

How to Pick Your Instrument

Grade Level: Grades 6-12

Objective: Students will be able to reflect and analyze personality traits to discover which instrument fits them more closely using the [How to Pick Your Instrument App](#), and will collaborate to create a group performance using two or more instruments together.

Vocabulary: guitar, bass, drums, keyboard, piano, ensemble, personality, characteristics, harmonic, melodic

Presentation Slides:

[How to Pick Your Instrument](#)

Project Expectations:

[How to Pick an Instrument Jam - "Lean on Me"](#)

Assessments:

[Rubric](#)

National Core Arts Standards:

Creating

1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
3. Refine and complete artistic work.

Performing / Presenting / Producing

4. Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
5. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Responding

7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.
8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

Connecting

10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
11. Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context.



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Activities:

ONE: Instrument Affinity Quiz

- Using the Instrument Explorer App take the affinity Quiz to see which instrument most connects to you.
- Have select students read out each question to support all learners.
- Have students share which instrument they received.
- **Reflection Questions:**
 - Does your instrument match your personality? Why or why not?
 - Which questions were missing from the quiz that would have helped?
 - What are your first impressions of your instrument?

TWO: Instrument Listening Examples & Analysis

- Listen to curated examples for Guitar, Bass, Keyboard, and Drums.
- Identify characteristics and patterns of each instrument and how it fits with the ensemble (Modify the speed of the videos as needed using the functionality in YouTube)
- Discuss what makes each instrument unique.
- **Reflection Questions:**
 - What makes this instrument sound like itself and not any other instrument?
 - How do the different instruments work together in the ensemble?
 - Are they all playing the same things?
 - How does the sound quality (timbre) or texture of each instrument affect the overall feel?

THREE: Exploring Your Instrument

- Choose the instrument you received from the quiz.
- Divide the class into groups of each instrument.
- Read and discuss the harmonic and melodic foundations for your instrument in your groups from the [Instrument Explorer App](#).
- Provide students with an acoustic instrument or see the resources for digital instrument options available.
- **Reflection Questions:**
 - Does this feel like an instrument that reflects you? Why or why not?
 - What characteristics about your instrument do you like the most? Why?
 - Do you want to play more harmonic foundations or melodic foundations? Why?

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Activities:

FOUR: Project Introduction & Ensemble Creation

- Introduce and model the Project Expectations.
- Present and explain the rubric criteria.
- Facilitate group formation and help students assign roles for an ensemble with two to four different instruments.
- Encourage students to use their How to Pick an Instrument findings as a reference point when building their ensemble.
 - Perform for peers and reflect: Have each group perform their groove for the class and use the rubric to guide self-assessment and peer feedback.

Resources:

Digital Instrument Resources

1. Guitar

- <https://www.apronus.com/music/onlineguitar.htm>
- <https://www.musicca.com/guitar>

2. Bass

- <https://muted.io/bass-fretboard/>
- <https://www.musicca.com/bass-guitar>

3. Keyboard

- <https://www.musicca.com/piano>
- <https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Shared-Piano/#CYh-UJZqI>

4. Drums

- [YouTube App Drum Playable - ETM created](#)



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Instrument Listening Examples:

• Guitar:

- **Description:** The guitar is a versatile string instrument. It fills the middle frequency range, providing rhythmic chordal backing (strumming) or soaring melodic lines (solos).
- **Prominent Guitarists:** **Jimi Hendrix, John Mayer, St. Vincent (Annie Clark)**
- **Musical Examples:**
 - Jimi Hendrix - [“Purple Haze”](#)
 - John Mayer - [“Neon”](#)
 - St. Vincent - [“Huey Newton”](#)

• Bass:

- **Description:** The bass bridges the gap between rhythm and harmony. It plays low-pitched notes that define the chord structure while locking in with the drums to drive the groove.
- **Prominent Bassists:** **Flea (Michael Balzary), Victor Wooten, Jaco Pastorius**
- **Musical Examples:**
 - Red Hot Chili Peppers - [“Bass Solo”](#) (Flea - Michael Balzary)
 - Bela Fleck and the Flecktones - [“Sinister Minister”](#) (Victor Wooten)
 - Jaco Pastorius Big Band - [“Soul Intro/The Chicken”](#) (Jaco Pastorius)

• Keyboard:

- **Description:** The keyboard is both harmonic (playing chords) and melodic (playing tunes), allowing a single player to function as a full ensemble.
- **Prominent Keyboardists:** **Stevie Wonder, Jacob Collier, Yuja Wang**
- **Musical Examples:**
 - Stevie Wonder - [“Superstition”](#)
 - Jacob Collier - [“Tiny Desk \(Home\) Concert”](#)
 - Yuja Wang - [“Turkish March \(encore\)”](#)

• Drummer:

- **Description:** The drums are the rhythmic heart of the band. They dictate the tempo (speed) and feel, requiring limb independence to coordinate different percussive sounds.
- **Prominent Drummers:** **John Bonham, Travis Barker, Questlove (Ahmir Thompson)**
- **Musical Examples:**
 - Led Zeppelin - [“Moby Dick”](#) (John Bonham)
 - Blink 182 - [Travis Barker’s Favorite Rudiments](#) (Travis Barker)
 - The Roots - [“You Got Me”](#) (Questlove - Ahmir Thompson)



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Extensions:

1. **Instrument Role Swap** - Students switch instruments (or digital versions) for one class period and compare how each role feels within the ensemble. End with a quick written reflection on which role surprised them most.
2. **Create a Signature Motif** - Students write a short 2-4 note or rhythm “signature” idea on their chosen instrument that represents their personality. Groups combine their motifs into a class sound collage.
3. **Add a Percussion Layer** - Introduce a simple auxiliary percussion part (shaker, hand drum, digital pad). One student adds a steady layer to enhance ensemble balance.
4. **Groove Variation Challenge** - Groups keep the same “Lean on Me” structure but must create one variation: change the rhythm pattern, tempo, or texture while staying recognizable.
5. **Build an Instrument Profile Card** - Students create a one-page “profile” of their instrument—role, strengths, tone, famous players, and their personal connection. Post as a gallery walk.
6. **Ensemble Decision Journal** - Groups keep a short journal documenting three decisions they made while building their arrangement and why those choices improved the final product.
7. **Compare Live vs. Digital** - Students try the same phrase on both a live instrument and a digital tool. They note similarities, differences, and which setting helps them learn faster.
8. **Timbre Exploration** - Students experiment with different timbres: guitar pickups, keyboard sounds, drum kit variations, or bass effects (or digital equivalents). They choose one timbre that best fits their ensemble vibe.
9. **Tempo Experiments** - Groups practice their groove at two additional tempos—slower and faster—and discuss how the emotional impact changes.
10. **Solo Spotlight Moment** - Each group adds a brief 4-beat or 1-measure “spotlight” moment where one instrument leads while others support. Students reflect on how the arrangement shifted.
11. **Audience-Focused Revision** - Groups imagine performing for a younger audience, older audience, or outdoor show. They make one change to better fit that imagined audience.

