

The 5-String Banjo in Bluegrass Music

Michael and Jennifer McLain - The Banjocats

michael@banjocats.com

615-496-1996

Content Outline:

Audience: All grade levels

Length: Flexible

Objective: Students will learn unique traits of the 5-string banjo and it's role in bluegrass music

Curriculum Standards: 9.2 describe music from various cultures and 9.2.3 discuss the distinguishing characteristics of / and the instruments used in music of selected cultures

Method of Instruction: Describe traits of the banjo, explain and demonstrate banjo techniques, music performance

Instruments Used: (2) Banjos, Steel String Acoustic Guitar, Mandolin, Voice

Physical Traits:

1. soundboard is drum head - not wood
2. fifth string is short - w/ tuning peg 5 frets up fingerboard
3. range short - travel 12 frets for two octaves compared to same fret on guitar
4. 3 strings tuned like guitar
5. tuned to chord
6. 3 finger style known for speed - close movements and metal picks

Articulation Techniques: explain how they are produced and demonstrate how they can be used

1. slide (demonstrate "Down The Road")
2. hammer on (demonstrate "Soldier's Joy")
3. pull off (demonstrate "Lorelei")
4. bend (demonstrate "Lonesome Road Blues")
5. harmonic (demonstrate "Bugle Call Rag")
6. grace note
7. muted
8. vibrato
9. tremolo
10. trill
11. ghost note

Role in bluegrass music: (as appropriate for students age) explain and demonstrate techniques

1. solo (demonstrate "I Will")
2. back up
3. rhythm (demonstrate "Foggy Mountain Breakdown")
4. Scruggs roll style (demonstrate "Foggy Mountain Breakdown")
5. Melodic style (demonstrate "Soldier's Joy")
6. Single String style (demonstrate "Blackberry Blossom")

Repertoire:

1. Bugle Call Rag
2. Down The Road
3. Soldier's Joy
4. Blackberry Blossom
5. Lorelei
6. Lonesome Road Blues
7. Restless
8. I Will
9. Foggy Mountain Breakdown
10. Lady of Spain (on 2 banjos)

Assessment: Ask for response to various musical examples.

Is this roll, melodic or single string style? Why?