

Musical Instruments of the Pueblo People  
Jemez Historic Site



Instructional Coordinator, Marlon Magdalena talking about musical instruments.  
Photo Credit: Aimee Slaughter, Los Alamos Historical Society 2019

## Essential Question

### **What kinds of instruments do Pueblo People and why are they important?**

This lesson will introduce and explain the basic reasons why certain instruments are used by Pueblo People. They will also learn how they sound and work.

## Objectives

After completing this lesson, student will be able to:

1. Describe the types of musical instruments that Pueblo People use.
2. Describe how trade was a part of Pueblo life.
3. Learn some aspects of Pueblo beliefs.

## Background

Pueblo People have lived in the American Southwest for hundreds of years, and have been using many types of instruments throughout their history. Instruments like drums, shells, bells, rattles, flutes, whistles, and the voice, have been part of many ceremonies throughout Pueblo History. They may be ceremonies for rain, planting or the hunt, but no matter what they are for, they represent a very important part of Pueblo Life. The sounds that come from these instruments are what connect them to the spiritual world of Pueblo religion. These instruments represent the different sounds of the natural and human world and often take on a different role. We may think of these instruments as inanimate objects, but Pueblo People believe that each instrument has a life. They also give them life and a voice



(sound) when they use them during a ceremony. Some instruments are very simple to make and use, but others require a little more skill to produce sound.

The voice is one of the most common instruments. Even though, many people wouldn't think of the voice as an instrument, but like all instruments it requires some practice to sing a song properly. Drums are one of the most common instruments other than the voice. They require a lot work to make a drum. The maker must procure dry Aspen or cottonwood logs, cut and hollow them out. Then, they must find the skin of an animal, usually cow, for the top, bottom and sides of the drum. Flutes and whistles also require the need to find certain materials to create. Wood from a certain type of tree, or bird bones were a common choice to make a flute or whistle. Rattles are very common, and are made from gourds, wood, and small stones. Turtle shell rattles are made from a turtle shell, leather and deer hooves. Rasps are made from a straight tree branch which is notched on one side and placed on top of a bowl-shaped gourd. The user then strikes along the top with hard object, often a deer leg bone, to create the rasp sound. Shells and bells have a significant history as they don't originate here in the Southwest, but must come from hundreds of miles from the oceans or from the large civilizations to the south in Mexico and beyond. They represent the significant amount of trade that took place between communities of the Southwest and Mesoamerica.

All of these instruments are very important to Pueblo Life. Sometimes they are used independently and sometimes they are used together. Some ceremonies only require the voice to sing songs, but others require a combination of these instruments. Many ceremonial dances are closed to the public because of the secretive aspects of Pueblo religion, but there are some dances where outsiders are allowed to watch. When you see these dances, you can hear and see all the different sounds and instruments that certain dancers are using or wearing.

## Activities

K-4 Drawing and Question Page

5-8 Questions and Answers Page with Picture

9-12 Written Assignment: Write About How Music Influences Your Life

## New Mexico Content Standards

<https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/instructional-materials/new-mexico-content-standards/>

### K-4<sup>th</sup> Grade Standards

#### **STRAND: History**

**Content Standard I:** Students are able to identify important people and events in order to analyze significant patterns, relationships, themes, ideas, beliefs, and turning points in New Mexico, United States, and world history in order to understand the complexity of the human experience.

**K-4 Benchmark I-A:** New Mexico: Describe how contemporary and historical people and events have influenced New Mexico communities and regions.

**(K)** 1. Identify the customs, celebrations, and holidays of various cultures in New Mexico.

**(1<sup>st</sup> Grade)** 1. Identify common attributes of people living in New Mexico today.

**(2<sup>nd</sup> Grade)** 1. Describe how historical people, groups, and events have influenced the local community.

**(3<sup>rd</sup> Grade)** 1. Describe how the lives and contributions of people of New Mexico influenced local communities and regions.



# NEW MEXICO HISTORIC SITES

**(4<sup>th</sup> Grade)** 1. Identify important issues, events, and individuals from New Mexico pre-history to the present.

**K-4 Benchmark II-B:** Distinguish between natural and human characteristics of places and use this knowledge to define regions, their relationships with other regions, and patterns of change.

**(K)** 1. Identify natural characteristics of places (e.g., climate, topography).

**(1st Grade)** 2. Identify how traditional tribal and local folklore attempt to explain weather, characteristics of places, and human origins and relationships.

**(2nd Grade)** 1. Explain how people depend on the environment and its resources to satisfy their basic needs.

**(3rd Grade)** 1. Explore examples of environmental and social changes in various regions.

**(4th Grade)** 3. Identify ways in which different individuals and groups of people view and relate to places and regions.

**K-4 Benchmark II-C:** Be familiar with aspects of human behavior and man-made and natural environments in order to recognize their impact on the past and present.

**(K)** 1. Identify family customs and traditions and explain their importance.

**(1st Grade)** 1. Identify examples of and uses for natural resources in the community, state, and nation.

**(2nd Grade)** 1. Identify ways in which people depend on natural and man-made environments including natural resources to meet basic needs.

**(3rd Grade)** 2. Identify ways in which people have modified their environments (e.g., building roads, clearing land for development, mining, and constructing towns and cities).

**(4th Grade)** 1. Explain how geographic factors have influenced people, including settlement patterns and population distribution in New Mexico, past and present.

## 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Standards

### **STRAND: History**

**Content Standard I:** Students are able to identify important people and events in order to analyze significant patterns, relationships, themes, ideas, beliefs, and turning points in New Mexico, United States, and world history in order to understand the complexity of the human experience. Students will:

**5-8 Benchmark 1-A.** New Mexico: explore and explain how people and events have influenced the development of New Mexico up to the present day:

**(7<sup>th</sup> Grade)** 2. describe the characteristics of other indigenous peoples that had an effect upon New Mexico's development (e.g., pueblo farmers, great plains horse culture, nomadic bands, etc. - noting their development of tools, trading routes, adaptation to environments, social structure, domestication of plants and animals); 3. explain the significance of trails and trade routes within the region (e.g., Spanish trail, Camino Real, Santa Fe trail)

## 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Standards

### **STRAND: History**

**Content Standard I:** Students are able to identify important people and events in order to analyze significant patterns, relationships, themes, ideas, beliefs, and turning points in New Mexico, United States, and world history in order to understand the complexity of the human experience. Students will:



# NEW MEXICO HISTORIC SITES

**9-12 benchmark 1-D.** Skills: use critical thinking skills to understand and communicate perspectives of individuals, groups and societies from multiple contexts:

3. Describe primary and secondary sources and their uses in research; 4. Explain how to use a variety of historical research methods and documents to interpret and understand social issues (e.g., the friction among societies, the diffusion of ideas)

## Additional Resources

1. <https://www.indianpueblo.org/19-pueblos/>
2. <https://www.indianpueblo.org/19-pueblos/history-culture/>
3. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/musical-instruments-from-ancestral-puebloan-sites.htm>
4. Videos of Pueblo Dances on You Tube
  - a. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmfUiHSOB7U>
  - b. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNaw8Vq\\_AUU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNaw8Vq_AUU)