pull-Out vs Push-In ESL Programs in Elementary Schools, TESOL International Association Blog, February 25, 2016.)

Haynes recommends a hybrid model, with some pull-out for newcomers, however, there is so much potential for the co-teaching model, if we just unleash it!

As a teacher of ELs, I've studied the Color Vowel Approach with its creator, Karen Taylor, and have been implementing this approach with my ELs. (See <https://colorvowel.com>.) In addition to addressing the 16 different vowel sounds of the English language in an engaging way that stresses the importance of what we hear and what we feel in our mouth, this approach emphasizes listening closely to hear the particular vowel sounds of the stressed syllables in words and phrases as a way to improve comprehensibility. English is a time-stressed language, so understanding how to produce those stressed syllables correctly is key for speaking and being understood. Adding music and rhythmic chants with body motions can help give beginning ELs a chance to practice their oral language skills in the whole-class setting in a fun and engaging way. Therefore, I suggest beginning the year by introducing the Color Vowel Chart and introducing vocabulary by using hand motions, drumming, and call-and-response singing as part of the daily morning routine or circle time.

Incorporating music, rhythm and movement into our classroom curriculum is essential for language learning as it provides opportunities for all students to participate, regardless of language level. It is important for social and emotional learning as well, for you must be fully "present" to be engaged in making music with your peers. Singing or chanting with a group reduces solo performance anxiety, and making music together is a great way to foster a caring and creative classroom community.

The following units include many ideas as teaching suggestions that I hope to explore in greater detail in the future. Not all of these ideas have detailed lesson plans. If there is an \* next to the objective, you will find a more detailed lesson plan below. If there are two

\*\* , then you will find links with resources for these lesson ideas on the unit webpage entitled “Learning to Listen, Listening to Learn.” (Link found in Resources)

### **Unit Objectives**

#### **Unit 1 – One Beat, Many Rhythms** *Students will be able to:*

- 1) Use knowledge of *Color-Vowel* chart and pronunciation of each other’s names in order to chant, rhythmically tap in unison, and sing various name games.\*
- 2) Listen to drumming patterns and respond with routine appropriate behaviors\*
- 3) Describe the history and practice of making a *djembe/jembe*\*
- 4) Create a homemade shaker or drum and compose a “How To” presentation about the experience\*
- 5) Learn to hear, copy, and produce rhythms \*\*
- 6) Explain how drums have been used as a communication tool\*\*

#### **Unit 2 - Lessons from the Griots** *Students will be able to:*

- 1) Identify and explain the purpose of the genre “documentary films” and understand key related vocabulary\*
- 2) Use “close-reading” skills to gather information from viewing documentary footage and reading subtitles, as well as to respond to documentary footage about Griot families\*
- 3) Learn songs by participating in call-and-response singing (i.e., “Kye Kye Koolay” from Ghana \*\*
- 4) Explain the role that Griots played in preserving family and community history
- 5) Take turns leading Call and Response singing as part of Morning Meeting to report the news of the class “Griot”-style\*\*
- 6) Describe music (and/or traditions and celebrations) of their own families, peers, and communities
- 7) Identify some ways in which heritage is passed on through music and/or through various community celebrations, and events
- 8) Compare and contrast music of different ethno-cultural groups from their culture and their classmates’ cultures and/or traditions and celebrations which include music
- 9) Brainstorm all of the different kinds of music (and/or traditions and celebrations) that their family participates in. Choosing one, students will interview parents, grandparents, and or guardians to discover what this musical story is all about\*

- 10) Record their findings on a graphic organizer that will include the following categories: the topic of the interview (music lesson, performance, or experience) who they interviewed, relation to interviewer, the person's country of origin, the first time they remember participating in/or hearing the music, how it was passed down, and how the music (and/or tradition or celebration) has changed in the family since then.\*
- 11) Create a documentary using iMovie about their relative's story. Draw or insert pictures and music to accompany the story and write English (or other) subtitles to translate the story for others
- 12) Discuss the role music plays in a part of daily life to teach, to tell stories, and for religious purposes

**Unit 3 - Geography and History** *Students will be able to:*

- 1) Identify the continent of Africa on a world map
- 2) Compare and contrast the size of different countries and continents with the size of Africa
- 3) Estimate and then count the number of countries in Africa
- 4) Define culture as customs and traditions – define customs and traditions
- 5) Explain that Africa has many diverse regions and cultures
- 6) Make a map or time-line showing the origin of the human species coming from East Africa
- 7) Identify the effect of local geography on the residents of the region (food, clothing, industry, trade, types of shelter, etc.).

**Unit 4 – The Musical Instruments of Mali and Ghana** *Students will be able to:*

- 1) Identify the sounds of the kora, the ngoni, the balafon, and the djembe
- 2) Describe the components of each instrument and how it is played
- 3) Respond to musical selections of each instrument with appropriate vocabulary
- 4) Respond physically or in another artistic medium to the music
- 5) Write and talk about how the music makes them feel.

**Teaching Strategies**

The strategies listed here are specifically geared toward classrooms with a large portion of English Learners. It's important to establish consistent routines that are visual in order to create a low-stress environment for newcomers to learn English. It's important to give all students opportunities to demonstrate comprehension through physical expression and to give them opportunities to become physically involved with language. Students need

many opportunities to interact with their peers in both their native language and in English in meaningful ways. Some well-known strategies include:

**Total Physical Response:** James Asher came up with the Total Physical Response (TPR) method of teaching language by incorporating physical reactions to verbal input. The process is meant to copy the way that babies learn their first language. When students are engaged in TPR activities they experience lower stress, less inhibition, all the while creating a brain link between speech and action to boost language and vocabulary learning.

**Activating and/or Building Prior Knowledge:** For both Els and non-Els alike, we know that students learn better when they are familiar with what they're about to learn. Therefore, teachers must elicit prior knowledge or else build background knowledge. Done well, this part of the lesson should spark curiosity and a learning purpose. Some ways this can be done include:

- Using a K-W-L Chart
- Showing a video, photos, or other visuals to elicit thinking and discussion
- Taking a poll that students respond to physically (e.g., four corners)
- Using Blended Learning – Watching the video with captions in their home language prior to teaching

**Think, Pair, Share:** After viewing, reading, or listening, students will be able to draw, or write in their home language (L1), or in English, their responses and then share them with a partner. The partners can write their ideas on chart paper for the whole class to view.

**Preview, View, Review:** This strategy is based on close-reading where students record just what they see or hear the first time, share their findings, then dig deeper with “real” questions with each additional viewing. Observations, thoughts, and questions should be shared for all to see. This helps us to learn from one another and fosters a sense of community by valuing each other's unique perspectives.

**Include Language Objectives:** ESOL teachers may take the lead here to plan for language learning opportunities. They should ask what are the forms and functions of the vocabulary being used? How can we create authentic speaking tasks that incorporate the new vocabulary to help make meaning and communicate?

**Note-taking with a Partner:** This strategy is especially helpful with Els, as working with a classmate who speaks the same home language but has a higher English proficiency can provide an opportunity for greater understanding. Similarly, bilingual students who have to explain what they've learned in English in their home language, will have to think about what they've learned more carefully.

**Use Sentence Frames:** Having students practice academic language using prepared sentence frames helps build confidence when discussing new topics and ideas while reinforcing new sentence structures and vocabulary.

**Ask Students to Show What they Know in Their Home Language** We could use Google Translate or another student who speaks the same language and is more proficient in English to translate when necessary.

**Play games and have fun:** We know that student engagement increases whenever games are introduced. Students are more likely to learn when they are engaged! Nothing like a little friendly competition to motivate students.

### Classroom Activities

#### **Unit 1 – One Beat, Many Rhythms: Chanting and Drumming**

With the beginning-of-the-year paperwork, send home a letter in all the students' languages asking for students to save any (clean) plastic food containers that have a secure lid and send them to school for our drum/shaker making project.

**Lesson One – Introduction to Color Vowels - Learning the Color of Our Own Names**

**Timeline:** These lessons could last 5-10 days, with 10-15 minute name games and songs becoming part of the morning ritual.

**Objective 1:** Students will be able to identify the color of the stressed syllable in their own and in their classmates' names in order to correctly pronounce each student's name.

**Essential Question:** How can knowing the color of a name or word help us to remember and pronounce it correctly?

**Standard:** CC.1.1.2.D Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

**Materials:** Color vowel chart, blank color vowel chart, projector or smart board to show blank chart, individual blank color vowel charts for students to record their classmates' names, photos of each student, a poster or Color Vowel word wall with the picture of each student in the correct category.

**Rational and Step by Step Guide to Completion:** In a multi-cultural classroom, it's extremely important to learn the correct pronunciation of each student's name and for the students to learn how to say each of their classmate's name correctly. It seems obvious, but not all classrooms spend time really learning every student's name at the beginning of the year. I would start this by introducing the COLOR VOWEL CHART

(<https://colorvowel.com>) and taking a few days to reinforce the color sounds. Students will add each name in the class to their own individual copy of a color vowel chart just for our names over a series of days by "pulling out" the stressed vowel in each name, stretching and opening the hand on the stressed syllable, and identifying its color. For an element of surprise, pull student's names out of a jar. Create popsicle sticks with the students' names on them and move them from one jar to another. DRUM or meat two

different student's names that two different stressed syllables (a one-syllable name vs. a two or more syllable name) and have students guess whose name it is?

**Objective 2:** Students will be able to correctly pronounce each other's name fluently using a rhythmic chant in order to ask and answer the question, "What's Your Name?" Here's a sample of how Karen Taylor, creator of the Color Vowel Approach, teaches this chant:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0brBwmTlu4&ab\\_channel=PureEnglishPracticewithColorVowel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0brBwmTlu4&ab_channel=PureEnglishPracticewithColorVowel) See minute marker 4:30 for the chant.

**MATERIALS:** Create **index cards** with a colored circle and a number on them so that each student has a card. Create a **chart** digitally to be projected during the activity with all different group configurations.

Example: For a class with 24 students:

Red 1, Red 2, Red 3, Red 4

Orange 1, Orange 2, Orange 3, Orange 4

Yellow 1, Yellow 2, Yellow 3, Yellow 4

Green 1, Green 2, Green 3, Green 4

Blue 1, Blue 2, Blue, 3, Blue 4

Purple 1, Purple 2, Purple 2, Purple 4

**Step-by-Step Completion Guide:**

The teacher will chant: "HI, my name is... HI, my name is... HI, my name is...(say name) "What's YOUR name?"

Teacher starts by teaching his/her name and getting all students to repeat. Then start with native speakers of English to model the phrase while having all students repeat.

- Chant while stomping left foot to right
- Chant while patting, tapping, or snapping a steady beat.
- Students can practice with one partner saying their name.
- Students can practice in small groups (see materials and grouping information below)
- Students to gather in smaller groups according to the cards they have. Put all the REDs together, then all the number ONEs together, then Red 1, Orange 2, Yellow 3, Green 4, Blue 1, Purple 2, and so on until all configurations are completed. This may be done over the course of several days.
- Students should get a chance to hear all of the names of their classmates in the circle and then rotate until all students have had the chance to practice all names. List out all possible groupings on slides to show students – use drum beat for changing groups.

Name games: 1) Adding Motions: In a circle, each student can create a motion to go with their name, then call on a classmate in the circle. That person says the previous person's name and does his/her motion, then says their own name adding their own motion and calls on a new person. Continue until all names have been said.

2) Time Trials: in seated positions, one student stands and calls the name of another student and stays standing. That student stands while calling on another student who stands and calls another student until all students (and teachers) are standing. Use a timer (on your phone or a stopwatch) to get a base-line reading and then repeat the activity with students saying the same name they did on the first round to see if the time improves. \*\* Explore the internet for more songs and games that include students' names. In primary classes, refer to the list or word wall of students' names often as a reference for letter sounds. Starting with the familiar and building on what they know will pay off!

Name Songs: This song can be adapted for older kids.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJgTL-dKyJk&ab\\_channel=MononaPublicLibrary](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJgTL-dKyJk&ab_channel=MononaPublicLibrary)

Language form: "His name is..." "Her name is ...." Clap the syllables. Drum and give more emphasis to the accented syllables of the names and of the phrase.

**Assessment:** Students will be able to say each classmate's name in each color vowel category correctly with the correct pronunciation. Students will be able to identify their classmate's names to match their pictures. Newcomer Els should be able to ask and answer the question, "What's your name," and to report on their classmates' names using the correct preferred pronoun his/her.

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### Lesson Two –How to Make a Djembe

**Timeline:** I would suggest two class periods for viewing the video of "how to make a djembe." If you choose to compare/contrast the two videos, you will need at least one more class period.

**Essential Questions:** What materials are needed to create a drum? How can we explain the steps for making a drum?

**Objective 1:** Students will be able to retell the story of the origin of the djembe or jembe, how it got its name and how it is made.

**Standards:** CC.1.5.2.B Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

CC.1.4.2.W Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

CC.1.5.2.A Participate in collaborative conversations with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

**Materials:**

A projector or smart board to show an image of a Djembe drum and then videos of djembe making. Student journals for notetaking. Word bank. Printed or digital images from the videos that students can match to words and or match to captions. Venn Diagrams for the extension activity.

**Step-by-Step Completion Guide:**

**Listening Activity:** Display an image of a djembe drum and tell the students they will take notes on what they hear. Tell this story: The Djembe drum is around 400-800 years old and was created by the Mandé people during the Malain Empire. The name (comes from the phrase "Anke dje, anke be" which) means "everyone come together" in Bambara. According to Bamanakans' mythology, the first djembe was made of gebraffe hide – the hide of a giraffe-zebra mix.

Students are to take notes on what they hear. Teacher should repeat the story again so that students can check their notes. Students will remember this if they have an opportunity to think of two other animals that could be made into a hybrid. How would you divide the name?

**Preview, View, Review** – Students to watch the video first to describe what they see, second to take notes, and third

How to Make a Djembe Drum

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLeede5z1vQ&ab\\_channel=DjembeDirect](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLeede5z1vQ&ab_channel=DjembeDirect)

Students to pause and take notes on what they see happening. Els can have the choice to illustrate or use their home language to describe what they're seeing.

Extension: Watch the Video [There Is No Movement without Rhythm](https://video.link/w/9OqSo) (<https://video.link/w/9OqSo>) Students can compare and contrast portions of the two videos using a Venn Diagram.

**Language Objective:** Students to understand ordinal numbers and the verbs needed to describe the process of making a djembe. Introduce the words on the word chart and watch the video again, pausing to point out where we see the verbs in action.

**Think, Pair, Share:** Students will share their viewing notes with a partner and make any necessary adjustments before preparing a "retelling" of the steps in a "how to" format.

**TPR Modification and Scaffolding:** The ESOL teacher should model the actions of the verbs while encouraging ELs to copy the motions. After some practice together, the teacher then says the verbs and waits for students to perform the motions. Els should write and illustrate, or translate the verbs in their L1, for each step in their "New Word

Notebooks.” **Play a Game:** Students would have fun playing charades, acting out the verbs in each step of making a drum.

Transition Words	VERBS
First, Second, Third, Fourth, etc.  Then, Next, After that,  Last, Finally, In conclusion	Cut the tree.*** Chop the wood.*** Dig out the middle. Smooth the sides. Draw a decoration. Carve the decoration Add the rim. Add the skin. Scrape the fur off the skin. Tighten the drum.  (These steps are seen in the second video only.)



Scaffolding and Modifications: For newcomers, have students match the pictures to the verbs as captions. You can take screen shots of different points in the video and have the students put them in order on Google Slides.

**Listening Activity 2 (optional).** Blacksmiths made the first djembes, custom-fitting the drum to the drummer. Seen as a spiritual act, choosing the tree and making an offering to the tree's spirit was all part of the ritual of drum-making. With the lengue tree, a sacrifice

would be made to ask for permission to cut the tree for a djembe. (Extension: What else do we get from trees? What can we offer trees to show our thanks?) Follow the same note-taking and think, pair, share, comparing steps as above.

**Lesson Three –How to Make a Tupperware Drum**

**Timeline:** These lessons would require 2-5 class periods depending on the age and ability levels of the students and the amount of adult help for editing.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to write an explanatory (“How To”) essay in order to demonstrate how to make a Tupperware Drum.

**Standards:** CC.1.4.2.A Write informative/ explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CC.1.4.2.B Identify and introduce the topic.

CC.1.4.2.C Develop the topic with facts and/or definitions.

CC.1.4.2.D Group information and provide a concluding statement or section.

CC.1.4.2.E Choose words and phrases for effect. CC.1.4.2.F Demonstrate a grade appropriate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

**Materials:** A projector or smart board to show video. [Click Here to See the Video - “How to Make a Tupperware Drum.”](#) A Tupperware, or other plastic, container, scissors, and packing tape (recommended – Uline of Duct Tape)

Word Bank

<u>Nouns</u>	<u>Adjectives</u>	<u>Verbs</u>	<u>Prepositions.</u>	<u>Misc. Directions</u>
Drumhead	Higher	Wrap	Around	go the same direction
Pitch	Tight	Put	Across	
Directions	Opposite	Cut		

Students will be able to make a drum and write a “How To” essay on how they did it. The teacher will use blended learning as they will first watch the DIY “how to video” on their

own before watching it together. Students will write their own "How To" essay or record a video showing how their drum is made. Beginning Els can do this in their home language. NB. Students may need to work with a partner to manage the tape.

"How To" Essay
Name :
Materials: _____ _____ _____ _____
Introduction: _____ _____ _____ First, _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Next,

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---

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Then,

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---

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---

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After that,

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Conclusion:

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**Assessment:** Use this rubric to grade the students' writing.

How To Make a Drum or Shaker				
Use this RUBRIC to plan your writing and for peer-editing. Your teacher will use this to assign a grade to your writing piece.				
	<b>Advanced</b> <i>4 Points</i>	<b>Proficient</b> <i>3 Points</i>	<b>Basic</b> <i>2 Points</i>	<b>Below Basic</b> <i>1 Point</i>
<b>Focus</b>	I very clearly explain the materials and steps needed to create a drum or shaker.	I explain the steps and materials need to make a drum or shaker, but focus may not be very clear.	I have listed the materials and steps needed to make a drum or shaker but may be missing some information.	My list of materials or steps needed to make a drum or shaker is incomplete.
<b>Content</b>	I have used all important details and information connected to the writing prompt.	I have most of the important information and details connected to the writing prompt.	I am missing some information or details connected to the writing prompt.	I have missing many details and information connected to the writing prompt.
<b>Organization</b>	I wrote a strong introduction, body, and conclusion. I used appropriate transitions to connect my ideas.	I need to strengthen some portions of my response. I need to use more transition words to make my ideas flow.	I need to put my explanation in a clear order and add some more transition words.	I need to put my explanation in order and add transition words.
<b>Style</b>	My sentences varied in length, word usage, and structure. My tone and voice are consistent.	I did not use different types of sentences. My tone and voice are not always consistent.	I used few descriptive words. I had little sentence variety. The tone and voice are not consistent.	I used no descriptive words. My sentences all begin with the same word or are not complete. There is no consistent tone or voice.
<b>Conventions</b>	I had fewer than three errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. My writing is neat and legible	I made a few (3-6) errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation, but my meaning is still clear and understandable.	I had many (7 or more) mistakes in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Sometimes my writing is hard to read.	My writing has so many mistakes that it is difficult to read or understand.

**Extension Activities to do with Drums and Shakers:** Students will be able to listen to and follow directions given as Total Physical Response (TPR) to the beat of a drum.

This lesson would ideally be performed with a co-teacher where the teacher models the directions for the co-teacher to follow. Try to use as little talking as possible. A teacher can communicate so much with a smile and a nod vs. a shaking the head and frowning a bit. Body language is universal.

- Sample Commands: Stand up  
 Line up  
 Sit down  
 Look at the Teacher  
 Hands on Head  
 Hands folded

(You can tailor the rhythms and responses to meet the needs of your class routines and procedures.)

**\*When teaching vocabulary** use drums to emphasize the stressed syllables. Have students drum out the letters to practice spelling. High tones could be for consonants, low tones for vowels. Have fun using the drums in “call and response” activities where students copy a leader. Introduce the concept of a drum circle. All of these activities can help foster a classroom community that’s cohesive – in step with one another.

### **Unit 2 Lessons from the Griots**

The following lessons should be done *after* some preliminary lessons on Africa, Mali, and Griots, and in conjunction with learning about the musical instruments of Mali.

#### **Lesson One – Introduction to Documentary Film Viewing**

**Timeline:** Depending on the age and abilities of your students, you may want to spread the viewing over the course of four days – one day for each viewing.

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will be able to use close-reading skills to watch a documentary, read subtitles, and answer questions about the video using inferencing skills.

**Essential Question:** What can we learn about people by watching documentary footage?

**Standards:** CC.1.3.2.B Ask and answer questions such as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

CC.1.4.2.W Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

From “Growing Into Music – Mali”



[VIDEO LINK to Theirre's Drum Lesson](#)

**Build Background Knowledge:** What is a documentary? What is the filmmaker doing? What's her purpose in making this documentary? To Entertain or Inform – could it be both?

**Vocabulary for Documentary Film-Watching**

**Factual** –attempting to relay information that is accurate about something real or actual; based on facts

**Footage** – refers to all material used in a film, including edited and unedited sequences

**Dialogue** – conversations that take place between subjects in a film (or subjects and the filmmaker)

**Subjects** - the topics of the film or the people the film features

**Document** (noun) **Document** (verb) **Documentary**

**Preview** Viewing Guide- 1<sup>st</sup> Showing

<b>Questions</b> <b>1<sup>st</sup> Viewing</b>	<b>Questions</b> <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Viewing</b>	<b>Questions</b> <b>3<sup>rd</sup> Viewing</b>	<b>Questions</b> <b>4<sup>th</sup> Viewing</b>
Who do you see?	How many different "scenes" are there?  Model this... Then let the students count together with their partner	What is the relationship between the boy and the dad?  How do you know?	What does the dad mean when he says, "There are days, when he starts in the morning and goes until the evening".  "Starts" what?  What does he mean by "go"?

What do you hear?	What is the boy's name?	How does the boy feel about learning to drum? How do you know?	What does that tell us about Thierré?
What do you think?	How does the dad teach his son?	Does Thierré do exactly what the father is showing him? Why do you think the father doesn't stop and correct him?	How do you think Thierré behaves "like a boss?"  How does he get all of his family/friends to start clapping?  What does that tell us about Thierré?
What do you wonder?	What kind of sounds do you hear? (tones, rhythms, acceleration of tempo) Can students copy the rhythms, or join in with shakers?	Why does he show his father his hand?  Why does Thierré spit on his hands?  How is Thierré learning to be creative?	Why do you think Thierré says he is five years old when he's really only four years old? Why does he say he's better at Djembe than his father? What does that tell us about character?

CREATE CHARTS SO ALL GROUPS CAN SEE EACH OTHER'S ANSWERS

What did you learn about DOCUMENTARIES from watching some clips and also from listening to your peers?

**WORD BANK**

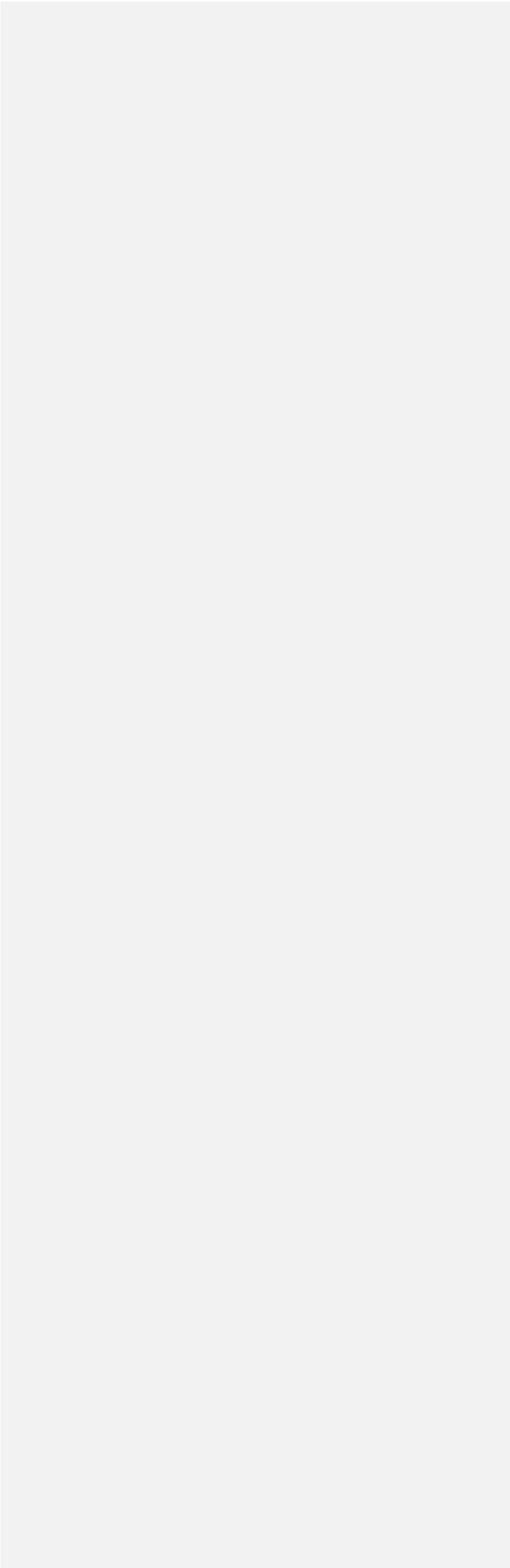
<b>NOUNS</b>	<b>VERBS</b>	<b>NOUNS</b>	<b>ADJECTIVES</b>	<b>OTHER</b>
<b>People</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Places/things</b>	<b>For Feelings</b>	
boy	dancing	a dry place	happy	hot (adj)
girl	drumming	cliffs	joyful	fun (adj)
son	listening to	patio/porch	excited	hands (noun)
father	touching	outside	proud	hurt (verb/adj)
the interviewer (heard, but not seen)	clapping, tapping, beating		confident	
brother(s),	watching, looking at	instruments	loving	
sister(s)	copying	drums	playful	
cousin(s)	smiling		funny	
friend(s)	stopping			
aunt/grandma	laughing			

Students will take notes and then work with a partner to listen to and record their partner's observations. Depending on your students' ability levels, you may want to provide sentence frames and picture clues as in the following notetaking guide.

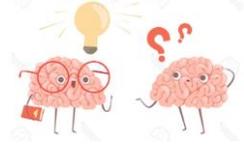
**Preview** Viewing Guide- 1<sup>st</sup> Showing

<b>Questions?</b>	
Who do you see?  	I see....
	___ sees...

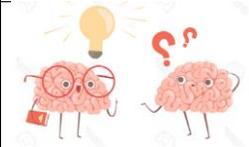
	
<p>What do you hear?</p> 	<p>I hear...</p>
	<p>___ hears ...</p>



What do you think?



I think...

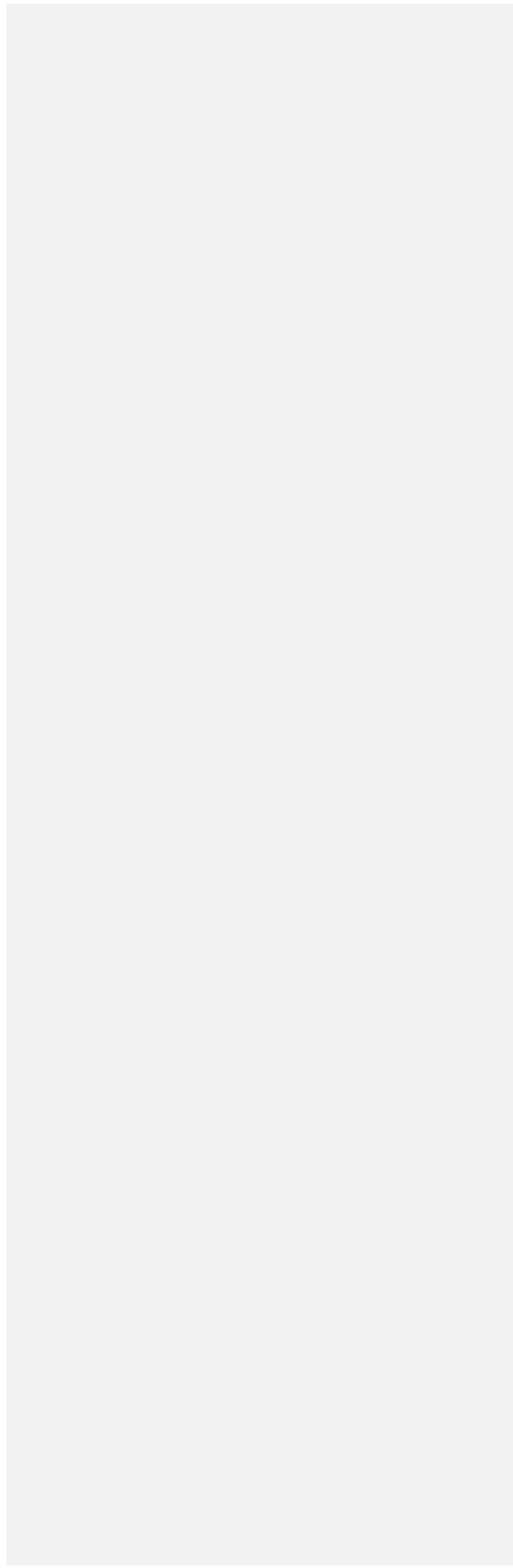


\_\_\_ thinks...

What do you wonder?



I wonder...



	___ wonders...
---	----------------

**Lesson Two: Learning to Sing like a Jeli**

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will be able to use close-reading skills to watch a documentary, read subtitles, and answer questions about the video using inferencing skills.

**Essential Question:** What can we learn by watching documentary footage?

[VIDEO LINK to Rokia's Singing Lesson](#)



**Standards:** CC.1.3.2.B Ask and answer questions such as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text. CC.1.4.2.W Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

**Building Background Knowledge:** Remind students of how they did a “close read” of the documentary footage Theirre’s drum lesson. Ask them to think about how watching the film multiple times and discussing the questions, answering the questions, and seeing our classmates’ responses helped deepen our own understanding of the film clip.

**Pre-teach Vocabulary:**

**Revered** (Verb/Adj) – respected

**Prestigious** (Adj) – respected and admired (loved) by people

**Tradition** (Noun) a custom an activity, a way of behaving, or an event which is usual or traditional in a particular society or circumstances.

**Lyrics** (Noun) the words to a song.

Questions 1 <sup>st</sup> Viewing	Questions 2 <sup>nd</sup> Viewing	Questions 3 <sup>rd</sup> Viewing	Questions 4 <sup>th</sup> Viewing
Who do you see?  What do you hear?  What do you think?	What is she singing about?  Why do you think it is important to get the lyrics absolutely correct?	What is the relationship between the girl and the mom?  How do you know?	What does the family friend mean when she says, “You can’t be shy.”  Do you think Rokia is shy? Why or Why not?
What do you wonder?	How does the mother teach her to sing?	How does the girl feel about learning to sing? How do you know?	Why do you think the mom asks her to talk to the filmmaker?

**Lesson 2 - Sharing a Family Story**

**Timeline** – This lesson could span over two weeks. Students will need time at home to record their relative’s music story. They may use Skype or Zoom to meet with a relative in another country. There needs to be time to transcribe and translate.

**Objective:** Students will be able to interview a family member about a musical memory in order to create an iMovie illustrating that memory with drawn or downloaded images and subtitles in English (or potentially another language as an extension activity for fast-finishers working with a bilingual partner).

**Standards:** CC.1.4.2.U With guidance and support, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing including in collaboration with peers.  
CC.1.5.2.A Participate in collaborative conversations with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CC.1.5.2.F Add drawings or other visual displays to presentations when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

**Materials:** Graphic Organizer, chromebooks, materials for drawing, Mac desktops or airbooks with iMovie or another movie-making platform.

**Step by Step Guide:** Create a graphic organizer suited to your students' ability-levels with space for some of the following questions/categories: the topic of the interview (music lesson, performance, or experience) who they interviewed, relation to interviewer, the person's country of origin, the first time they remember participating in/or hearing the music, how it was passed down, and how the music may have changed in the since then.\*

Students will create their own documentary with only the voice of their relative. They will add music and visuals to the documentary.

**Assessment:** A rubric should be used for this project that includes grading the graphic organizer.

### Resources

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Commented [CH8]: TED talk? 2 words

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Field Code Changed

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There will be many more resources added to this Google Site. [Learning to Listen, Listening to Learn](https://sites.google.com/view/learning-to-listen-listening/home?authuser=0) (<https://sites.google.com/view/learning-to-listen-listening/home?authuser=0>)

## **Appendix**

### **Common Core Standards for Second Graders**

CC.1.1.2.D Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

CC.1.5.2.B Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

CC.1.4.2.W Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

CC.1.5.2.A Participate in collaborative conversations with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CC.1.4.2.A Write informative/ explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CC.1.4.2.B Identify and introduce the topic.

CC.1.4.2.C Develop the topic with facts and/or definitions.

CC.1.4.2.D Group information and provide a concluding statement or section.

CC.1.4.2.E Choose words and phrases for effect.

CC.1.4.2.F Demonstrate a grade appropriate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

CC.1.4.2.W Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

CC.1.3.2.B Ask and answer questions such as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

CC.1.4.2.W Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

CC.1.4.2.U With guidance and support, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing including in collaboration with peers.

CC.1.5.2.A Participate in collaborative conversations with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CC.1.5.2.F Add drawings or other visual displays to presentations when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Color Vowel Template (More can be found at <https://colorvowel.com>)

#### WIDA Standards

English Language Development Standard 1: English language learners communicate for Social and Instructional purposes within the school setting Social and Instructional language.

English Language Development Standard 2: English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Language Arts

English Language Development Standard 5: English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Social Studies

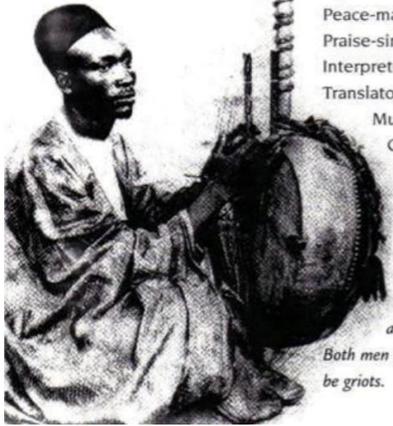
# GRIOTS

What do griots do? They are:

Poets  
Historians  
Advisors  
Spokespersons  
Diplomats  
Peace-makers  
Praise-singers  
Interpreters  
Translators  
Musicians  
Composers  
Teachers  
Warriors  
Witnesses

*A Griot is  
sometimes called  
a JALI in Mali.*

*Both men and women can  
be griots.*



<https://www.iamhiphopmagazine.com/theGriottradition/>

<b>Green Tea</b>		<b>Blue Moon food</b>		<b>Wooden Hook good</b>		Rose Boat	
Silver Pin		<b>Brown Cow</b>		<b>Purple Shirt</b>		<b>Orange Door</b>	
<b>Grey Day</b>		<b>White Tie</b>		<b>A Cup of Mustard</b>		<b>Turquoise Toy</b>	
<b>Red Pepper</b>		<b>Black Cat black</b>		<b>Olive Sock</b>		<b>Auburn Dog</b>	

Blank Color Vowel Chart created by Rebecca Horner