

2025 PCCU Conference - Understanding and Teaching Culture Through Music

Lesson Title: Singing the Times: Bridging Cultures Through Korean Music

Lesson Context: High school students, 9-12 graders, studying world language and culture in an urban school, 78-minute class periods

Introduction - Reflective Essay:

Attending the 2025 PCCU Conference - Understanding and Teaching Culture Through Music was an inspiring experience that deepened my understanding of how music can bridge cultural divides. The sessions emphasized that music is not just an artistic product, but also a living expression of identity, emotion, and collective memory. For example, at one of the most influential sessions explored "Arirang", a music professor described how the song's unforgettable melody and poetic lyrics convey a deep sense of sadness and resilience, as well as a feeling of affection and emotional connection. As I listened to regional variations of "Arirang", I was struck by how this folk song captures the heart of the Korean people, including their struggles, hopes, and enduring spirit. This reinforced my previous belief that teaching music is not just about melody or pronunciation, but more importantly, about exploring the cultural values and history inherent in sound. I have come to realize more deeply that teaching Korean music can help American students build a meaningful emotional connection with Korean culture.

As a world language teacher, I deeply understand that music can make language learning more tangible. When students sing "Arirang" in Korean, they are not just practicing the lyrics, but also experiencing the rhythm, emotions, and cultural connotations behind the song. This immersion fosters deeper empathy and understanding. Furthermore, in classroom discussions, students can reflect on how "Arirang" expresses love and loss, comparing it to songs in their own culture that express similar themes. These moments allow students to recognize cultural differences and universal human experiences, thus helping them build cultural competence.

The conference also emphasized the importance of integrating music with other forms of learning. Korean songs can be naturally linked to music, history, geography, language, and art lessons. Exploring traditional instruments such as the gayageum (zither) or the janggu (hourglass drum) helps students understand the Korean aesthetic of balance and harmony. Comparing traditional versions of "Arirang" with modern interpretations by Korean pop singers demonstrates how Korean culture evolves while preserving tradition. This multimodal teaching approach transforms classrooms across different disciplines into spaces for cultural exploration, rather than simply lecturing on knowledge.

After attending this year's PCCU conference, I feel more comfortable and plan to incorporate more Korean music into my teaching as a form of cultural narrative. Students can learn short songs, analyze lyrics, or create bilingual lyrical artworks to express the emotions conveyed in the songs. They can also compare "Arirang" with American folk songs to discover universal themes such as belonging, love, and resilience. These experiences help learners recognize that language, culture, and social influence are inseparable through music. In fact, music is a universal language that transcends language, encompassing cultural concepts and social values.

Ultimately, this conference made me realize that teaching Korean music is not just about teaching a song or understanding its trends, but more importantly, about cultivating empathy and cultural

awareness. Through the rhythms and melodies of Korean music, American students can learn to listen in different ways, experience the resonance of another culture, and feel the shared heartbeat of humanity.

Teaching Opportunities:

The 2025 PCCU Conference - Understanding and Teaching Culture Through Music provides me with numerous opportunities to cultivate students' intercultural awareness both inside and outside the classroom and in the wider community. By integrating cultural themes into the curriculum and utilizing community resources, I can help students and community members gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Korean culture. For examples:

1. **Project-Based Learning:** I can assign students to research different Korean songs and present their findings through multimedia projects, presentations, or stage performances. This approach promotes active learning and encourages students to explore cross-cultural topics in depth.
2. **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** I can incorporate cross-cultural comparison into the existing curriculum and ask students to point out the similarities and differences between Korean and American songs. This comparative approach helps students develop a global perspective.
3. **Cultural Studies Unit:** I can design a unit specifically focused on Korean songs, covering a variety of folk songs and modern K-pop, supplemented by discussions on the cultural significance of Korean music in different eras.
4. **Cultural Awareness Days:** I can advocate for and assist in organizing campus-wide cultural exchange activities. These activities can include guest lectures, cultural performances, and interactive workshops on various aspects of Korean music. Students can share their research articles, videos, and individual projects to showcase their learning outcomes, thereby attracting a wider audience and stimulating interest in intercultural topics.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify and interpret key vocabulary and phrases from Korean songs.
2. Read and sing the lyrics with the correct rhythm and intonation.
3. Use simple Korean expressions to demonstrate understanding of the song's historical and emotional significance in Korean culture.

Lesson Procedures:

1. Warm-Up (10 minutes): "Music and Emotion Across Cultures"

Objective: Activate background knowledge and connect personally to music.

Teacher Actions:

- Write on board: "What song represents your culture or identity?"
- Show 2–3 famous world songs (e.g., "Auld Lang Syne," "La Bamba," "Mo Li Hua").
- Ask: "What makes a song feel national or emotional?"

Student Actions:

- Pair-share: each student describes one meaningful song from their own culture.
- Teacher records key words (sad, happy, slow, proud, love, goodbye) on board.

Transition:

“Today we’ll listen to a song "Arirang" that many Koreans feel represents their heart.”

Formative Check:

Students volunteer to describe the emotions music can express.

2. Pre-Listening (10 minutes): Vocabulary & Cultural Background

Objective: Build comprehension and cultural schema before listening.

Teacher Actions:

- Introduce key vocabulary on slides:
 - 아리랑 (Arirang) – Korean folk tune / refrain
 - 고개 (mountain pass) – symbol of hardship or farewell
 - 정 (affection, connection) – untranslatable cultural emotion
 - 이별 (parting, separation)
- Use images and gestures to illustrate meanings.
- Explain briefly:
 - Arirang has over 60 regional versions (e.g., Miryang Arirang, Jeongseon Arirang).
 - It expresses Korean resilience and emotional depth (한 han, 정 jeong).
 - UNESCO recognized it as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2012).

Student Actions:

- Repeat each new word aloud.
- Match words with pictures on printed cards or slides.
- Write short notes in vocabulary section of handout.

Formative Check:

Students call out English equivalents for each new term.

3. First Listening (10 minutes): Comprehension & Emotional Response

Objective: Understand general meaning and feeling of the song.

Teacher Actions:

- Play "Arirang" (traditional slow version).

Arirang

아리랑

Korean folk song



- Display Korean lyrics with romanization, English, and Chinese translation side-by-side

Arirang 아리랑 阿里郎

Lyrics - Romanization

Arirang, Arirang, Arariyo
 Arirang gogaero neomeoganda
 Nareul beorigo gashineun nimeun
 Shimrido motgaseo balbyeongnanda

Korean – 아리랑

아리랑, 아리랑, 아라리요
 아리랑 고개로 넘어간다
 나를 버리고 가시는 님은
 십리도 못가서 발병난다

English Translation - My Sweetheart

Arirang, Arirang, Arariyo
 Crossing over Arirang Pass
 The one who abandoned me
 Will fall ill before going ten miles

Chinese – 阿里郎

阿里郎, 阿里郎, 阿拉里哟, 我要过阿里郎山了, 离开我的人, 不到十里就会生病。

- Guide students: “Circle any words you recognize. Underline parts that sound repeated.”

Student Actions:

- Listen quietly first, then hum along the second time.
- After listening, students jot down their emotional impression (sad, calm, proud, nostalgic).

Teacher Prompts (in Korean + English):

- 슬퍼요? (Is it sad?)
- 아름다워요? (Is it beautiful?)
- 빠르아요? 느려요? (Is it fast or slow?)

Formative Check:

Ask 3–4 students to share how the song made them feel using simple Korean phrases:

“저는 슬퍼요.” / “노래가 느려요.” / “아름다워요.”

4. Guided Cultural Discussion (10 minutes): “Why Is Arirang Important?”

Objective: Connect song themes to Korean history and emotion.

Teacher Actions:

- Explain briefly how Arirang was sung by farmers, workers, and activists.
- Show short video clip (1 min) of Arirang at the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics.
- Discuss how music can carry collective memory and national pride.

Student Actions:

- In small groups, discuss:
 - “What emotion do you feel from this song?”
 - “When might people sing this kind of song?”
- Share 1–2 group responses with class.

Formative Check:

Teacher listens for emotional vocabulary in Korean and content comprehension in English.

5. Pronunciation & Singing Practice (20 minutes)

Objective: Build pronunciation, rhythm, and confidence in singing.

Teacher Actions:

- Break the song into short sections:
 - 아리랑, 아리랑, 아라리요
 - 아리랑 고개로 넘어간다
 - 나를 버리고 가시는 님은
 - 십리도 못 가서 발병난다
- Model pronunciation slowly.
- Play instrumental or karaoke version.

- Lead call-and-response singing (teacher sings a line, students echo).
- Add clapping or simple beat with rhythm sticks.

Student Actions:

- Practice pronunciation and melody in small groups.
- Sing the chorus together multiple times.
- Optional: record a short group singing clip for later reflection.

Pronunciation Focus:

- Emphasize rhythm on “-랑” and soft ‘r/l’ sound.
- Use body gestures to feel phrasing and flow.

Formative Check:

Teacher circulates, noting pronunciation accuracy and engagement.

6. Reflection & Comparison (10 minutes)

Objective: Deepen cultural and emotional understanding.

Teacher Actions:

- Ask reflection questions:
 - “What message or feeling do you think Arirang expresses?”
 - “Can you think of a similar song from your culture?”
- Give each student a sticky note or index card:
 - Write 2 Korean words learned today and 1 emotion you felt.
 - Example: 아름다워요 (beautiful), 슬퍼요 (sad)

Student Actions:

- Write short reflection (in English or Korean).
- Example:

저는 아리랑을 좋아해요. 노래가 슬프지만 예뻐요.

Formative Check:

Collect cards to assess vocabulary and affective engagement.

7. Closure (5 minutes): Review and Connection

- Review key terms: 아리랑, 고개, 정, 이별
- Quick oral quiz: “How do you say ‘beautiful’ in Korean?” “What does Arirang represent?”
- Conclude:

“Through music, we understand culture. Arirang teaches us the emotion of connection and perseverance in Korean life.”

8. Optional Extensions / Follow-Up Activities

Option A: Modern Music Connection

- Play a contemporary Arirang remix or K-pop song inspired by traditional melodies.
- Students identify differences in rhythm, instrumentation, and emotion.

Option B: Cross-Cultural Comparison

- Compare Arirang to a local folk song using a Venn diagram:
 - Themes, instruments, emotions, and purposes.

Option C: Project / Assessment

- Group performance or mini-presentation:
 - Introduce Arirang’s meaning, sing a short part, and share their interpretation.

References:

- Korean Folk Song - Arirang
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bC62xvkl9g>)
- Contemporary Korean Song – Arirang by BTS (방탄소년단)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZOQ6HjHEC0>)
- Pyeongchang Olympics OBS Theme Arirang Music
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhraMl1ndxM>)
- Rod Stewart - Auld Lang Syne
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Al7ONqrdscY>)
- Ritchie Valens - La Bamba
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwjKTH5xCTw>)
- Chinese Traditional Folk Song - Mo Li Hua Jasmine Flower
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItPX_IJyPE)

Standards:

Local Standards:

1. SPPS Social Studies Standards:

- Standard 4 (Culture): Students will understand and appreciate cultural diversity and the role of culture in their lives and in the world.

2. SPPS World Languages Standards:

- o Standard 5 (Connections): Connect with other disciplines and acquire information and diverse perspectives in order to use the language to function in academic and career-related situations.

State Standards:

1. Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies:

- o Strand 4 (History): The student will understand historical events and concepts.
 - Benchmark 9.4.4.18.1: Analyze how the cultural characteristics of different regions of the world are impacted by geography, historical events, and individuals.

2. Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in World Languages:

- o Standard 1 (Communication): Communicate in languages other than English.
 - Benchmark 9.1.1.1: Engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.
- o Standard 2 (Cultures): Gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures.
 - Benchmark 9.2.1.1: Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.

National Standards:

ACTFL World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages:

- o Standard 2.1 (Relating Cultural Practices to Perspectives): Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.
- o Standard 2.2 (Relating Cultural Products to Perspectives): Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.
- o Standard 4.1 (Language Comparisons): Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.
- o Standard 4.2 (Cultural Comparisons): Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.
- o Standard 5.1 (Communities): Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.
- o Standard 5.2 (Lifelong Learning): Students show evidence of becoming lifelong learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Materials Needed

- PowerPoint slides with:
 - o Song title, background, and key vocabulary (Hangul + Romanization + English)

- o Images: Korean landscape, traditional instruments (가야금, 장구), and national symbols
- Audio/Video:
 - o Traditional version of Arirang (slow folk)
 - o Modern rendition (e.g., BTS, IU, or Arirang from 2018 Winter Olympics)
- Printed or digital lyric sheets
- Whiteboard for vocabulary
- Sticky notes / index cards for reflection