

FirstWorks Virtual Learning Series: Yang Wei

Introduction:

The performance “Crossings,” a collaboration between the Rhode Island-based Aurea Ensemble and guest artist Yang Wei celebrates the deep and surprising connections between Eastern and Western cultures. The premiere of “Crossings” was presented by FirstWorks on April 23, 2017 at St. Martin’s Church in Providence. The accompanying [video](#) of Yang Wei (linked below) was recorded during a rehearsal conducted a few days prior to that performance.



About Yang Wei:

Yang Wei is a professional musician and a celebrated virtuoso on the *pipa*, a Chinese string instrument. He has performed worldwide as a soloist with various orchestras and ensembles, including the Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma. Teaching students of all ages about the *pipa* and its over 2,000-year history is also a major focus of Yang Wei’s work. Wei’s musical education began in his native China at the age of six, when he started to receive instruction on several different classical Chinese musical instruments. At the age of 13, he focused his studies on mastering the *pipa* under the tutelage of Liu Dehai (1937-), one of the leading *pipa* musicians of his generation. By the age of 18, Wei went on to perform as a *pipa* soloist with the National Shanghai Orchestra.

In 1996, Wei moved to the United States, settling in Chicago. He has performed at prestigious venues worldwide, including the Ravinia International Music Festival, the Kimmel Center, Lincoln Center, and the Chicago Symphony Center, and was an artist-in-residence at the Art Institute of Chicago. Among his recordings are *When Strangers Meet*, *New Impossibilities*, and *Song of Consonance: Master of Chinese Music, Vol. 1*.

Watch the performance [HERE](#)

Grade 6 - 12 Lessons:

Music: Understanding how music is influenced by interests, experiences, understandings, and purposes through learning information about the music, culture, historical era, lyrics, etc. MU:Re7.1.5a, MU:Re7.2.5a, MU:Re8.1.5a, MU:Re9.1.5a

English Language Arts: Writing a Definition Essay, W-2, W-4, W-5, W-6, W-10

1. Watch the solo performance video provided. It is a very old traditional Chinese piece entitled, “The Ancient Battlefield.” Research the history of the pipa and write a short paper explaining your findings. Use information from that research to create a PowerPoint presentation, a Google slideshow, a digital flyer, or a short video, explaining your discoveries. Be sure to include the following information:

- Country of origin.
- Original date/time period when the pipa was created.
- What materials have been used in its construction?

- What different types of sound can it make?
- How does it differ from other string instruments?
- Who are the most well-known composers for the pipa?
- Who are the most well-known pipa musicians throughout history and in current times?
- Does this piece convey anything about the culture of the country of origin?

Extra Lesson

Research the history behind this piece of music, “The Ancient Battlefield”. In some creative way, such as a PowerPoint presentation, Google slideshow, digital flyer, visual art piece, or, video, explain the history of the piece. If you are musical in any way, try performing the piece and record yourself doing so. How do you compare to Yang Wei’s performance? Can you feel the emotionality of the music? How do they compare and/or contrast with the emotions you see Yang Wei experiencing?

1. Elements of Music:

- a. Check those that apply to Yang Wei’s solo:
 - i. Beat/meter: __ duple __ triple
 - ii. Harmony: __ yes __ no
 - iii. Tempo: __ Largo __ Andante __ Allegro __ Tempo Changes
 - iv. Texture: __ one part __ two part __ three or more parts
- b. How do the elements of music and structural components identified for this performance affect a listener’s response?

2. “Expressive intent” is defined as: *the emotions, thoughts, and ideas that a performer or composer seeks to convey by manipulating the elements of music*. In your opinion, what was the composer’s expressive intent for Yang Wei’s solo?

- i. What key elements helped you think that was the composer’s expressive intent?

Social Studies/History/English Language Arts/Music/Geopolitics/Ethnic Studies/Visual Art/Literature, Grades 6 - 12: *Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic*: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.9

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.2

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.4

1. The Silk Road Ensemble is an international musical collective of artists interested in exploring the relationship between tradition and innovation in music from the East and West. See their website here: www.silkroad.org
 - a. In addition to the *pipa*, the Ensemble brings together various instruments from the Silk Road region. These include: the Armenian *duduk*, the Japanese *shakuhachi*, and the Mongolian *morin khuur*.
 - i. Research these instruments to learn more about them.
 - ii. Make a sketch of each instrument, including the *pipa*.
 1. How are they alike? How do they differ?

Communicate your findings using PowerPoint slides, Google Slides, a digital flyer, or video.

2. The Silk Road was an ancient land and sea trade route linking China with the West. It was named for the precious material, silk, which was only manufactured in China, but, many other goods were transported along the routes.
 - a. Research the time period of the Silk Road.
 - b. Research the manufacturing process of silk. Why was it valued?
 - c. What might be a typical journey?
 - d. Who were the main traders?
 - e. What was the economic impact of the Silk Road?
 - f. What else besides goods were traded or shared across the East and West?

g. What is your favorite piece of clothing? Track the different places around the world that contributed to its manufacture.

- i. Where did the material come from?
- ii. Where was it processed? Constructed? Marketed? Sold?, etc.
- iii. Map out the places where each step took place?
- iv. Have you travelled there?
- v. Have you travelled that much?

Communicate your findings using PowerPoint slides, Google Slides, a digital flyer, or video.

Note to Educators:

FirstWorks Education will make every effort to connect appropriate supporting curricula to the arts presentations provided. However, your professional expertise, rapport with your students, and knowledge of their capabilities will make these lessons resonate. We welcome your feedback: Did you use the lessons? How did it go? Did you not use them? If not, why? Or, did you vary them? Please let us know. We are here to help. We'd also be delighted to see any resulting creations!

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