

SILK ROAD

CULTURAL DIFFUSION AND TRADE ROUTES

Tool Kit I



MIM's Silk Road display

Objective

Students are introduced to the concept of **cultural diffusion** through objects from MIM's collection (two spike lutes), which represent the transmission of musical ideas along the Silk Road during the first millennium CE (1,000–2,000 years ago).

Background Information for Educators

Some instruments are created in one place but move around the world and change over time, as people encounter each other and trade ideas and cultural influences. This is known as **cultural diffusion**. For example, merchants and travelers carried goods, music, musical instruments, culture, technology, and news along the trade routes known as the **Silk Road**. Trade routes like these play an important role in cultural diffusion.

What is collectively called the “Silk Road” was a set of caravan trade routes that stretched about seven thousand miles from eastern China through Central Asia to as far west as Turkey, and northeast to as far as Japan. The

golden age of trade along these routes was during the first millennium CE (1,000–2,000 years ago). The starting point was in the Chinese city of Xi'an (SHEE-yan), which was a center for silk production. From there, routes splayed out heading to the Mediterranean and as far south as India. Along with the caravans carrying silk, spices, and other goods, many traders, pilgrims, and merchants carried their traditions, philosophies, and musical instruments with them.

The **kamancha** (kah-MAHN-chah), for example, traveled from Iran to China and influenced the creation of the **erhu** (AR-hoo), which today is played in Chinese musical traditions such as the *sizhu* (“silk and bamboo” music) ensemble and the Beijing Opera pit orchestra. The name *erhu* actually gives a clue about its origin: *er* means two (as in two strings) and *hu* refers to some ancient people from Central Asia who used to invade China from the west. Both the *kamancha* and *erhu* are **spike lutes**, which means the neck is a rod that runs straight through the resonator. Today, spike lutes are played throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

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Images, Videos (Click [here](#) for all images and videos)



[Erhu \(spike lute\) from China in MIM's Silk Road display](#)



[Kamancha \(spike lute\) from Azerbaijan in MIM's Silk Road display](#)



[Kamancheh \(spike lute\) from Iran in MIM's display](#)



[Video of an erhu being played](#)



[Map of the Silk Road](#)



[Video of a kamancheh being played](#)

Discussion Questions, Writing Prompts

Standards Addressed	Prompt
<p>Social Studies, 3rd–6th Grade Strand 4: Geography <i>Concept 1: The World in Spatial Terms</i></p> <p>Social Studies, 5th–6th Grade Strand 2: World History <i>Concept 3: World in Transition</i> <i>Concept 5: Encounters and Exchange</i></p> <p>Social Studies, High School Strand 4: Geography <i>Concept 4: Human Systems</i></p>	<p>Trace the “route” that the <i>kamancha</i> traveled from Iran to China, where it influenced the creation of the <i>erhu</i>, using the <u>map of the Silk Road</u>.</p>
<p>Social Studies, 6th–7th Grade, High School Strand 4: Geography <i>Concept 3: Physical Systems</i> <i>Concept 4: Human Systems</i> <i>Concept 6: Geographic Applications</i></p>	<p>Can you think of more reasons that people might travel or move from one place to another? <i>Trade, tourism, forced migration, war, etc.</i></p>
<p>Social Studies, 6th Grade Strand 4: Geography <i>Concept 6: Geographic Applications</i></p> <p>Social Studies, 7th Grade Strand 4: Economics <i>Concept 1: Foundations of Economics</i></p>	<p>What do you think it was like to travel along the Silk Road? What sights might you see? What things or people might you encounter? <i>Use the Additional Resources about the Silk Road to learn more about life along these trade routes.</i></p>

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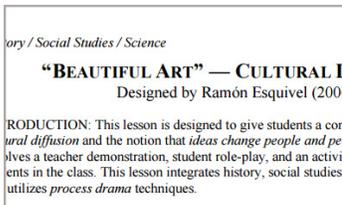
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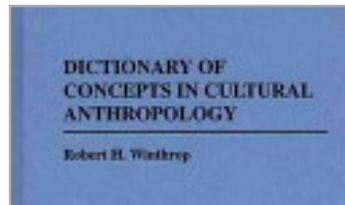
Standards Addressed	Prompt
<p>Social Studies, 6th Grade Strand 4: Geography <i>Concept 2: Places and Regions</i></p> <p>Music, 3rd–8th Grade Responding <i>Apply teacher-provided criteria to evaluate music</i> Connecting <i>Relationships between musics and other content areas</i> <i>Context for performances</i></p> <p>Music, High School Connect – Reflect on Understanding <i>Connections between music and other content areas</i> <i>Personal reactions to musical experiences</i></p>	<p>Using the photo of the <i>kamancha</i> from Azerbaijan, the photo and video of the <i>kamāncheh</i> from Iran, and the photo and video of the <i>erhu</i>, answer the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How are the <i>erhu</i> and <i>kamancha/kamāncheh</i> similar?2. How are they different?

Additional Resources

Click on the thumbnail to see each resource



Cultural Diffusion | Lesson plan by Esquivel, Ramón. “Beautiful Art: Cultural Diffusion.”



Cultural Diffusion | Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology. “Theories in Diffusion.”



Silk Road | American Museum of Natural History. “Traveling the Silk Road.”



Silk Road | China Institute. “From Silk to Oil: Cross-Cultural Connections Along the Silk Roads.”