

Playing Northern Spirit Flutes

- Playing Native American Flutes With Your Senior Students -



“Bring me a hollow reed,” said the Creator, “and I will teach you to make a flute.”

Manitoba Music Educators Conference

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(These notes are a gift to all interested in the Native American Flute. Please feel free to share what you have learned, spreading the joy of the Northern Spirit Flute.)

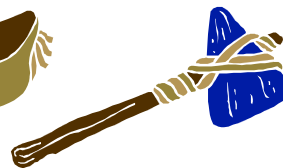
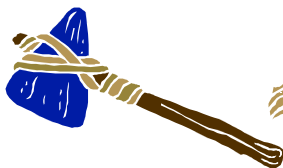


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MY JOURNEY WITH THE NATIVE AMERICAN FLUTE

My journey with the Native American Flute began when I attended a Northwest Music choral reading session in the fall of 2000. At the time, I was teaching at Pleasant Hill Community School where the student population was over 95% Aboriginal students. I purchased a book called *Voices of the Wind – Native American Flute Songs* by Bryan Burton. The book had Native American Flute songs that had been transcribed for the recorder. As I read Bryan's book and played through the songs, I began to think this would be really great to do with senior students on real Native American Flutes. I started researching the cost on purchasing wooden flutes and found out they were very expensive. I looked again at the resource list in the back of the book and found out about the Bear Paw Flutes that were made out of plastic. The flutes were inexpensive enough that my principal would pay for a class set of flutes to use with my grade 6 class. Thus began my journey into the world of the Native American Flute.

I used the Bear Paw flutes for two years with my grade 6 students. The class definitely enjoyed playing these flutes more than the recorder. The problem I had was that they were pitched in F# minor and were not completely in tune within themselves. I found myself home sick one day taking my Bear Paw flute apart and trying to understand how it created sound. I scoured the internet looking for plans to build flutes that were tuned in a key that would play with the Orff instruments to no avail. I began to experiment myself with PVC tubing and vinyl baseboard as materials to try and build flutes out of with my students. After many failed attempts, I came up with my first of what would be many different Native American style flutes I would come to make out of PVC tubing.

I continued to pursue my passion for the Native American Flute, purchasing a number of flutes over the years from different flute makers. I have four made of wood, one made of ABS plastic, two I'm not entirely sure of, and one made of PVC. I have collected many books and CD's over the years and even conducted my master's research on the impact learning to make and play Native American style flutes had on the emotional and spiritual needs of students at an urban Aboriginal high school. As a part of my masters work, I even produced a DVD on how to make flutes out of PVC tubing.

However before I started selling the DVD, I felt the need to journey to South Dakota to meet with Lakota Elders and Kevin Locke, knowledge and songkeeper for the Lakota people, seeking their guidance and permission to share what I had learned about Native American Flutes. I explained what I had been doing with my students and what I was interested in doing. I then presented tobacco and asked advice from Elders Vernon Iron Cloud, Robert Tiger and Oliver Eagleman along with Kevin. They all agreed that if this is something that would benefit First Nations and other children they thought it would be good and were in full support of my work. When I returned home, I began to share what I had learned through selling the DVD's and doing workshops for teachers. I continue to be inspired by the positive impact I see the flute having on my senior students as they get positively engaged in school through learning how to make and play the Native American style flute.

In the spring of 2008, I learned about concerns over carcinogens in PVC and I quit making flutes with this material and stopped selling my DVD. I put a warning up on my website to share what I had learned in the hope that others would also stay away from using PVC to make flutes with their students.

My first substitute material was from Dr. Hal Kacanek at Sounds We make. His unique design had two molded pieces and a piece of ABS plastic tubing. All the materials were made of food grade plastic. I really liked the clip that acted like an extra piece of cane on a cane flute to create the air channel and plug that locked into place by compression fit. The one major draw back was that the tubing still had to be prepared, marked, and filed in order to make flutes with students. The teacher was still left with much work tuning and voicing flutes. I also found that students still tended to paint over the True Sound Hole creating yet more work for the teacher.

In the fall of 2008, I made over 100 flutes in two days with the National Arts Centre's *Music Connections Project* at two inner city school in Winnipeg. I used Dr. Hal's flute building materials. I found myself doing many hours of preparatory work prior to the trip, drilling square holes with a mortising bit and marking the location where to the drill the holes with pencil. In addition, I found myself up until past 1:00 a.m. in Winnipeg tuning and voicing flutes. I remember thinking to myself, "Not many teachers are going to be interested in all this work." I paused for a moment, looked at the clock and thought to myself, "NEITHER DO I!" When I returned to Saskatoon I decided to use the money I had saved up from all of my work with the Native American style flute and invest it in designing my own version of the Native American Flute that would eliminate all of the difficult work involved in making flutes with kids. It is now one year later and I am very pleased to say that I have designed a flute making kit that makes it possible to make a class set of Native American style flutes with your students in just over an hour. The flutes are voiced, tuned and ready to play with no further work needing to be done by the teacher.

Thus, my journey with the Native American Flute continues. I welcome you on this journey and hope that the Northern Spirit Flute inspires you to share this gift with your students. May the flute feed your spirit and soothe your soul, as it does mine.

GETTING STARTED

Once your flutes have been made and students have made their first sounds on their Northern Spirit Flute, it is time to refine what they are doing. I play for my students often, so they see how the flute is held and hear the flute played with good tone quality. I play my flute over the microphone as students come into the gym for assembly, while I'm on supervision in the basement, while I'm waiting for them to line up for music, and in class. I also play recordings of prominent Native American Flute players so they hear a variety of styles of music that can be played on the Northern Spirit Flute. Once my students have heard the flute played well, they make it their goal to sound as good or better on their own flutes.

I follow a sequential, step by step teaching process. My primary learning objectives for the first lessons are listed below.

Learning Objectives

1. Hold the Northern Spirit Flute correctly
 - a. left hand on top
 - b. using pads of fingers not tips to cover holes
 - c. learn how to play notes using the top three holes
2. Establish playing with slow, gentle air to create a warm, gentle tone

Kinesthetic Learning

I begin my using kinesthetic learning to establish how to properly hold the flute. I explain to students that I am going to mirror what they need to do. I want to establish playing hand goes on top. I have students hold their flutes by the foot (bottom end) in their right hand (me in my left). I mirror holding it like a torch then take my right hand and put it to my chest like I'm holding a book. I say, "Statue of Liberty." They usually echo. Then I close my left hand, put my thumb up and say, "Right on!" Again they usually echo. I then tell them to put a thumbprint on the back of their flute with their left hand. I then say while mirroring, "Cover the top hole with your first finger. Cover the second hole with your second finger. Cover the third hole with your third finger, then you can use your pinky on the side of the flute to help hold it. Cover the fourth hole with the first finger of your right hand. Cover the fifth hole with the second finger of your right hand. Cover the sixth hole with the third finger of your right hand." I then say, "Now take your flute and" as I pull it towards my mouth, "put it in your lap." This drives the kids crazy as they are dying to play.

Before I repeat the above process, I establish how to cover the holes properly. I say, "Take a look at the pad of my finger" while pointing to the pad from the first joint of my index finger to the tip on my right hand. While holding up the tip of the finger on my left hand beside the pad of the finger on my right hand, I say "The pad of my finger is three times bigger than the tip of my finger. If I play with the tip of my finger, I am more likely to not cover the hole properly and get an air leak. This will ruin my sound. I use the pad of my finger because it is three times bigger. If I am a little off center of the hole, I will still cover it properly and I won't get an air leak.

I repeat the process above, this time also saying to put a "fingerprint" on each of the holes. I repeat this process at least three times (or more if needed) to establish which hand goes on top and how to cover the holes properly. I also repeat this process for the first four or five music classes until students instinctively use their left hand on top. I explain to students that four out of the five flute players on the SongKeepers DVD play with their left hand on top. So we will honor and respect this fact by doing the same. I also point out that if they learn to do this correctly it will be very easy for them to learn to play another instrument like the saxophone, clarinet, oboe, bassoon, or band flute, as they all play with the left hand on top.

Learning to Be Flexible

All this being said, I have learned to be flexible as I get older. I have a talented grade 8 student who is an phenomenal Native American Flute player. His fingers dance around the flute faster than mine can. He improvises beautifully and has even learned many advanced playing techniques characteristic on the Native American Flute. You've guessed it. He plays with his right hand on top. He is my exception and the other students seem okay with it.

First Breath

I have students hold their hand up and go "haaaaah," exhaling through their mouth onto their upheld palm. I ask them, "Put you're your hand up if you want to tell me how that feels. The answer comes back, "Warm" or "Hot." I then say, "This time shape your mouth like you are holding a straw in it and blow on your hand. "Put you're your hand up if you want to tell me how that feels. The answer comes back, "Cold" or "Cool." I say, "This time keep your mouth like you are holding a straw in it and blow so slowly that it feels warm." I give students the opportunity to do this. I then say, "This is how slowly you need to blow into your flute to make it sound good."

I repeat the kinesthetic process outline above to establish correct hand and finger positions to get students ready to play their first guided notes.

PLAYING THE FIRST NOTES

Echo Playing

I use echo playing to begin with to work on establishing a good tone quality when playing the flutes. Once students have been prepared as above, holding their flutes correctly with all holes covered, I say while mirroring, "Peel off all but your top finger then echo what I play." The first time I have students echo my sound, I usually blow with less air than I would use to play regularly. Most often my students will still over blow even though I have guided and prepared them to use slow, gentle air. I continue to have students echo with the top hole covered until they are blowing slow, gentle air making a reasonably good tone. Next I have the class echo with two holes covered. Once they are playing with slow, gentle air making a reasonably good tone. I echo using the first two holes. I usually play very easy patterns so they experience success from the beginning. For example I would play a four quarter note pattern with the first two notes being two holes covered and the last two notes being 1 hole covered. I reverse the pattern then start making it more complicated as they become more skilled. I suggest going slow with middle years students so they don't shut down. Try to strike the balance between challenge and boredom. Once they can play reasonably well with one and two holes covered, I add the third hole. At first, I echo with the third hole covered a number of times. Once they make a good sound, I move to echoing between three and two holes covered. Once they are successful with three and two holes covered, I move to echoes with three, two and one hole covered. You probably have guessed by now that I have led them to echoing *Hot Cross Buns*. I say, "Please put up your hand if you recognize the song." The answer comes back, "Hot Cross Buns." I say, "Let's see if we can play it together." I count them in and we play the song together.

Teaching by Rote

My goal when I begin teaching students how to play their Northern Spirit Flutes is to have them experience success quickly so they will be motivated to learn on their own. I use teaching by rote until students are playing well, covering the holes properly and using slow, gentle air. I know if the class is making a good sound together and they are learning songs fairly quickly they will want to move on and will be ready to begin reading music.

Learning to Read Tab Notation

Once students have mastered introductory songs, I have them practice reading tab notation. I have a lot of transient students, many who are new to the school and new to music class. Tab notation is an excellent way to engage students in learning to change their notes by following dots on the page. The only difference is there are a lot more dots to follow and the rhythms are not attached to the dots. Students catch on very quickly to reading tab notation. When they purchase their flute, I give them a book of beginner songs to take with them to play at home. I have had students who have learned to play "O Canada" in less than a week. I featured them at beginning of assembly while I accompany them on the piano in the key of C.

Transition to Staff Notation

If you have a more stable student population, you can make the transition to reading staff notation. Students I taught for a number of years at Pleasant Hill Community School were able to make this transition very easily after having played recorder in grade 4 and 5.

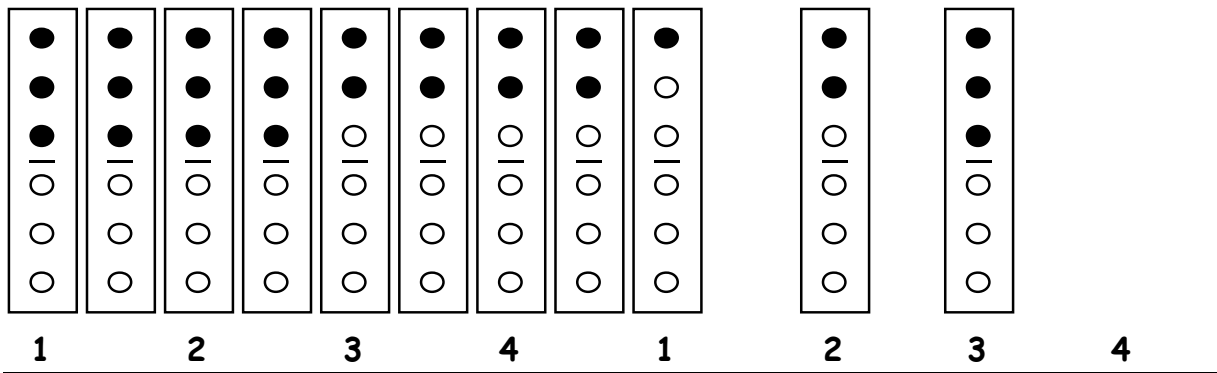
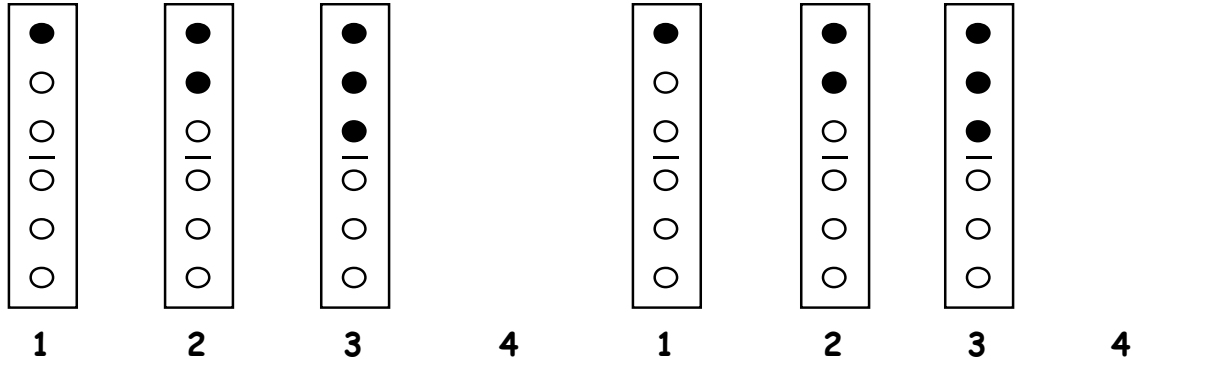
Types of Notation for the Native American Flute

Native American Flute music can be tab notation, regular pitched staff notation, and R. Carlos Nakai 6 hole tablature. Please see the examples below.

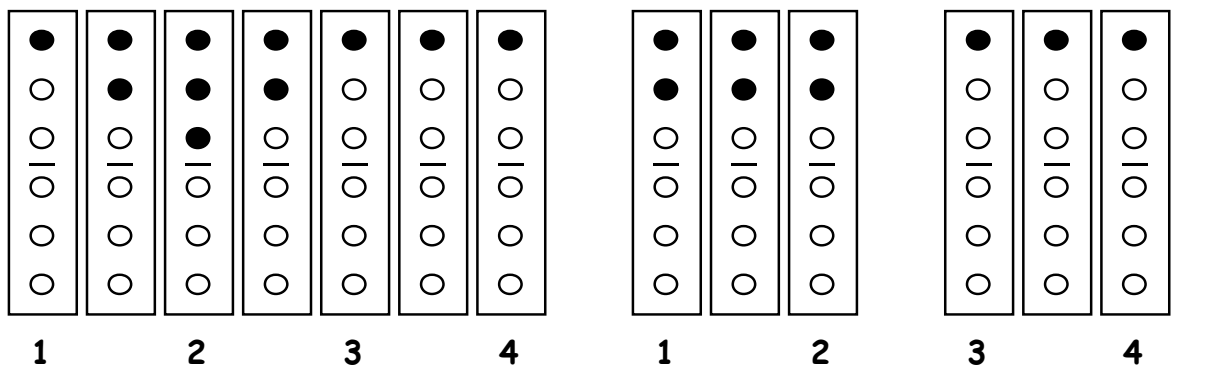
SONGS TO GET YOU STARTED

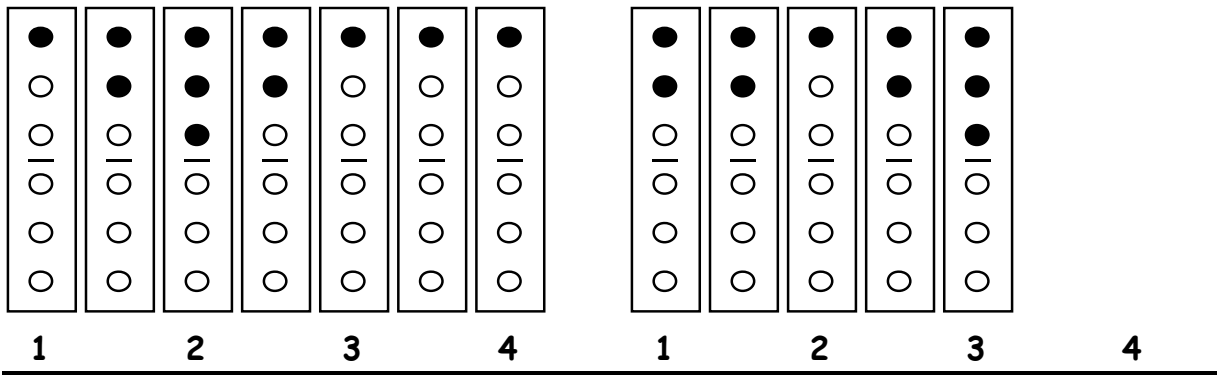
Here are some introductory songs to get you started. If you email me, I will send along my entire collection of songs and links to where you can download more songs for yourself and your students. Please note that not all flute makers tune their flutes in the same way. Therefore, fingerings for certain notes can vary from flute maker to flute maker. Generally, your Northern Spirit Flute use the same fingerings as an Ed Hrbec Native American style flute.

Hot Cross Buns



Mary Had a Little Lamb





Earth Spirit

©Rad Music 2003

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Water Spirit

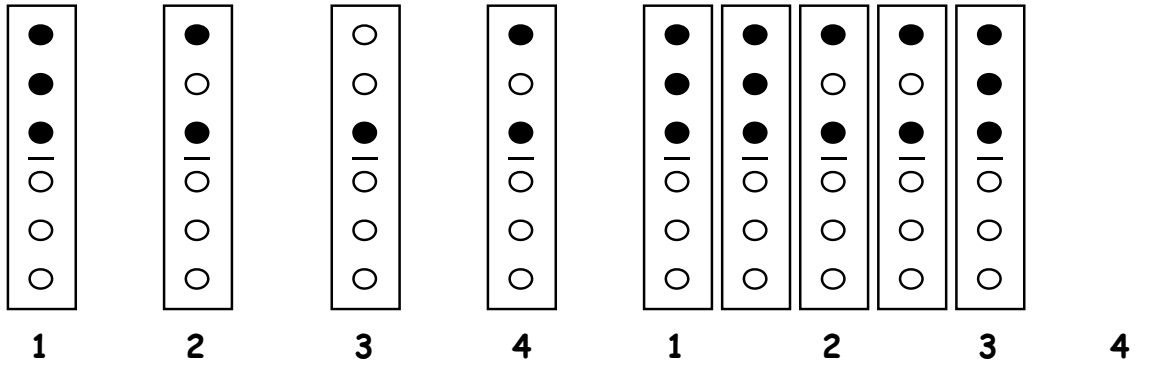
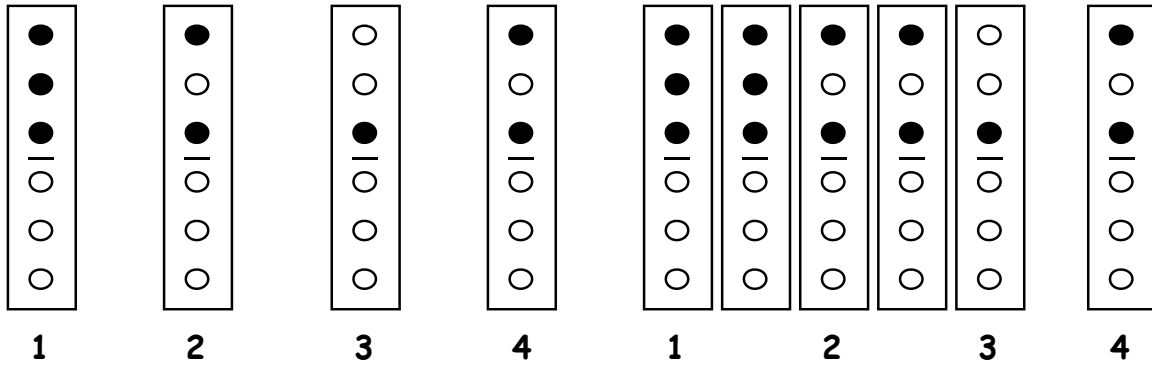
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1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

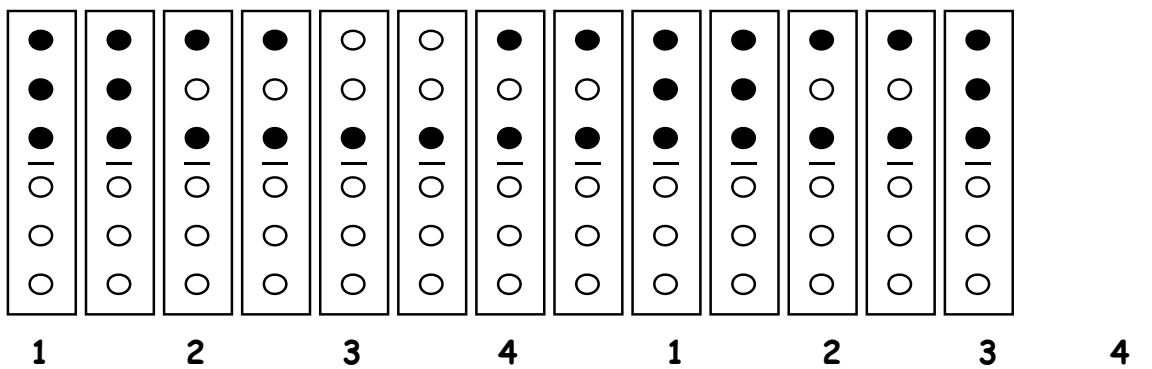
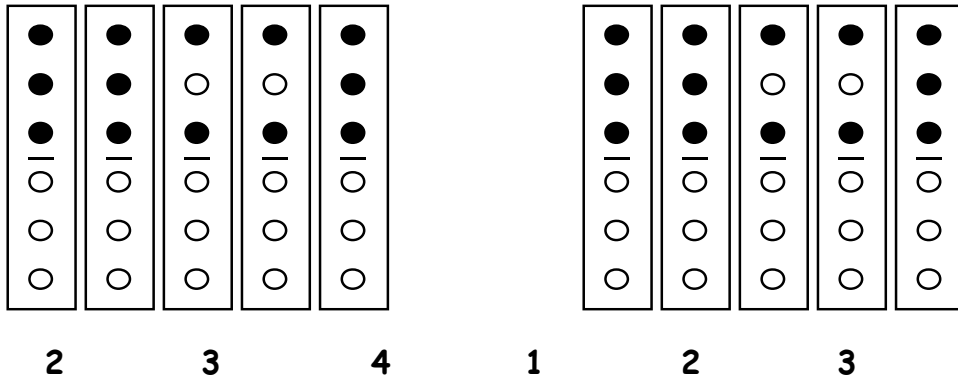
Wind Spirit

©Rad Music 2003

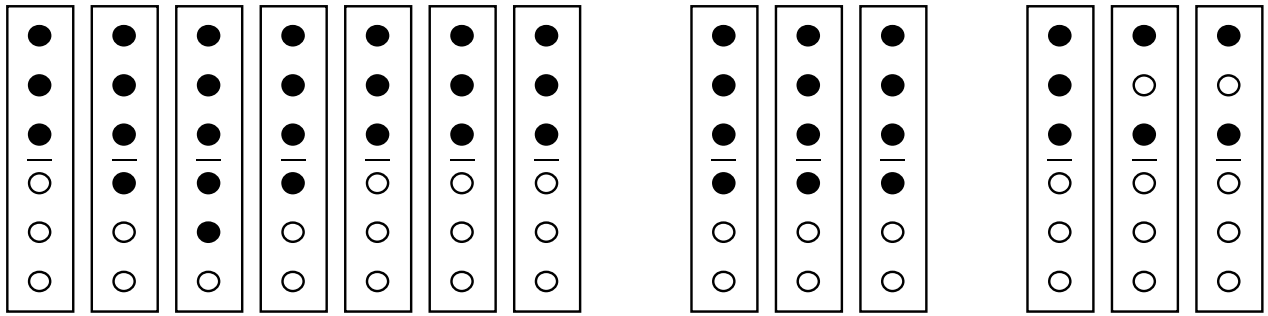


Fire Spirit

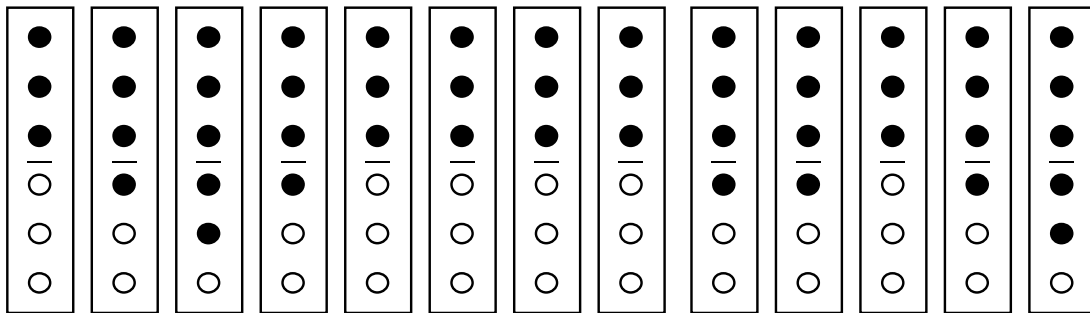
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Mary Had a Little Lamb

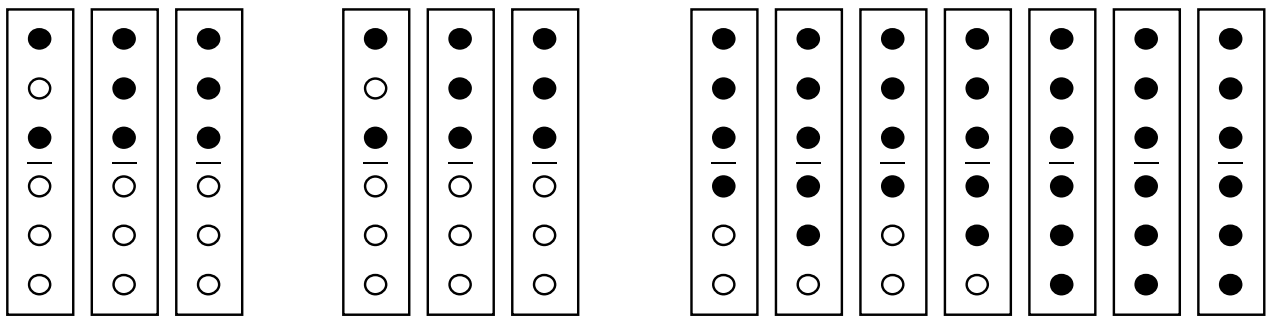


Ma- ry had a lit- tle lamb, lit- tle lamb, lit- tle lamb.
 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

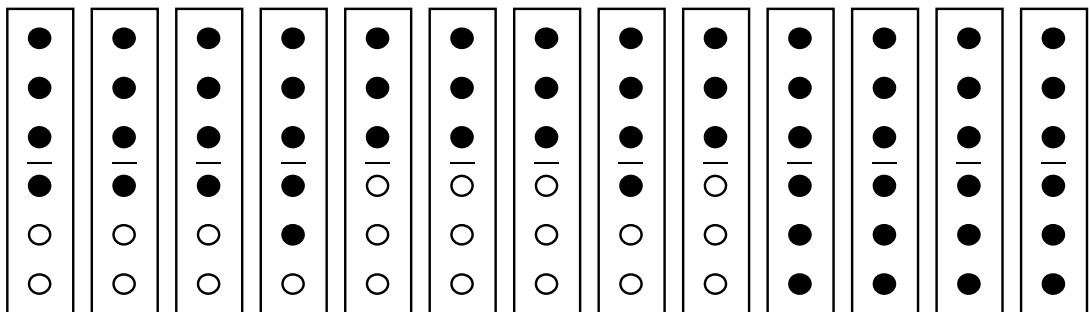


Ma- ry had a lit- tle lamb, its fleece was white as snow.
 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Lakota Courting Song



1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4



1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Repeat

CONCLUSION: ENGAGING STUDENTS IN ACTIVE HANDS ON LEARNING

I continue to be amazed at the positive impact learning how to make and play a Native American style flute has on so many of my students. A large number of these students have previously been disengaged from learning and have had poor attendance. I am especially moved by how the gentle, healing sound of the flute penetrates through the tough shells put up by students who face many daily challenges in their lives putting them at risk of not meeting their full potential. It is because of this, I have persevered in designing the new Northern Spirit Flute in a format that will make it easy and accessible to all teachers and in turn their students. This latest version of a Native American style flute is so simple and straight forward you can **make a class set in about 1 hour 15 minutes with up to 30 students.**

It has always been my goal to make Native American style flutes **accessible and affordable to students** I believe would most **benefit from the healing sound of the Native American Flute.** I have also come to believe that non-Aboriginal students also benefit greatly from learning how to make and play a Native American style flute. The beautiful gentle sound of the Northern Spirit Flute helps both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students connect to a beautiful sounding instrument from North America that touches the soul. When we connect in a positive and joyous way with a culture, our hearts cannot help but be opened and drawn to experiencing, learning, and understanding more about that culture.

The Flutes4Kids Program

The *Flutes4Kids* program gives a large discount to teachers and people working with youth who are at risk of not meeting their full potential on an order of materials to build 25 or more flutes.

RICH'S CONTACT INFORMATION

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RESOURCE LIST

Books

The Art of the Native American Flute, R. Carlos Nakai

FLUTE MAGIC, An Introduction To The Native American Flute (1997), edited by Dr. Kathleen Joyce-Grendahl, that covers history, designs, Flute Music Tablature and a number of songs for both the five and six hole flute (all 12 of the songs on *VOICES* have sheet music in the *FLUTE MAGIC* book.), by Tim Crawford

INAFSA Songbook Volume 1, arranged and compiled by Gary Stokum and Dr. Kathleen Joyce-Grendahl for the International Native American Flute Association, 310 Ash wood Drive, Suffolk, VA 23434, USA, Email: INAFSA@AOL.COM, <http://www.worldflutes.org>

Hymns for the Native American Flute, arranged and compiled by Gary Stokum and Dr. Kathleen Joyce-Grendahl for the International Native American Flute Association, 310 Ash wood Drive, Suffolk, VA 23434, USA, Email: INAFSA@AOL.COM, <http://www.worldflutes.org>

Understanding the Gift - The Native American Flute, by John Vames and Molly Moon Arts Publishing, 8513 East Mulberry Street, Scottsdale, AZ 85251

Voices of the Wind – Native American Flute Songs, [traditionally notated book comes with CD of flute and recorder versions of the songs], Bryan Burton, World Music Press, PO Box 2565 Danbury CT 06813-2565 USA 1-800-810-2040. ISBN 0-937203-88-2 Book/CD Set (Comes with notated music, CD of recorder and flute versions of songs, lessons plans and a suggested listening list. This is an excellent starting point for the performance and study of the Native American Flute.)

Myth, Music and Dance of the American Indian (Student SongBook, Student Workbook and Teacher Book w/CD), Ruth De Cesare, Ph.D, Alfred's Publishing Company, 16320 Roscoe Blvd., P.O. Box 10003, Ban Nuys, CA 91410-0003 USA, www.alfredspub.com
Pacific, Missouri, 63069-0066, USA

Oregon Flute Store, www.oregonflutestore.com, or Email: info@oregonflutestore.com

Videos

*** **Songkeepers 2010 – a saga of five Native Americans told through the sound of the flute**, Americas Flute Productions. 1999 – available through the Northern Spirit Flutes. ******I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THIS VIDEO*****

*****All One People – The most beautiful song I have ever taught my students. Great for National Aboriginal Day or anti-racism or multi-cultural events. The CD is in CD Extra format meaning you can play it on a regular CD player/blaster or put it on your computer to access both the audio and 30 printed PDF files including the sheet music for piano (Keys of C, F & G), guitar, recorder and Native American Flute, ready to print overheads, Cree phonetic pronunciation guide, 21 lesson plan and class activities including links to Mary Lee's "Tipi Teaching" and the United Nations declaration on human rights, etc. Toubat: A journey of the Native American Flute**, Sundance Media Group for Indigenous Pictures & the Oregon Flute Store. 2001 – available through the Oregon Flute Store

Presenting Kevin Locke, promotional video for Kevin's performances <http://www.kevinlocke.com>
Native American Flutes (Instruments you can purchase, video on making your own flutes and resources such as books and CD's), Echoes Past, Lee LaCroix, <http://www.echoespast.com>

Wooden Flute Makers

Ed Hrebec – <http://www.spiritofthewoodsflutes.com/>

Butch Hall - <http://www.butchhallflutes.com/>

Tom Stewart - <http://www.stellarflutes.com/>

Ken Light - <http://www.aoflutes.com/main.htm> (R. Carlos Nakai's Flutemaker)

Spring Shine – <http://www.native-american-flutes.com/> (Canadian lives in B.C.)

Links & Performers

International Native American Flutes Association <http://www.worldflutes.org/>

Oregon Flute Store has Native American Flutes for sale and a wide variety of books and resources for the Native American Flute – <http://www.oregonflutestore.com/>

Joseph Naytowhow – story teller & Native American Flute player 1-306-261-6674

Clint Goss presents sessions on the Native American Flute. He is the designer of the flute font I used for the fingering charts. He has many more links on his website. <http://www.clintgoss.com/resources.html>

Delia & Bryan Waskewitch – Onion Lake First Nation

Kevin Locke - <http://www.kevinlocke.com/>

Jason Chamakese

Colby Tootosis