



# Different Drummer

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Unit: *Henry as Artist*

Topic: *Exploring differences*

## Thoreau Quotations

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”

—*Walden* (1854)

“All music is only a sweet striving to express character.”

—*Journal*, November 12, 1841

## Background

Thoreau is known—and admired—for following what he believed to be his most true self, and he encouraged others to do the same. For Henry, this meant simplifying his life so he could spend most of his days doing what he loved—being with Nature and writing. Henry believed that the most inspired world was one in which each person could be his or her most true self and “step to the music which he [or she] hears.”

Also relevant to this lesson is that Thoreau loved music—both hearing it and playing it. He had a flute that he would often play; he liked to hear the ways it would echo across the surface of Walden Pond and bounce back from its wooded shores.

## Objectives

1. To demonstrate, through the act of music-making, the role and importance of differences between individuals.
2. For students to be able to identify a musical instrument that is in some way a metaphor for themselves and to articulate why it is a metaphor for them.

## Method

Students will either create their own instrument or choose one from an assortment of provided instruments and will make music while exploring what each instrument adds to the sound.

## Time Required

30-75 minutes (shorter = pre-existing instruments, longer = students make their own instruments)

## Materials

- A different percussion, wind or string instrument for each person in the class. It is best if there are more instruments available than there are students in the class.
- For a fun in-class activity that provides more opportunity for creativity and self-expression, give students a bunch of different materials out of which they can make their own instruments—think old milk containers, beans/seeds, straws, bottles, rubberbands, corrugated cardboard, recycled glass jars, strings...have fun with it!). If going this route, be sure to provide materials like glue, tape, scissors, etc. to help them construct.

## Procedure

1. If bringing in pre-existing instruments for students, lay them all out in clear sight of the class. Possibly have a conversation about each instrument, discussing the nature of the sound it makes, its size and shape, and any other characteristics. Then ask the students to each choose an instrument that is like them or represents them in some way. It is best to have at least a handful more instruments than there are students, so the last ones to select instruments still have some choice.
2. If asking students to make their own instruments, lay out the materials that will be used. Give them the instructions to create an instrument that is like them in some way (whether it's loud or quiet, brightly colored or earth tones, moves a lot or a little, etc.)
3. Once students have chosen or constructed their instruments, it's time to make music! Henry would certainly encourage you to do your music-making outside, if possible!
4. To demonstrate the importance of each instrument to the overall sound, start with a simple rhythm played by just one instrument. Continuing with the same rhythm, slowly add in instruments one by one, allowing enough time for each person to hear how their instrument contributes to the overall sound. Take turns starting and change up the order to further demonstrate this point.

## Reflect and Explain

- Why did you choose the instrument you chose? How is it “like you?” OR Why did you design/create your instrument the way you did? How is it “like you?”
- What did your instrument add to the sound of the group?
- How would the sound have been different if everyone played the same instrument?

## Extensions

1. For older students, possibly ask each person to take a turn “sitting out” while the rest of the group is playing. Then include a discussion about what it felt like to not be playing while your classmates were still making music. Did you want to be playing

with your classmates, instead of sitting silent? Are there any connections to your experience and groups of people who might not always feel like they are part of society or of a group?

2. Split the class into groups of similar instruments (horns/brass, percussion, strings, woodwinds). Have each group make their own music individually and then all at the same time. How does the music change when only similar musical instruments are playing? When they are in a group that has all similar sounds, what happens to the “other” groups? Do you hear them? Do you start wanting to hear only your music or being able to only hear your music? Or do you miss the other sounds? What happens when we only surround ourselves with people or ideas that are the same as ours? What do we miss out on?

## Vocabulary

**brass** - Brass instruments are made of brass or some other metal and make sound when air is blown inside. The musician's lips must buzz, as though making a "raspberry" noise against the mouthpiece. Air then vibrates inside the instrument, which produces a sound. Brass instruments include trumpet, trombone, tuba, French horn, cornet, and bugle.

**percussion** - Most percussion instruments make sounds when they are hit, such as a drum or a tambourine. Others are shaken, such as maracas, and still others may be rubbed, scratched, or whatever else will make the instrument vibrate and thus produce a sound. Percussion instruments include drums, cymbals, triangle, chimes, tam-tam, glockenspiel, timpani, bells, and xylophone.

**strings** - Yes, the sounds of string instruments come from their strings. The strings may be plucked, as in a guitar or harp; bowed, as with a cello or a violin; or struck, as with a dulcimer. This creates a vibration that causes a unique sound. Stringed instruments include the violin, viola, cello, bass, harp, and dulcimer.

**woodwinds** - Woodwind instruments produce sound when air (wind) is blown inside—like Thoreau's flute! Air might be blown across an edge, as with a flute; between a reed and a surface, as with a clarinet; or between two reeds, as with a bassoon. The sound happens when the air vibrates inside. Woodwind instruments include flute, piccolo, clarinet, recorder, bassoon, and oboe.

## Common Core Standards

### English Language Anchor Standards (all grades)

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1](#)  
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4](#)  
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow

the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.6](#)  
Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1](#)  
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.3](#)  
Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.5](#)  
Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.6](#)  
Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.