

# 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.