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EDUCATOR ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

# Maa Vue

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Education





## Educator Engagement Guide

# Maa Vue

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# Musician Information

**Musician Name:** Maa Vue

**Song:** [“Txiv Lub Xim Xaus” \(“Father’s Violin”\)](#)

**Cultural Identity:** Hmong

## Biography:

Maa Vue is a Wausau-based singer and songwriter who bridges Hmong language and traditions with contemporary music making. Maa grew up in Green Bay and credits a high school solo performance of “Respect” by Aretha Franklin as the first time she let her voice shine and found her love for musical performance. After high school, she worked for a few years and cared for her family, but realized that she wasn’t spending time on her true passion—music. She decided to refocus and launched a YouTube channel featuring her own original songs, all of which are sung in the Hmong language. She grew a huge following on the platform, and in 2013 she signed an album deal with California-based record label, Yellow Diamonds Records. Maa released a second album in 2016, and went on a national tour in 2017, before becoming president of the record label. In her career as a musician, she has used her voice to connect with her family and culture to keep the Hmong language alive.

For musician photos please see the resources section later in this guide.

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## Learning Goals

**By using project resources, learners will:**

1. Explore connections between music, identities, cultures and emotions.
  2. Recognize shared and unique elements of distinct pieces of music.
  3. Relate content to personal experiences choosing, playing and sharing music.
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## Elements of Music

**Melody** - stepwise melodic line by Hmong 2-string violin (xim xaus), keyboard and vocalist

**Rhythm** - rhythmic pulse is in sets of two with regular use of quarter and eighth note patterns; xim xaus intro and conclusion contain some syncopation

**Harmony** - keyboard, xim xaus, and vocal harmony present

**Texture/Timbre** - electronic layering including piano, xim xaus, voice and drum kit

**Form** - aab small form within AAB large form

**Expression** - dynamic and tempo remains constant, legato phrasing

# Instruments

1. Xim Xaus - Hmong Two-Stringed Violin
  2. Piano
  3. Drum kit
  4. Voice
  5. Synthesizer
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## Lyrics

### “Txiv Lub Xim Xaus”

Txhua zaj nkauj kuv tau hnov  
Pheem muaj ib zaj kuv nco  
Tsis muaj lus tsis muaj suab  
Tsuas yog nco thaum npaum suav  
Xyov npau suav puas yog tiag  
Tau los pom kuv txiv ib pliag  
Yog sib ntsib hauv npau suav  
Kuv yuav ntsia kuv txiv tsis dhuav  
Txawm cim tsis tau lub ntsej lub muag  
Cim tau lub suab raj kuv txiv qoj  
Xim xaus, xim xaus  
Qoj kuv txiv zaj nkauj  
Xim xaus, xim xaus  
Thaum tsis muaj txiv lawm  
Leej twg yuav nco mloog  
Thaum tseem me thaum tseem yau  
Txiv khwv nrhiav noj nrhiav haus  
Txia ua kab ua noog cawm  
Tsis pub mob tsis pub ntshaw  
Txiv lub suab hais lub luag ntshi  
Lub suab raj no yog ntxiv li  
Peb ua neeg nyob mloog txiv lus  
Vim suab raj no yog txiv tug  
Txawm cim tsis tau lub ntsej lub muag  
Cim tau lub suab raj kuv txiv qoj  
Xim xaus, xim xaus  
Qoj kuv txiv zaj nkauj  
Xim xaus, xim xaus  
Thaum tsis muaj txiv lawm  
Leej twg yuav nco mloog

### “Father’s Violin”

Of all the songs I've heard  
There is one I always miss  
It has no words, it has no voice  
Only in my dreams do I remember  
But is this dream even real?  
Dreamt of seeing my father for a moment  
If we only are to meet in dream  
I will never grow tired of looking at my father  
Even though I can't recognize the features of his face  
I recognize the instrument that my father plays  
Violin, violin  
Play my father's song  
Violin, violin  
If when there is no longer Father  
Who will remember to listen?  
When I was little, when I was young  
Father worked and searched for food  
Transformed to bees and birds to provide  
Didn't let us fall ill, didn't let us long for wants  
Father's voice gleams with laughter  
This instrument belongs to Father  
As we live our lives, listen to Father's words  
For this instrument's voice is Fathers'  
Even though I can't recognize the features of his face  
I recognize the instrument that my father plays  
Violin, violin  
Play my father's song  
Violin, violin  
If when there is no longer Father  
Who will remember to listen?

# Outcomes, Strategies and Assessments

**Main Theme:** The smooth, plaintive phrasing along with the use of traditional Hmong instruments helps to create a unique sound, laying the foundation for lyrics that explore how we each interpret our unique composition of culture, family, and life experiences.

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## Skill Outcome, Strategies and Assessments

**Outcome:** Students will recognize, perform and notate appropriate musical phrasing.

**Strategies:**

1. To introduce phrasing, present phrasing as a musical sentence. Give examples of what it would sound like for an early reader to read through a picture book as opposed to someone who understands the fluency of reading and following written punctuation. Have students provide the phrasing for nursery rhymes. Where would the punctuation go? Where is the high point of each phrase in the rhyme? Have students recite the rhymes using the phrasing they wrote.
2. Students choose their own movement ideas to accompany each phrase of a song with a clear phrasing pattern. Allow students to listen to the music and describe what movement might fit each phrase the best. Perform using class suggestions.
3. Students will evaluate Maa Vue's piece to identify the phrasing. Lead students in a discussion about what they heard: Are the phrases approximately the same length? Are the phrases repeated? How can you tell where each phrase ends? Provide students with a stretchy band as they relisten to the piece to show the length of each phrase.
4. Separate the class into two groups. Instruct the class that we are comparing and contrasting the phrasing of the singing and the violin. Are they the same? If not, how are they different? Have half the class listen to the phrasing of the singing and the other half listen to the phrasing of the violin. Have them jot down thoughts or draw a representation of the phrase. Listen again and have the violin group listen to the singing and the singing group listen to the violin.
5. Using a simple song, put in several breath marks within a long phrase. Have the students sing it with quick breaths throughout the phrase. Erase the breath marks and have the students sing the entire phrase in one breath. How did the breath markings alter the expression of the phrase? Discuss good breath support.
6. Have the students sing along with Maa Vue's song on a neutral syllable for a designated time and imitate her phrasing. Encourage good breath support and shape the phrase using good dynamic control. How does Ma Vue's use of phrasing create the emotion that she is expressing?
7. So that students understand that composers use many musical techniques to be expressive, share a new choral or band piece or even a conductor's score of an orchestral work to have them identify other expressive elements including articulations, dynamics, repetition, tempos, etc. Have students predict what they are going to hear in the piece and what emotional effect the composer

may have been working toward. Then listen to the piece to have students identify what was heard.

**Assessments:**

1. Have students add and perform phrasing to a simple melody. Students can complete a written analysis of how they decided to phrase the song.
2. Students choose one piece of music from your classroom repertoire. Have students think/pair/share how they believe the phrasing would look by [bracketing] each phrase and using a star to mark the high point of the phrase. Once students meet and agree on the phrasing, have them use gradient color to mark using a lighter shade at the beginning and end of the phrase and a darker gradient at the height of the phrase. After they have notated that song, have them sing it with their decided dynamics and shaping.
3. Share performances of pieces from a variety of cultures. Ask students to compare or contrast the phrasing techniques used by another culture.

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## Knowledge Outcome, Strategies and Assessments

**Outcome:** Students will compare and contrast instruments of other cultures.

**Strategies:**

1. Listen to the Hmong xim xaus (violin) opening of Maa Vue's piece. Ask students to describe what they hear and predict what it looks like. Then show the opening portion of the video that not only shows the instrument but how it is played. Have students find pictures of other Hmong instruments (or instruments of their own culture) and list five things about them (how they are made, what they are made of, how played, significance in culture, compare/contrast with familiar instrument, map location of this type of instrument or other similar or contrasting instruments)
2. Teacher will create a powerpoint using Hmong instruments that have a visual representation and an audio clip. Included will be the 2 string violin (xim xaus) that is part of Maa Vue's accompaniment. Students will ask to classify these instruments using a worksheet or card sorting activity.
3. Instruments from around the world have been organized into various families based on their design, uses, how they are played, and how they sound. One example of this is the Hornbostel-Sachs system. For reference links to more about this system, reference *Re/sound: Songs of Wisconsin* resource page under 'curriculum.' Students and/or the teacher create a slideshow on the various categories of: Aerophones, Idiophones, Membranophones, Chordophones, Electrophones.
4. Venn diagram or compare/contrast the aural and visual differences between similar instruments from different cultures (i.e., Hmong 2-string violin v. traditional western violin; qeej v. bagpipes; taiko v. djembe). For more student involvement and choice, have students partner up, select instruments for a venn diagram, then trade and fill out the diagrams for their partner's instruments.

5. After being introduced to some world instruments, students work to create their own instrument classification system, which they can then present, explain, and give examples.
6. As an extension of the above, using their classmates' systems (or using just Hornbostel-Sachs v. Western orchestral families), students could write a persuasive paper on which classification system is best.

**Assessments:**

1. Students choose one of the Hornbostel-Sachs classifications and create an instrument that would fit into that classification. They could write a brochure, short essay, or powerpoint explaining how the instrument could be made and how it fits that classification.
  2. Assign a continent, country, or region of the world to a group of students to identify native peoples of the area, the instruments created, instrument classification and the instruments' meaning and/or role to the people. Final project should include a map of the region chosen.
  3. For a quick, "exit ticket" style assessment, each student is shown a picture of a world instrument to identify in which Hornbostel-Sachs family to place it.
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## Affective Outcome and Strategies

**Outcome:** Students will explore how music can make them feel connected to their culture or family.

**Strategies:**

1. Students can make a playlist with songs that celebrate or remind them of the important people in their life or songs that are important to the celebrations in their family (songs that they have heard throughout their life at family celebrations). Have students explain why they chose each piece or why the song reminds them of a certain person or part of their life.
2. Students record their connections to music by playing 4 songs that help to bring strong feelings (examples: National Anthem, song school, nostalgic to childhood, etc.) Play each song 3 times. The first time the song is played, ask students to simply LISTEN and FEEL. In the remaining 2 times, ask students to draw a picture or write a few words about how they perceive the song and how it connects to them. Have students think/pair/share to find similarities and differences in the connections they have to each song.
3. The arts have been used to honor or memorialize people throughout history (e.g. Walt Whitman's O Captain, My Captain for Abraham Lincoln; Picasso's Guernica for the slaughter of innocent Spanish by the Nazis as they tried to rebel; Ain't I A Woman by Sojourner Truth; sculptures, tombs, museums, naming buildings, etc. could all be shared). Just as Maa Vue memorialized her father, students arrange/compose their own work through song, words, poetry, sound clips, music recordings, artworks, or any other media that honors someone they know or a piece that reflects their own cultural identity.
4. Students select a country/culture, research a traditional folk song or particularly meaningful song from that country/culture and write a paper or make a presentation about that song and why it

holds such a special place in that country or culture.

5. Students could research the question: Synthesizers are used in modern music from many different cultures. How do different cultures use the same electronic sound/instruments (thinking specifically of synthesizer or computerized samples) to create such different sounds? This could extend into using soundtrap or GarageBand to create a song in the style of a country or culture.

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## Extensions

1. Share and discuss these questions with your students after watching the interview video:
  - Maa talks about how singing in show choir helped to raise her confidence and find her voice. How do you feel when you make music? Are there other ways you express yourself?
  - Maa shares about how there are expectations for girls and women in her family and culture, and that she had to defy those expectations to forge her own path as a musician. What expectations are in your own life?
  - Maa uses music to communicate with her dad and her culture. What music makes you feel connected to your culture or the ones you love? Why?
  - Even though Maa Vue's parents disagree with her working outside of her home, she still loves and honors them and cherishes her tradition. Is there a time that you have disagreed with your parents over a family rule and still loved them?
  - Is there a time in your life when your parents want something for you that is not what you want? How do you work through this conflict? Example might be: My parents want me to be on a soccer team but I want to draw, sing or be a part of the school play or vice versa?
2. Students pick a song that is currently popular in the United States and trace the style influences and cultural roots of the song. (A fascinating example of this is on the podcast *99% Invisible* with "Who Let the Dogs Out.")
3. Maa Vue describes how she creates her melodies based on feelings and moods to be expressed. Share a specific mood or setting with your students such as fun on the playground, worrying when a test approaches, or excitement at the end of a school year or team victory. Walk through the choices necessary in creating a melody that expresses that feeling such as size and amount of intervals, phrasing, expressive marks, instrument choice and the like.

# Standards Addressed

## WMEA Music Standards

MU:Cr1.1.4a, MU:Cr3.1.6a, MU:Pr4.1.5a, MU:Pr4.2.8c, MU:Pr4.3.6a, MU:Pr5.1.5a, MU:Re7.1.8a, MU:Re7.2.4a, MU:Re7.2.7b, MU:Re8.1.8a, MU:Cn10.1.5b-WI, MU:Cn10.1.7b-WI, MU:Cn10.1.7c-WI, MU:Cn11.1.8c-WI

## DPI Standards

MG.2.P.7.i, MG.2.P.8.i, MG.2.P.9.i, MG.2.P.10.i, MG.2.P.12.m, MG.2.P.14.m, MG.3.R.6.i, MG.3.R.7.i, MG.3.R.10.m, MG.3.R.11.m, MG.4.Cn.6.i, MG.4.Cn.8.i, MG.4.Cn.9.m, MG.4.Cn.10.m, MG.4.Cn.11.m, MG.4.Cn.12.m

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# Resources

1. Resources to help reach the outcomes and strategies are provided at: <https://wsmamusic.org/re-sound/resources/>. For Hmong cultural background and history search 'culture'. For PBS music and art resources, search 'culture, instrument, curriculum, or performer'. For Hmong cultural centers in Wisconsin and the surrounding area search 'culture'. For instruments featured and other Hmong cultural instrument resources search 'instrument' and for additional Maa Vue websites and links search 'performer'.
2. [Interview transcript](#)
3. Musician photos (see next page).



Maa Vue creates original musical compositions in the Hmong language.  
Photo credit: PBS Wisconsin Education.



Maa Vue performing “Txiv Lub Xim Xaus” at the Weidner Center for the Performing Arts on February 22, 2020.  
Photo credit: PBS Wisconsin Education.



Vang Vue playing his xim xaus at the Weidner Center for the Performing Arts on February 22, 2020.  
Photo credit: PBS Wisconsin Education.

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