

STUDY GUIDE FOR “ORIGIN STORIES: CRISTINA PATO & KOJIRO UMEZAKI’S ‘VOJO’”



Summary In this short, three-minute video, two members of the Silk Road Ensemble discuss how they created a piece that combined two very different instruments and musical traditions. Cristina Pato, who plays the Galician bagpipes (*gaita*), and Kojiro Umezaki, who plays the Japanese *shakuhachi* (bamboo flute), talk about their collaboration on “Vojo” and what they learned as they wrote and arranged the song.

Note to Teachers The video interview, “Origin Stories: Cristina Pato & Kojiro Umezaki’s ‘Vojo,’” and this accompanying study guide are recommended for use in courses such as music, social studies, and language arts at the high school level and above. It is particularly relevant for courses that touch on migration and cultural contact.

- Organizing Questions**
- What happens when different cultures or languages connect for the first time?
 - How can commonality be forged out of difference?
 - How can art provide a model for sharing and appreciating differences?
 - How does learning about cultural differences teach us something about ourselves?

Objectives	<p>During and after the viewing of this video, students will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• appreciate the challenge and power in combining two different cultural traditions;• understand the role of art in promoting communication across cultures; and• find commonality in seemingly contrasting cultural traditions or elements.
Materials	<p>Handout 1, <i>Understanding the Artists and Instruments in “Vojo,”</i> pp. 4–6, 30 copies</p> <p>Handout 2, <i>“Vojo” and Esperanto,</i> pp. 7–8, 30 copies</p> <p>Handout 3, <i>“Vojo” and the Acculturation Framework,</i> p. 9, 30 copies</p> <p>Handout 4, <i>Reflection Exercise,</i> pp. 10–12, 30 copies</p> <p>Projection, <i>Discussion Questions,</i> p. 13</p> <p>Teacher Information, <i>Video Transcript,</i> pp. 14–15</p> <p>Video interview, <i>“Origin Stories: Cristina Pato & Kojiro Umezaki’s ‘Vojo,’”</i> online at either of these two websites:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• https://www.silkroadproject.org/posts/connecting-cultures-with-silkroad• https://youtu.be/h9yxp9F4Wr8 <p>Audio sample of <i>shakuhachi</i>: https://youtu.be/m4d1KggkfAc</p> <p>Audio sample of Galician <i>gaita</i>: https://youtu.be/CAP4CG3cdoY</p>
Equipment	<p>Computer with Internet access and a Flash-enabled or HTML5-supported web browser</p> <p>Computer projector and screen</p> <p>Computer speakers</p>
Teacher Preparation	<p>Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts.2. Set up and test computer, projector, speakers, and video before starting the lesson. Confirm that you are able to play all videos with adequate audio volume.3. Preview the video interview, <i>“Origin Stories: Cristina Pato & Kojiro Umezaki’s ‘Vojo.’”</i> See Teacher Information for a transcript of the interview.4. Become familiar with the content of handouts and the projection.

Time One 50-minute class period

- Procedures
1. Begin by informing students that they will be watching a three-minute interview in which two musicians from very different backgrounds—Galician *gaita* player Cristina Pato and Japanese *shakuhachi* player Kojiro Umezaki—discuss their creative process in composing and arranging “Vojo”, a piece that merges two very contrasting musical traditions.
 2. Distribute Handout 1, *Understanding the Artists and Instruments in “Vojo.”* Give students 5–10 minutes to read through the handout and answer question 1.
 3. Play the first 30 seconds of each of these audio clips of the instruments:
 - a. Audio sample of *shakuhachi* as played by Kojiro Umezaki: <https://youtu.be/m4d1KggkfAc> (total length = 2 minutes, 50 seconds)
 - b. Audio sample of Galician *gaita* as played by Cristina Pato: <https://youtu.be/CAP4CG3cdoY> (total length = 6 minutes, 19 seconds)
 4. Give students one minute to write down their responses to questions 2–5 on Handout 1.
 5. Play Video interview, “Origin Stories: Cristina Pato & Kojiro Umezaki’s ‘Vojo,’” once. If needed, play the video a second time.
 6. After the video, display Projection, *Discussion Questions*, and ask students to discuss the questions in small groups.
 - a. For you, what worked about hearing the two instruments together? What didn’t work?
 - b. What other musical combinations have been surprisingly harmonious to you?
 - c. The artists spoke about their music being a metaphor for surprising harmony. In what other aspects of life have you found opposites to complement each other?
 7. Distribute Handout 2, *“Vojo” and Esperanto*. Ask students to read through the handout and answer the questions at the end, either individually or in small groups.
 8. Assign Handout 4, *Reflection Exercise*, for homework as a culmination of this lesson.

Optional Activity For more advanced students, assign Handout 3, *“Vojo” and the Acculturation Framework*, rather than Handout 2, *“Vojo” and Esperanto*. Ask students to read through the handout and answer the questions at the end in small groups. This handout introduces a theoretical framework for acculturation, and as such is more relevant for courses that involve psychology and sociology.

BACKGROUND FOR UNDERSTANDING “VOJO”

Background Information

Please read the following before answering the questions at the end of this handout.

Silk Road Ensemble

Made up of performers and composers from more than 20 countries, the Silk Road Ensemble was formed under the artistic direction of Yo-Yo Ma in 2000. Since then, audiences and critics in over 30 countries throughout Asia, Europe, and North America have embraced these artists passionate about cross-cultural understanding and innovation. The group has recorded six albums. (Source: <http://www.silkroadproject.org/ensemble>)

Instruments

***Shakuhachi* (bamboo flute):**

Source: <https://www.silkroadproject.org/ensemble/instruments/shakuhachi>

The *shakuhachi* is made from the base of a bamboo stalk with holes drilled into the center and the sides. The instrument is played by blowing air across the beveled edge at the top end while covering and uncovering the holes with fingertips.

The *shakuhachi* has been used in Japanese Zen Buddhist meditation since the 15th century. The sounds produced by the instrument range from soft whispers to strong piercing tones. They are intended to reflect sounds in nature, such as birdcalls, wind and water. Today the *shakuhachi* is also often played in jazz, orchestral and popular music ensembles.

Galician bagpipe (*Gaita*):

Source: <https://www.silkroadproject.org/ensemble/instruments/gaita>

The bagpipe is found in many cultures around the world. Known as the *gaita* in Galicia, an autonomous region in the northwest of Spain, the instrument was popularized there during the 15th century, and has recently enjoyed resurgence in both folk and contemporary music.

With probable ancient origins in the Mediterranean, the bagpipe consists of a bag in which air is trapped and manipulated to produce prolonged tones with various effects. Once made from animal skins, the bags are now more commonly made from synthetic materials. The Galician bagpipe features a blowpipe and a chanter, or melody pipe, which contains two reeds and is played by covering and uncovering the holes with the hands. Up to three wooden drone pipes rest on the player’s shoulder or arm. The instrument is frequently played in folk dances and is also often accompanied by a drum or vocalist.

Artists

Kojiro Umezaki:

Source: <https://www.silkroadproject.org/ensemble/artists/kojiro-umezaki>

Japanese-Danish performer and composer Kojiro Umezaki, originally from Tokyo, is renowned as a virtuoso of the *shakuhachi*, but his work also encompasses traditional

and technology-based music mediated by various forms of electronics. His recent commissioned works and producer credits include those for Brooklyn Rider, Joseph Gramley, Huun Huur Tu, and the Silk Road Ensemble. Umezaki is currently associate professor of music at the University of California, Irvine, where he is a core faculty member of the Integrated Composition, Improvisation, and Technology (ICIT) group.

Cristina Pato:

Source: <https://www.silkroadproject.org/ensemble/artists/cristina-pato>

Cristina Pato is a master of the Galician bagpipe (*gaita*), a classical pianist, and a passionate educator. Hailed as “a virtuosic burst of energy” by the *New York Times*, and as “one of the living masters of the *gaita*” by the *Wall Street Journal*, her professional life is devoted to cultural exchange and forging new paths for the Galician bagpipe. Cristina has performed on major stages throughout the world and has released and produced six solo *gaita* albums and two solo piano recordings, and collaborated on more than 40 albums as a guest artist.

Education is a critical part of Cristina’s personal and professional life. She serves as one of Silkroad’s learning advisors, has been an artist-in-residence at a number of universities, including Harvard, the University of California, Santa Barbara, and College of the Holy Cross, is the founder of the multidisciplinary Galician Connection Festival, and writes a bimonthly column for the Spanish newspaper, *El Correo Gallego*.

Cristina holds a DMA in Collaborative Piano from Rutgers University, degrees in piano, music theory, and chamber music from the Conservatorio de Musica del Liceu, and a Master of Fine Arts in Computer Music from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra.

Origins

Kojiro and Cristina created “Vojo” by combining traditional and folk melodies from Okinawa, Japan and Galicia, Spain. Below, the artists describe the significance of these melodies.

Cristina Pato: “The one from Galicia is an *Alborada*, the kind of music you use to wake people up to come to a party or to church in the very early morning. The piece Ko brought from Okinawa is something similar. We tried to look for the things that were in common between the two cultures. We already had two very different instruments and two different ways of understanding music, and then we started looking for things that make things connect. The Galician piece that I brought for “Vojo”... I grew up playing those melodies in the very early morning with my sister to get people to go to church. It’s about community.”

Kojiro Umezaki: “The piece that I [brought] into this particular work was *Sa-sa Bushi*. It’s not necessarily one of the more famous folk tunes from Okinawa. It’s actually about a young woman. It’s a full moon that night, and she just wants to go to the beach and bring all of her friends to the beach to celebrate that night, because if they don’t celebrate then, when are they ever going to celebrate?

It is about a calling. It’s about bringing people together on both sides. In Cristina’s case, it’s related to the context of church service and bringing people to that. And in the case of *Sa-sa Bushi*, it’s more a celebration, I think. But we’re trying to connect both. What we’re trying to do is bring communities together in this framework of contrast.”

“VOJO” AND THE ACCULTURATION FRAMEWORK

“Vojo” is an example of how one element of two cultures—their folk musical traditions—work together. As such, it is an example of acculturation, the process of cultural change that occurs when two or more cultures meet. According to Professor John W. Berry, one of the founders of acculturation psychology, there are four main acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Berry developed the framework below to explain these strategies:

	Maintaining one’s identity and characteristics IS valued	Maintaining one’s identity and characteristics IS NOT valued
Maintaining relationships with the greater society IS valued	<p>INTEGRATION</p> <p>Individuals are able to adopt the cultural norms of the dominant or host culture while maintaining their culture of origin</p>	<p>ASSIMILATION</p> <p>Individuals adopt the cultural norms of a dominant or host culture, over their original culture</p>
Maintaining relationships with the greater society IS NOT valued	<p>SEPARATION</p> <p>Individuals reject the dominant or host culture in favor of preserving their culture of origin</p>	<p>MARGINALIZATION</p> <p>Individuals reject both their culture of origin and the dominant host culture</p>

Source: Berry, John W. (1997). “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation.” *Applied Psychology*. Wiley-Blackwell. 46 (1): 10. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x.

Based on this framework, which of the four acculturation strategies does “Vojo” seem to most advocate or follow?

Which of the four approaches do you believe the artists would support? Why?

What are some examples of how music has helped people who enter a new cultural context acculturate?

REFLECTION EXERCISE

The “Vojo” video interview explained how the challenge of bringing two cultural traditions together forged not only a provocative work of art, but also a friendship between two people of disparate cultural backgrounds.

Using the video interview as inspiration, write a reflection in response to one of the following prompts:

1. As noted in the video, “‘Vojo’ creates a musical dialogue that explores and connects the cultural roots of two very different parts of the world.” Do you have any divergent elements in your heritage? Do your ancestors come from different parts of the world? Are you living in a very different part of the country than where your family is from or where you grew up? If so, explain what elements of the “Vojo” video resonated with you and why, as well as which elements (if any) did not resonate with you.
2. Describe a time when an element of culture (dance, music, visual art, language, food, movies, architecture, etc.) brought you closer to someone from a different cultural background. If you cannot think of any examples in your personal life, use an example from someone you know or from a story you have encountered.
3. Have you ever been surprised when a work of art (dance, music, visual art, language, food, movies, architecture, etc.) from a very different culture or part of the world seemed to speak to your personal values, dreams, or passions? Describe this experience, why it surprised you, and what you learned from it.

To give you an example of how others have addressed this, we have included reflections from three students on the following pages. Note that all of these students responded to the **first prompt** above. We thank these students for their permission in allowing us to use their thoughts:

- Lukas Chao (high school student, Fusion Academy, San Francisco, California, USA)
- Sarah Fujimori (middle school student, Menlo School, Menlo Park, California, USA)
- Mika Isayama (high school student, Henry M. Gunn High School, Palo Alto, California, USA)

Reflection Example 1: Lukas Chao

Being half Chinese and half Japanese, balancing two sometimes very different philosophies of life, has always been something I struggled with. Growing up in San Francisco, one of the world's most liberal cities, I was surrounded by other mixed-race or mixed-ethnic children and I never really put much thought into race and ethnicity and the importance that many in the world place on them. I was only really exposed to this at a particular family event, when I noticed the Chinese and Japanese sides of the family sitting on opposite ends of the room and I wondered how they could come closer together.

The music in this video reminded me of that connection. At the beginning of the video, Cristina talks about the origins of the piece “Vojo”—how it began through discourse and through simply sitting down and talking with one another. There is merit in simply talking and understanding each other, as it helps connect us at a human level. For me, the bagpipe symbolizes my Chinese side while the *shakuhachi* represents my Japanese side. Both different types of music probably share very little similarities, but that does not mean they cannot work together and produce something beautiful, as heard from the song. On one end there is the strong and beautiful sound of the bagpipe and on the other there is the soft and delicate sound of the *shakuhachi*. The blend between two completely unique sounds was able to create this beautiful explosion of music. The beautiful harmonization between the two instruments made me remember that I need to find a balance between being Japanese and Chinese to be the best person I can be. Those who believe one is better than the other cannot improve and grow as human beings. By experiencing this amazing blend of two different sounds, more and more opportunities will open up.

Reflection Example 2: Sarah Fujimori

Many years ago, I visited the Silk Road in China. The road was a network that originated in China and connected civilizations across Europe, Asia, and Africa. As a result, new technology traveled along this route, bringing civilizations into contact that would have not normally interacted.

My own dual heritage of being Japanese and Chinese has brought together two cultures. I have learned that in the Japanese language there are three writing systems, one of which (*kanji*) shares the same characters as the Chinese language. Moreover, there are similarities in architecture between the two countries—in particular, the Buddhist temples I see when traveling to China and Japan. Like my own experiences, “Vojo” has brought together two separate cultures, discovering a wonderful, unique fit between the different instruments. Music is a form of dialogue that can cross cultures, and it can be understood by anyone. “Vojo” celebrates a crucial part of a successful community: Diversity, the beauty in a wide variety of cultures that come together.

I study these two cultures, and when I visit family in both countries, I even introduce some American culture to them. Even if countries have tension, this type of cross-cultural dialogue can help them find something in common, foster collaboration, and may even lead to a better relationship. Culture is part of one's identity, special to everyone in a different way. Mixing cultures brings together different people and different worlds, simultaneously observing and appreciating both the similarities and differences between them. The connections between the cultures are found with not only creativity, but also an open mind that accepts and encourages diversity, and exploring one's passion in a new light or collaborating with someone new that

follows a different culture or way of thinking. Ultimately, the unexpected yet perfect harmony of “Vojo” illustrates the beautiful connections between seemingly completely different countries that lie beyond their political relationship.

Reflection Example 3: Mika Isayama

People who grew up in different countries are constantly exposed to a variety of languages and cultural differences in this world. At least, that is how I felt when I grew up in Japan and the United States, where I was surrounded by friends from different parts of the world such as China, Korea, Spain, and Russia. It didn’t take too long for me to realize that this diversity is what makes us unique and our world interesting. It’s the mixture of cultures and jam sessions that create something new and bring excitement to our lives. So how do we connect people and bridge cultures together while embracing the diversity that sets people apart in our global society? As an immigrant who struggled to narrow cultural gaps, I was impressed and enlightened by Cristina Pato and Kojiro Umezaki’s “Vojo,” and its success in bridging two very distinct cultures—Japanese and Spanish—together.

To a musician, a piece may be a compilation of instruments, dynamics, genres, pitches, rhythms, and tempos. To a regular audience member, however, music is often more about the entertainment and experience. Sure, music is not a spoken language and you can’t have conversations using it, but it is a universal element that connects people together—no matter how diverse their backgrounds are. Even if we may not understand the lyrics of foreign music, we may share the same notes, same melodies, and therefore the same emotions. Like Cristina Pato said in the video, I agree that “the reality of having these two instruments together playing on a stage is not so weird.” “Vojo” didn’t sound funky or unnatural at all, and I believe that music can uncover similarities between cultures that we may have never noticed or discovered before.

Discussion Questions

1. For you, what worked about hearing the two instruments together? What didn't work?
2. What other musical combinations have been surprisingly harmonious to you?
3. The artists spoke about their music being a metaphor for surprising harmony. In what other aspects of life have you found opposites to complement each other?

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

On-screen text: Silkroad Presents: Origin Stories - Cristina Pato & Kojiro Umezaki's "Vojo"

On-screen text: "Vojo," which means "journey" in Esperanto, combines traditional and folk melodies from Galicia, Spain and Okinawa, Japan.

On-screen text: It creates a musical dialogue that explores and connects the cultural roots of two very different parts of the world.

Cristina Pato: "Vojo" is a piece that Ko Umezaki and myself co-wrote and co-arranged. I think we began talking, and that is a very unusual way of working in music.

Kojiro Umezaki: The contrast is so apparent, right, at the outset that we have to have a conversation about what are we going to do, because they're two sonic worlds that we're trying to put together here. So the way that I think we dealt with it was to find metaphors or just connecting ideas.

[Sample of "Vojo" being played]

Cristina Pato: Think about the loudest instrument in the world: that would be me. Then think about the softest and most meditative instrument in the world, and that would be Ko's instrument. And now think about putting them together, and think about what are the challenges into making that work. And through that process, we ended up actually developing a beautiful relationship, but also a piece that will connect the beautiful things about my culture that are in common with the beautiful things about his culture.

Kojiro Umezaki: It is about a calling, it's about gathering people together, I think, on both sides. What we're trying to do is bring communities together in this framework of contrast.

[Sample of "Vojo" being played]

Cristina Pato: Then, when we are on a stage, not only do we believe that we can make it work, but we also make the audience to believe that the reality of having these two instruments together playing on a stage is not – is not so weird; it actually works, and it makes you feel something. And at some point you forget that you have a Japanese flute and a Galician bagpipe playing together on a stage, and you just focus on the experience.

Kojiro Umezaki: We were set up to deal with what seemed to be a very difficult problem of contrasting elements, and I think we can extract that situation and put it into any kind of context. Sometimes there's struggle in that challenge, but the reason why we do it is because we want to discover things that we probably would not have done had we not had this setup of very contrasting elements put together in a single space.