

If you only have 15 minutes ...

Explore the sound, history and community of taarab music.

Discuss the following questions:

1. Observe (3 minutes)

Skim the article on taarab, and note of one word or phrase from the passage that describe each of the following three themes:

- The emotional sound of taarab.
- The history and cultural influences behind its development.
- The interaction between performers and the audience.

Words or phrases describing emotion ¹	
Words or phrases describing history ²	
Words or phrases describing audience interaction ³	

2. Discuss (10 minutes)

The Sound of Taarab.

- The word taarab in Swahili means “to move the heart.” How does the music described in the article achieve this emotional power?

The History of Taarab

- How has Zanzibar’s layered history—including Arab, African and European influences—shaped the music’s style and ensemble structure?

Audience Interaction

- How do musicians and audience members communicate during a performance? Why is this interaction essential to taarab as a communal experience?

3. Reflect (2 minutes)

Which aspect of taarab—sound, history or audience participation—felt most meaningful to you? Why?

Common Core Standard(s) Met:

CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas

1 Answers will vary but may include the following: Taarab means “to move the heart”; “The public airings of romantic intrigues”; or “making the music feel personal and meaningful.”

2 Answers will vary but may include the following: “these musicians returned with qanuns, ouds, violins and percussion instruments”; “It started with Siti bint Saad, a woman of slave ancestry.”; and “adapted to local cultural with lyrics in Swahili.”

3 Answers will vary but may include the following: “tipping the singer at a certain moment in the song sends a message”; “collective bonding experience for the community”; “In modern taarab performances, competition is a major attraction for audiences, with female singers using poetic allegory.”