The Power of Indigenous Songs – Nakoa Heavy Runner

Suggested Grade Levels: 5-12

This lesson is designed to help students build both foundational understanding and meaningful real-world connections related to Indigenous music using insights shared by Nakoa Heavy Runner.

In Part 1, students demonstrate comprehension of key ideas from the video, including the role of songs in Indigenous communities, how music connects people to land, animals, ancestors, and the universe, and the importance of Song Keepers as cultural carriers. Students also learn how music preserves language, traditions, and ceremonies, even when other aspects of culture have been lost, and how songs evolve as each generation adds its own spirit and intention.

In Part 2, students are guided to make personal and cultural connections between Indigenous musical traditions and music in their own lives. Through open-ended reflection questions, students compare Indigenous songs to modern songs about place, animals, community, grief, and celebration. They consider the role of contemporary musicians as cultural voices and explore the idea that music carries responsibility—not just entertainment. This section encourages students to recognize music as a shared human practice used to express identity, honor experiences, support communities, and pass down meaning across generations.

Overall, the worksheet aims to deepen cultural awareness, promote respectful understanding of Indigenous perspectives, and help students see how the purposes of Indigenous music continue to exist in modern and familiar musical traditions today.

This video and discussion guide supports instruction related to **Essential Understanding #3** - The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs.

Name: _____

Teacher: _____

Part 1: Basic Understanding

What does Nakoa Heavy Runner say Indigenous people often have songs for?

A. Only for powwow celebrations

B. For just about everything

C. For cooking recipes

D. For modern pop music

According to Nakoa Heavy Runner, people who live by the ocean have songs that honor which of the following?

A. The mountains

B. The animals and the ocean

C. City buildings

D. Cars and machines

What name does Nakoa Heavy Runner give to the people who carry and are called upon to sing important songs?

A. Storytellers

B. Song Keepers

C. Dancers

D. Performing Artist

Nakoa Heavy Runner describes music as a way to do which of the following?

A. Cook food faster

B. Speak to the universe

C. Make money

D. Deal with your emotions

How does Nakoa Heavy Runner say music affects energy or vibration when people sing?

A. It lowers the vibration.

B. It raises the vibration and amplifies intentions.

C. It makes people tired.

D. It has no effect.

Nakoa Heavy Runner calls music both a gift and a what else?

A. A relic of the past

B. Responsibility

C. Burden

D. Talent

Which of these does Nakoa Heavy Runner say many Indigenous communities still have today?

A. Song carriers alive and well

B. No musical traditions left

C. Only recorded pop songs

D. Only written sheet music

What does the speaker say Indigenous communities may have lost but music has preserved?

A. Technology and cars

B. Language, culture, and ceremonies (but music survived)

C. Weather and seasons

D. Rivers and mountains

According to the video, music can change over time because people do what?

A. Ignore it completely

B. Incorporate their own spirit and evolve it

C. Forget the meanings of songs

D. Only drum and not sing

Part 2: Making Connections

In what ways do people today create or sing songs about the places where they live (such as states, cities, neighborhoods, or nature)?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Think about songs you know that mention animals. What animals are they about, and why do those songs include those animals?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Describe songs you know that people use during times when family members pass away or sad things happen. What are these songs about, and how do they help people during those times?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Who are some people today who create or share songs that are important to culture or communities (famous musicians/composers, etc.)? Why do you think these people are important?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Explain if you think modern song makers have responsibilities similar to the Indigenous Song Keepers described in the video. What responsibilities do they share, and how are they different?

_____
_____
_____

TEACHER ANSWER KEY

Part 1: Basic Understanding

What does Nakoa Heavy Runner say Indigenous people often have songs for?

A. Only for celebrations

B. For just about everything (0:05-0:13)

C. For cooking recipes

D. For ceremonies only

According to Nakoa Heavy Runner, people who live by the ocean have songs that honor which of the following?

A. The mountains

B. City buildings

C. The animals and the ocean (0:21-0:36)

D. Cars and machines

What name does Nakoa Heavy Runner give to the people who carry and are called upon to sing important songs?

A. Song Keepers (1:00-1:11)

B. Story Tellers

C. Dancers

D. Performing Artist

Nakoa Heavy Runner describes music as a way to do which of the following?

A. Cook food faster

B. Speak to the universe (1:19-1:30)

C. Make money

D. Deal with your emotions

How does Nakoa Heavy Runner say music affects energy or vibration when people sing?

A. It lowers the vibration.

B. It has no effect.

C. It makes people tired.

D. It raises the vibration and amplifies intentions (1:30-1:43).

Nakoa Heavy Runner calls music both a gift and a what else?

A. A relic of the past

B. Responsibility (2:02-2:14)
C. Burden
D. Talent

Which of these does Nakoa Heavy Runner say many Indigenous communities still have today?
A. Song carriers alive and well (2;32-2:48)
B. No musical traditions left
C. Only recorded pop songs
D. Only written sheet music

What does the speaker say Indigenous communities may have lost, but music has preserved?
A. Language
B. Culture
C. Ceremonies
D. All of the above (2:56-3:13)

According to the video, music can change over time because people do what?
A. Ignore it completely
B. Forget the meanings of songs
C. Incorporate their own spirit and evolve it (3:13-3:31)
D. Only drum and not sing

Part 2: Making Connections

In what ways do people today create or sing songs about the places where they live (such as states, cities, neighborhoods, or nature)?
Example Answer:
People make songs about the places they live by writing lyrics about their hometown, state, or favorite nature places like lakes or forests. Some songs even talk about special places where families have memories. These songs show pride in where people come from.

Think about songs you know that mention animals. What animals are they about, and why do those songs include those animals?
Example Answer:
Many songs I know mention animals. For example, “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” talks about cows, pigs, and ducks. Songs include animals because animals are part of life and can teach us

lessons or make songs fun to sing.

Describe songs you know that people use during times when family members pass away or sad things happen. What are these songs about, and how do they help people during those times?

Example Answer:

Some songs people use when family members pass away are slow and emotional, like “Tears in Heaven.” These songs are about remembering someone you love. They help people feel sad and remember good memories.

Who are some people today who create or share songs that are important to culture or communities (famous musicians/composers, etc.)? Why do you think these people are important?

Example Answer:

Some people today who share important songs are Taylor Swift, who writes songs about life and feelings, and local singers who perform at community events. These people are important because their music brings people together and helps them feel understood.

Explain if you think modern song makers have responsibilities similar to the Indigenous Song Keepers described in the video. What responsibilities do they share, and how are they different?

Example Answer:

I think modern song makers have some similar responsibilities because they share feelings and stories that matter to people. But Indigenous Song Keepers also have the job of honoring land, ancestors, and traditions, which is more than just writing songs. Both help people connect, but they do it in different ways.

Special thanks to the Music Teachers from East Helena Schools for creating the discussion guide and questions: Cole Bass, Jon Cantrell, Mathew Krantz, Traci Mazanec, and Tamika Schoppe.