

study guide



INVOKE



study guide

Invoke

School-Day Performance

Wednesday, November 15, 2023, 10-11 AM

Recommended for students in grades 5-8

The following guide was created by the Moss Arts Center and Invoke. The Moss Arts Center would like to thank Invoke for its assistance with this educational resource.



For more information about the ensemble, visit invokesound.com.

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WE WANT EVERYONE TO ENJOY THE SHOW

Please prepare your students for their visit to the Moss Arts Center by practicing audience etiquette before you attend a live performance. The following guidelines will ensure that everyone can enjoy the show:

- Find your seat before the show begins. If you arrive after the show has started, the ushers may need to wait for an appropriate time in the performance to seat you. Always follow the instructions from the ushers.
- Turn off your cell phone and any other device that creates light or could make noise and distract others during the performance.
- Photography, audio, or video recording is not allowed inside the theatre.
- Food, gum, and beverages are not allowed inside the theatre.
- Keep the aisles clear at all times and stay seated so that those behind you can also see the stage. Please keep your shoes off of the seats.
- You can show appreciation and enthusiasm for the performance by paying attention and clapping at the proper time. Save personal conversations and questions for after the show.
- Some performers may invite you to clap, sing along, or even dance in your seat! We want you to have fun, but please make sure you are not ruining the experience for your neighbors. Use your self-management skills to control your voice and body.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

“ The special thing about Invoke is the group’s love of bluegrass and how its lively spirit and playfulness are essential to the way they approach every piece of music. They infuse their performances with such a down-home joyfulness that they can be playing Beethoven at the Blanton, and you’ll feel like you’re on a porch in the Blue Ridge Mountains. ”

— *Austin Chronicle, Best of Austin 2019,*
“Most Foot-Stompin’ Classical”

Burlywood by Invoke, 4 minutes
Evolve and Travel by Invoke, 7 minutes
Alchemy by Invoke, 3 minutes
Doorway by Invoke, 3 minutes
Story Improvisations by Invoke, 15 minutes
Lift by Paul Wiancko, 4 min

ABOUT INVOKE

Described as “...not classical but not, not classical...beautiful, adventurous, American and immediately engaging” (David Srebnik, former SiriusXM classical producer), Invoke strives to successfully dodge even the most valiant attempts at genre classification. The multi-instrumental quartet encompasses traditions from across America, including bluegrass, Appalachian fiddle tunes, jazz, and minimalism. Fueled by its passion for storytelling, Invoke weaves all of these styles together to form a unique contemporary repertoire, featuring original works composed by and for the group.

Invoke was selected to be the young professional string quartet-in-residence at the University of Texas at Austin from 2016-2018. The ensemble’s awards include first prizes in the Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition in New York; at the M-Prize International Chamber Arts competition in Ann Arbor, Michigan; and in the Coltman Competition in Austin, Texas.

Invoke has shared the stage with some of the most acclaimed musical groups in the country, including the Westerlies, Miró and Ensō quartets, and the U.S. Army Field Band. Additional performance highlights include Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall, Lincoln Center, and the Green Music Center. Invoke has also appeared with musicians from various genres, including chamber rock group San Fermin, indie group Never Shout Never, and Washington, D.C. beatboxer, rapper, and spoons virtuoso Christylez Bacon.

Invoke's discography includes its debut album, *Souls in the Mud* (2015); *Furious Creek* (2018); and *Fantastic Planet* (2021). The group's recording credits appear on bassist/composer Ethan Foote's solo album, *Fields Burning*; singer/songwriter Marian McLaughlin's *Spirit House*; jazz/soul singer Rochelle Rice's EP, *Wonder*; and many more.

Invoke is committed to championing diverse American voices through commissioning new music. Invoke's ongoing commissioning project, entitled *American Postcards*, asks composers to pick a time and place in American history and tell its story through the group's unique artistry.

Nick Montopoli, violin, banjo, and vocals

When he's not banjo pickin' or fiddle scrapin' with Invoke, you might find Nick Montopoli at the recording studio of composer Graham Reynolds, where he works as Reynolds' assistant, or pumping iron at the Montopoli Barbell Club. He also loves relaxing to the soothing tones of power metal, or stalking around the stage of a reunion show as lead singer of a former Washington, D.C. hair metal band.

Zach Matteson, violin and vocals

A man of many origins (e.g. Maryland, Siberia, Montana), Zach Matteson is proud to call Austin, Texas his home base. When he's not making tunes with Invoke, you can find him at a local coffee shop writing down some haikus, slurping down ramen from Ramen Tatsuya, or adding to his crazy collection of shirts from the local goodwill.

Karl Mitze, viola, mandolin, and vocals

When he isn't performing and teaching with Invoke, Karl Mitze enjoys baseball, board games, and walking his dog, Max. A huge baseball fan, Mitze follows the Cincinnati Reds avidly and listens to as many games as possible, usually when running at the park. He is also kind of a nerd: he's a weekend Xbox player, loves fantasy novels, and enjoys anything Dungeons and Dragons-related. You can often find him enjoying trivia night somewhere in Austin, Texas.

Geoff Manyin, cello and vocals

Geoff Manyin is passionate about scrumptious vegan food, always searching for Austin's best tacos, Thai, or tofu scramble. An avid video gamer, you'll often find Manyin enjoying a role-playing game, a story-rich one-off, or whatever may strike his fancy that month. Sometimes though, all he needs to be happy is a stroll through a local park on a crisp afternoon, a great Netflix show, or a nice chat with an old friend.

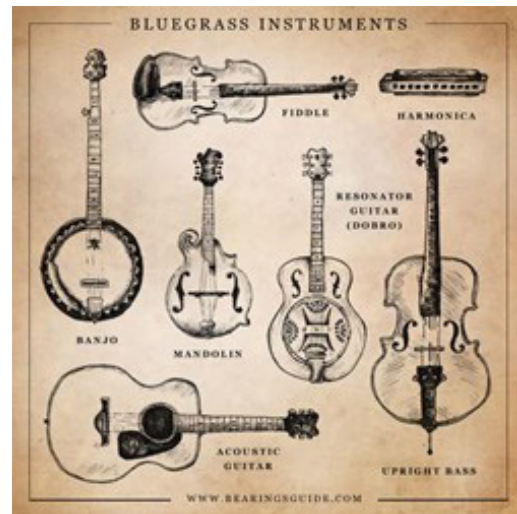
LEARNING ACTIVITIES

MUSIC

Bluegrass: The Sound of Appalachia

The origin of bluegrass music can be traced to the people who came to America in the 1600s from Ireland, Scotland, and England and brought with them basic styles of music that are generally considered to be the roots of modern bluegrass music. As the settlers began to move out into North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia, they wrote songs about daily life in the new land. Since most of these people lived in remote areas, many of the songs reflected life on the farm or in the hills. This music was often referred to as country, hillbilly, or mountain music. Its development included the blending of elements from gospel music and the blues music that was prominent among people of African origin who lived in the Mississippi Delta region. The invention of the phonograph and the onset of radio in the early- to mid-1900s brought this music out of the hills and into the homes of people all over the United States.

Typically, a bluegrass band consists of four to seven performers who sing while accompanying themselves on acoustic string instruments such as the guitar, double bass, fiddle, five-string banjo, mandolin, steel guitar, and Dobro. Bluegrass combines elements of old-time mountain music, square dance fiddling, blues, gospel, jazz, and popular music. Like jazz, bluegrass allows performers to improvise and take turns playing lead. Its distinctive timing surges slightly ahead of or anticipates the main beat, creating an energized effect. Its vocal range is rather high, forcing vocalists into their upper ranges and creating a tight, almost austere, sometimes called "high lonesome" sound. Bluegrass makes frequent use of close-harmony duets, trios, and quartets.



The bluegrass style first became popular in the 1940s, largely through the efforts of Bill Monroe (1911-1996) and his Blue Grass Boys (Earl Scruggs, Lester Flatt, Chubby Wise, and Joel Price). Previously, as one-half of the Monroe Brothers act, Bill Monroe starred as mandolinist, fiddler, radio performer, and recording artist with his brother, Charlie. In 1938 he formed the Blue Grass Boys, naming the band after the nickname for his home state of Kentucky. Deeply rooted in country sounds, the group combined elements of swing with a surging fiddle and syncopated banjo picking to create a wholly new genre. As instrumentalists, each member of the band is regarded by performers today as a model of all that's best in bluegrass playing, and as singers, the group created a unique sound. Today the recordings of Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys are landmarks in country gospel, both critically and popularly acclaimed. The band members may have changed over the years, but the band's sound and the quality of its compositions remained strong throughout.

As with other popular music of the time, bluegrass developed regional shadings. Honky tonk sold well in the Midwest, southern influences crept northward up the Atlantic coast, in Nashville it was definitely infused with mainstream country, and the West Coast seemed to encompass all shadings. Many in the audience considered the music "country" or "hillbilly," but purists recognized bluegrass as a separate entity.

In the 1950s rock and roll took over the country, while bluegrass performers faded in popularity. However, by the 1960s country and bluegrass music had become infused with new energy as part of a folk music revival. In 1965 singer-promoter Carlton Haney and folklorist Ralph Rinzler produced the first genuine bluegrass festival in Fincastle, Virginia. Bluegrass moved from the bars and tour buses, to which it had been relegated in the 1950s, to the open air and the airwaves. When younger performers started adding elements of jazz, pop, and rock to the traditional country base, bluegrass somehow mutated into "newgrass." Bluegrass music has never truly left the musical stage; it has merely adapted. Since Bill Monroe's first time on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry in 1939, pickers and singers have been keeping his style alive even as they have added new elements to it, just as Bill did when he created bluegrass in the 1940s.

► **VIRGINIA MUSIC SOLS:** 5.6, 6.6, 7.6, 8.6, HM.6

LEARNING ACTIVITIES, cont.

Analyze and Evaluate Music

Share the YouTube video of [Invoke performing Burlywood](#) while students watch, listen, and write their observations of the piece using the guiding questions below. Play the video more than once to allow students to focus on different elements of the performance.

OBSERVE: Identify and note details

- What type of music is it?
- What instruments do you see and hear?
- How would you describe the tempo of the piece?
- How does the volume of the instruments change throughout the piece?
- Are there details that suggest the historical period or culture this music relates to?
- What other details can you hear?

REFLECT: Formulate and justify responses

- How does the instrumentation affect the feeling or mood of the song?
- Why do you think the creator chose this tempo? How does the tempo affect the feeling or mood of the music?
- What do you think the creator might have wanted the audience to think or feel? What evidence supports your theory?
- How does the music make you feel?
- What did you learn from listening to this music?

► **VIRGINIA MUSIC SOLS:** 5.3, 5.4, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, HM.3, HM.4, HM.5

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Songs as Stories

The most studied musical tradition in the Appalachian region is the ballad. Many ballad melodies began in England, Scotland, Ireland, or Wales and then traveled with settlers to the mountains of Appalachia. Ballads were then passed on from generation to generation. Although the tunes or composition would change with each generation of musicians, often following some sort of event, the essence of the ballad would remain. Like the range of popular music in America today, ballads tell stories of love and loss, murder and violence, heartbreak and betrayal, or heroes and villains.

Ballads are songs that tell a story in short stanzas. The ballad style of song appealed to the Appalachian people for many reasons. Ballads typically told a simple story that contained a moral tale or advice for the listener. The themes that many ballads carried were usually universal feelings that people of the time could relate to and feel validated in their own experiences of lost love, death, and other difficult realities of a challenging rural life. In Appalachian ballads, many of the plot lines focused on real problems that real people faced.

Provide students with the lyrics for the ballads *Gypsy Davy* and *Pretty Saro* before beginning the activity. Both of these songs have been covered by many artists, but really wonderful recordings by Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan, respectively, are linked in the resources.

As a class, listen to both songs while following along with the lyrics. As they listen, ask students to consider:

- What makes these two songs ballads?
- What kinds of instruments do you hear?
- How would you describe the tone or mood of this piece of music?
- In what ways does the music support the story that is being told?
- Can you think of any contemporary songs that might be ballads?

Share the audio and printed lyrics for *Dear John* by Taylor Swift. In what ways does this song fit the definition of a ballad? How is it different?

Using what we have learned about ballads, write an original ballad in the form of a poem or song lyrics about a contemporary or personal event. The final product should contain at least four stanzas in rhymed quatrains.

► **VIRGINIA ELA SOLS:** 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.7, 7.2, 7.3, 7.5, 7.7, 8.3, 8.5, 8.7

LEARNING ACTIVITIES, cont.

Exquisite Corpse: Collaborative Writing Exercise

Improvisation and collaboration are integral to Invoke’s musical process. Have your students try these tools in writing and then reflect on how they impact their artistic process.

Exquisite Corpse is a collaborative writing exercise with roots in the Parisian Surrealist Movement. It is designed to promote imaginative thinking during the writing process. This activity can be adapted for prose, poetry, or playwriting.

For this activity, it may be easiest to split students into groups of five or six. Provide each student with a sheet of paper. Each student writes the opening two to three sentences of a story, folds the paper so that part of what they wrote is obscured, and then passes the paper to the next student. Without opening the paper, the next student writes two to three sentences of the story, folds the paper so that part of what they wrote is obscured, and then passes it to the next student. Consider using a timer to maintain a quick and fun pace to keep the story moving forward. You may choose to end the activity after students have had the opportunity to contribute to each story once, twice, or three times. When you stop, each student should end up with a story in their hands. Have students read the final stories out loud to their small group. You may choose to have one member from each group share their group’s favorite story with the full class.

If choosing to create a poem instead of a short story, it is easiest to establish a sentence structure for students to follow (i.e. adjective, noun, verb, adjective, noun). In this version, students contribute a single word at a time, rather than a full line.

Revision and Reflection:

Have students revise the story or poem that they started with in the exquisite corpse activity. Challenge them to incorporate literary elements into their writing. They may attempt to convey a theme, mood, or tone, or they may choose to incorporate foreshadowing, metaphor, symbolism, etc. Prompt students to reflect on which elements they kept from the original exquisite corpse, which elements they removed, and which new elements they added. Have students explain how the collaborative exercise impacted their writing process, why they made the revisions they did, and how their authorial choices contribute to their work as a whole.

► **VIRGINIA ELA SOLS:** 5.7b, 5.7h, 6.7b, 6.7i, 7.7b, 7.7j, 8.7b, 8.7g

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Yes, And: Improv Games for SEL Learning

Improvisation and collaboration are integral to Invoke's musical process. Have your students try these improv games to build classroom community.

Improv games can be used in any class to help students build relationships, resilience, and quick decision-making skills. These activities are useful as a brain break between activities, or at the end of the day to help students self-regulate and connect with their peers. They also give your class the opportunity to practice good audience behavior before attending a live performance.

Questions Only

This scene is for two people. Each line the improvisers say must be a question. If they use a statement instead of a question, they are out and a new player will enter the scene in their place. Keep a time limit for each response so that the pace remains quick.

Bad Lip Reading

Pull up a video clip on YouTube of a scene from a movie, TV show, cartoon, or news program that contains two characters. Choose two players to voice over the scene while it plays without sound. Try the same scene multiple times with different players and see how many new scenarios the class can create.

Park Bench

Place two chairs together to create a makeshift park bench. One person sits on the bench and a second person sits next to them. The newest person to sit must provide a reason for the first person to get off the bench. They are not allowed to ask, "will you get off the bench?" and they are also not allowed to physically push the person off the bench. Once the person gets off the bench the second person shifts over and a new person appears attempting to get the current bench sitter off of the bench.

This game cycles, so play multiple rounds. Challenge yourself to discover new ways to get the person off the bench, both positive and negative. Remember to follow the improv rule of "yes, and" and react accordingly to the person trying to get you off the bench. If you stay on the bench, the game stops.

VIRGINIA SEL STANDARDS: ReS1:5-6b, ReS2: 5-6c, ReS2: 5-6d, DeM1: 5-6c, DeM2: 5-6b, ReS1: 7-8a, ReS1: 7-8b, ReS2: 7-8a, DeM1: 7-8c

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Websites

[Invoke YouTube channel](#)

[Ballad of America](#)

[Primary Source Nexus – Analyze a Song or Sound Recording](#)

[Woody Guthrie: Gypsy Davy](#)

[Bob Dylan: *Pretty Saro*](#)

[Taylor Swift: *Dear John*](#)

Bibliography

Bluegrass Music. [Web.] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, [loc.gov/item/ihas.200152684/](https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200152684/).

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Changing Your Reservation

If you cannot attend or your party turns out to be smaller than the number of tickets you have reserved, please inform the Moss Arts Center as soon as possible by contacting Kari Heistad at kheistad@vt.edu so that Moss staff can release your tickets to those on the waiting list.

Accessibility

The Moss Arts Center is committed to being accessible to all of our patrons. Patrons with disabilities and their companions are accommodated through wheelchair seating, parking, and other special requests throughout the center at all levels. Assisted listening devices are available. Service animals are permitted. Sign interpretations and large-print programs are available with advance notification. If you or your students have questions regarding accessibility or would like assistance, please contact Jamie Wiggert at wiggertj@vt.edu.

Drop Off

The bus drop-off location is on the Alumni Mall side of the Moss Arts Center, located at 190 Alumni Mall on the Virginia Tech campus. Drivers may pull their buses into the driveway loop directly in front of the center. Staff will be on site to assist. Recommended arrival time is 15-30 minutes before the start time of the performance.

Parking For Cars And Vans

Those driving cars and vans may park in the North End Center Garage (300 Turner Street NW), which is one block from the Moss Arts Center's Turner Street entrance. A valid university parking permit, a validation from one of the retail tenants, or payment of the daily fee is required to park in the North End Center Garage.

Parking For Buses

Bus staging is located in the upper section of the Chicken Hill lot (Football Lot 5) on the Virginia Tech campus. The lot entrance is on Southgate Drive, opposite Sterrett Drive. Parking passes will not be required for buses. For more information about parking at Virginia Tech, please visit parking.vt.edu. Please note that buses are not permitted to park adjacent to the Moss Arts Center's Turner Street entrance.

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO, cont.

Checking In

When you arrive at the center, please check in with Moss Arts Center staff to confirm that your party has arrived. Staff will be on site to assist seating your group, directing you to restrooms, and answering any questions you may have.

Pick Up

It is recommended that buses arrive back at the Moss Arts Center 15 minutes before the end of the performance. Following the performance, please remain in your seats; school groups will be dismissed by Moss Arts Center staff to ensure a smooth and speedy departure for all. Staff and volunteers will assist school groups in meeting their buses in the center's Alumni Mall driveway.

Feedback

Following the performance, you may receive an email requesting feedback on your group's experience. Please make time to respond, as doing so could significantly improve the Moss Arts Center's PK-12 programs for you and future visitors.

For More Information About Moss Arts Center Programs

Please subscribe to the [Moss Arts Center's email list](#) and join the list for school-day performances and PK-12 programs.