

Lesson Plan: Gnome Accordionist

Summary

In this episode of Sketch and Coffee Live at 5:30am Texas time, Blade sketched a gnome with a big beard and a little concertina. The discussion wandered from gnome folklore—like how female gnomes didn't appear until the 1950s—to the history of the accordion and concertina. Blade explained how the accordion was patented in Vienna in 1829, how the concertina followed in the 1830s, and how both grew from the harmonica. He also noted how sailors loved the concertina for its portability, and how companies like Hohner boosted its popularity by including easy song sheets. Cowboys, pirates, and even fantasy gnomes helped give these instruments a timeless vibe, even though they're only about 200 years old.

Watch the episode here: <https://www.youtube.com/live/TR-OezueJfo?si=93ADvSIygzFbHAIi>

Lesson Plan

Objective: Students will explore how folklore and musical history overlap, understanding the origins of gnome imagery and the development of the accordion family of instruments.

Standards:

- Cultural Studies: Identifying folklore traditions and their modern interpretations.
- Music History: Recognizing the invention and spread of 19th-century instruments.
- Critical Thinking: Comparing myth versus historical accuracy in storytelling.

Materials:

- 9 Fun Facts sheet included
- Images of gnomes (classic folklore and modern garden gnomes)
- Pictures of accordion, concertina, and harmonica
- Optional: musical clip of a concertina or harmonica performance

Procedure:

1. Begin with a class discussion: What do students know about gnomes? What instruments do they associate with pirates or folklore characters?
2. Present the background: gnome folklore, the accordion's invention in Vienna (1829), and the concertina's invention in England (1830s).
3. Show how myths and fantasy sometimes "backdate" instruments to make them feel timeless.
4. Explore Hohner's marketing strategy and how it popularized free-reed

instruments.

5. Encourage students to reflect: why does popular culture use concertinas for pirates and fantasy creatures, even though the timelines don't match?
6. Wrap up with a creative exercise: students draw their own "fantasy character with an anachronistic instrument."

Assessment:

- Participation in discussion.
- One written reflection: "Why do myths and fantasy borrow details from different time periods?"
- Optional creative drawing assignment.

Extension:

- Music tie-in: Have a student or teacher demonstrate a harmonica or accordion.
- History tie-in: Compare other anachronisms in film or literature (like Vikings in horned helmets).

Rubric

Criteria	4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Developing	1 – Beginning
Participation	Fully engaged, thoughtful contributions	Participates with relevant points	Minimal participation	No participation
Understanding Folklore	Clearly explains folklore and its link to modern gnomes	Explains most key ideas	Partial understanding	Limited or no understanding
Understanding Music	Accurately explains invention and spread of instruments	Explains most points	Some details missing	Major inaccuracies
Reflection	Insightful and creative connections	Clear but basic connections	Limited depth	No reflection provided
Creativity (extension)	Highly imaginative, well-presented	Shows imagination, clear effort	Some imagination	Minimal effort

9 Fun Facts About Gnomes and the Concertina

1. Folklore Roots – The modern garden gnome traces its look to 19th-century German figurines, which in turn drew inspiration from older Scandinavian and Germanic folklore about small, earth-dwelling guardians of the home and garden. Source:

<https://salisburygreenhouse.com/the-mysterious-mythology-of-garden-gnomes-2/>

2. Scandinavian Style – Many depictions of gnomes in art and toys borrow from the Scandinavian *nisse* or *tomte*, often shown with pointed hats, beards, and simple work clothes. Source: <https://www.lifeinnorway.net/norwegian-nisse/>

3. Accordion's Big Brother – The accordion was invented in Vienna in 1829 by Cyrill Demian, placing it close to the Germanic and Scandinavian regions associated with gnome folklore. Source: <https://www.britannica.com/art/accordion>

4. Concertina's Birth – The concertina, the smaller cousin of the accordion, was invented in the 1830s by Charles Wheatstone in England. It uses buttons instead of a keyboard and often produces different notes depending on whether the bellows are pushed or pulled. Source: <https://www.britannica.com/art/concertina>

5. Sailor's Companion – The concertina became popular among sailors because of its compact size, durability, and ability to provide lively tunes for long voyages. Source: <https://www.concertina.net/forums/index.php?/topic/7381-concertinas-at-sea-a-history-of-a-nautical-icon/>

6. Pop Culture Anachronism – Despite being a 19th-century instrument, the concertina often appears in medieval-themed fantasy, pirate tales, and folklore art, giving it an “older” feel than history supports. Source: <https://pirates.fandom.com/wiki/Concertina>

7. Hohner's Influence – Founded in 1857, Hohner became one of the best-known makers of harmonicas and concertinas, using clever marketing and beginner song sheets to make their instruments accessible to anyone. Source: <https://vapaalehdykka.net/hohner/?lang=en>

8. Traveler and Camper Popularity – In the 19th and early 20th centuries, concertinas were marketed to travelers and campers as the perfect portable singalong instrument for long journeys and evenings by the fire. Source: <http://www.concertina.com/worrall/anglo-in-united-states/>

9. Still in Play Today – While not as common as guitars or pianos, concertinas are still produced and played worldwide, especially in Irish traditional music, English folk, and South African Boeremusiek. The global market for accordions and harmonicas was valued at approximately **\$1.8 billion USD in 2023** and continues to grow. Source: <https://www.indexbox.io/search/accordion-market/>

Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Review Questions:

1. When was the accordion invented, and by whom?
2. How did Charles Wheatstone's concertina differ from the accordion?
3. Why did sailors prefer the concertina?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think fantasy stories often show pirates or gnomes with concertinas, even though the timelines don't match?
2. How does marketing (like Hohner's song sheets) influence whether an instrument becomes popular?

Data Analysis:

If the global market for accordions and harmonicas was \$1.8 billion in 2023, and it grows at 4% annually, what will the market be worth in 2030? Show your math.

Reflection:

Write a short paragraph: What instrument would you give to a fantasy character, and why?