

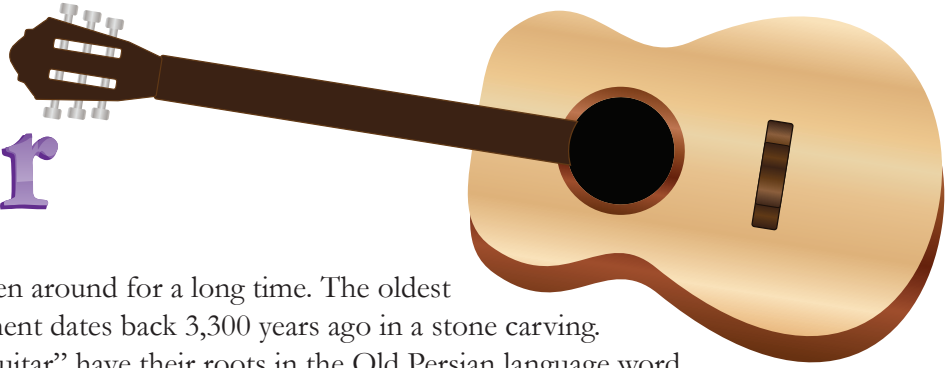
# Facts About Musical Instruments

Young readers will love digging into these great passages on their favorite musical instruments, and they'll get a nice reading comprehension workout in the process.

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# Guitar



Guitar-like instruments have been around for a long time. The oldest picture of a guitar-shaped instrument dates back 3,300 years ago in a stone carving. All modern forms of the word “guitar” have their roots in the Old Persian language word “tar,” which means “string.” The guitar usually has six strings.

The actual form of the modern guitar may have come from the four-stringed “oud” of the Moors in the 8th century, or possibly the six-stringed lute from Scandinavian Vikings. With stringed instruments of similar form from all over the globe in our human history, it’s no wonder these instruments are still popular today.

Although there are only two categories of guitars, acoustic and electric, there are many types of guitars. All acoustic guitars have a hollow body with curved sides with a round hole towards the center of the front panel, a long **fretboard** or fingerboard (the neck of the guitar usually made of wood with thin metal bars embedded in it in measured sections), and a headstock with tuning keys. They have either nylon or metal strings that run across the front panel, over the hole, up the fretboard, and around the tuning keys. The tuning keys turn to adjust the tension of the strings to produce the correct notes and chords when they vibrate. Guitars are played with both hands, one on the fretboard held in various positions, and one to strum or pluck the strings. Electric guitars are similar, except the sound from the vibrations of the strings don’t **resonate** (or echo) inside the hollow body. Instead, they use electric feedback through amplifiers to produce music.

Guitar music is very versatile. It can be used in almost any **genre** of music such as jazz, flamenco, classical, country, rock, blues, bluegrass, folk, mariachi, reggae, punk, soul, pop, and metal. There is debate as to who should make the list of best guitar players of all time. Jimi Hendrix and Chuck Berry are often mentioned. However, there is no debate about the popularity of the almost limitless instrument known as the guitar.



1. **New terms:** See how these three terms are used in the text, and write a definition next to each one.

**fretboard**

**resonate**

**genre**

2. What language do all forms of the word “guitar” come from? What was the root word?



3. There are five categories of guitar types.

**True or False?**

4. Guitar music is used in many different genres of music.

**True or False?**

# Piano



The piano is one of the most popular musical instruments in our culture. It's extremely versatile; it's used in almost every popular style of music, such as jazz, classical, and rock 'n' roll.

The piano has strings, but you can't see them on every piano and it isn't considered a string instrument. It's actually considered a percussion instrument because each key on the keyboard triggers a hammer inside the piano that strikes a metal string, like a drum. The sound of the string vibrating echoes off the wood in the piano to create loud, full notes.

The piano was invented by Bartolomeo Cristofori in Italy in the early 1700s. It was originally called the "pianoforte." The words "piano" and "forte" mean "quiet" and "loud" respectively. When musicians play the piano, they play quietly by striking the keys softly, or loud by striking them hard. This was one of the most appealing features of the piano when it was first introduced.

Most pianos have 88 keys on their keyboards, 52 white keys and 36 black keys. Pianos weren't the first instruments to use a keyboard. The clavichord and harpsichord both came before the piano. The piano was, however, the most popular of all instruments with a keyboard. It inspired the creation of the electric keyboard, which was invented in 1955. Today, through modern technology, people use electric keyboards to create the sounds of any instrument, or even sound effects for movies!



1. **New terms:** See how these three terms are used in the text, and write a definition next to each one.

**versatile**

**respectively**

**appealing**

2. Where was the piano invented? \_\_\_\_\_

3. The piano is a string instrument.

**True or False?**

4. The piano was the first instrument with a keyboard.

**True or False?**

# Saxophone

A member of the woodwind family of instruments, the saxophone, or sax for short, is usually made of brass. It's considered a woodwind instrument because it uses a single-reed mouthpiece, and brass instruments utilize the player's lip vibration to produce sound. A **reed** is a thin, flat strip of material used in some musical instruments. Reeds used to be made only of cane wood, but are now often **synthetic**, or man-made. The saxophone was in fact created to be a middle ground between woodwind and brass instruments.


Created by Belgian inventor Adolphe Sax in 1846, the saxophone was made to be the most powerful and vocal of the woodwinds and the most **adaptive**, or able to change easily, of the brass instruments.

Saxophones were originally designed for military bands. They are mostly thought of as jazz and classical music instruments, but are often used in school bands, symphony orchestras, opera, choral music, and even blues, rock, and pop music. They are sometimes used by street performers.

Someone who plays the saxophone is called a "saxophonist." The saxophonist plays by blowing air through the single-reed mouthpiece. The reed vibrates depending on the speed and power of the breath.

The air moves through the conical tube of the saxophone and changes notes as the saxophonist holds down a combination of buttons.

The buttons work to either open or close one or more of the 20 to 23 tone holes that are in the body of the tube. Both hands and all fingers are used in various combinations for different notes. The opening of the tube is a bell shape to help with the sound projection.

..... 

1. **New terms:** See how these three terms are used in the text, and write a definition next to each one.

**reed**

**adaptive**

**synthetic**

2. Is the saxophone a woodwind or brass instrument? Why?

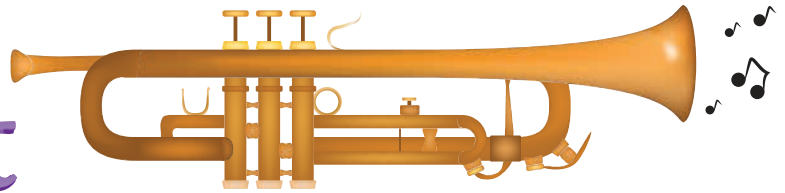
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3. The saxophone was originally designed for the opera.

**True or False?**

4. How many tone holes are in the tube of a saxophone? \_\_\_\_\_

# Trumpet



The trumpet may be known best for its use in American jazz, symphonies, and school marching bands, but it has a long history that stretches several continents. It is in the brass instrument family, along with the tuba, trombone, French horn, and many others.

Trumpet sounds are made by the player's closed lips vibrating while he blows air through the brass tubes. The player can change the notes by also pressing on three valves. Not all brass instruments are made of brass, and not all instruments made of brass are considered brass instruments. The saxophone, for example, is made of brass but is considered a woodwind instrument.



The trumpet is one of the oldest musical instruments known. It's over 3,500 years old! Historians don't know where it was invented or who invented it. In medieval times, armies used trumpets to relay messages over large areas. It is sometimes confused with the bugle, which is a brass instrument that is famously used by the United States military. The cornet is another instrument often confused with the trumpet.

In the early- and mid-1900s, the trumpet became extremely popular in the United States as jazz music was developed. Two of the most famous and influential trumpeters are Miles Davis and Louis Armstrong. People still listen to their music, and musicians still imitate their styles.



1. **New terms:** See how these three terms are used in the text, and write a definition next to each one.

**relay**

**historians**

**influential**

2. The text mentions an instrument that is made of brass but isn't in the brass family.

What is it? \_\_\_\_\_

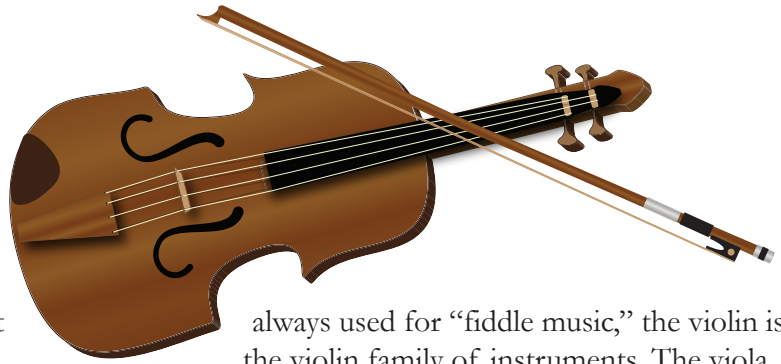
3. The bugle and the cornet are types of trumpets.

**True or False?**

4. Name two brass instruments besides the trumpet.

\_\_\_\_\_

# Violin



Sometimes called a “fiddle,” although not the smallest, highest pitched instrument in the violin family of instruments. The viola and cello are two of its cousins. The name “violin” comes from the Medieval Latin word *vitula*, meaning “stringed instrument.” The modern form of the violin was first made in Italy in the 16th century.

always used for “fiddle music,” the violin is

A “**luthier**” is a person who makes and repairs violins. Violins are usually made of wood. They have four nylon or metal strings and a figure-eight shaped body with two S-shaped holes. The strings run from the body up a long neck to tuning keys, much like a guitar. There is a chin rest at the base of the violin used to balance the base between the player’s jaw and shoulder. The player then uses the hand of that shoulder to hold down the strings on the neck in varying positions. There are no frets to show where to hold the strings. Players must learn the proper finger placements for correct **intonation**, or pitch accuracy, by memory. The other hand holds the bow, a long stick with a ribbon of horsehair strung along its length. The bow is moved across the strings in slow or fast motions (*arco*) as the other hand holds the strings on the neck to produce music. The strings can be plucked (**pizzicato**) as well with fingers or a pick, which is thought to be the way violins were first played. The bow is thought to have been invented by horse owners in Central Asia.

Violins are also one main instrument in concert halls. Violin musicians play many genres of music including Baroque, classical, jazz, folk, country, rock, and traditional music of many Asian, European and Indian cultures.



.....

1. **New terms:** See how these three terms are used in the text, and write a definition next to each one.

**luthier**

**intonation**

**pizzicato**

2. What material are bow strings made of?

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3. Violins are used in concert halls.

**True or False?**

4. Name two other instruments in the violin family.

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# Answer Sheets

## Facts About Musical Instruments

Guitar Facts

Piano Facts

Saxophone Facts

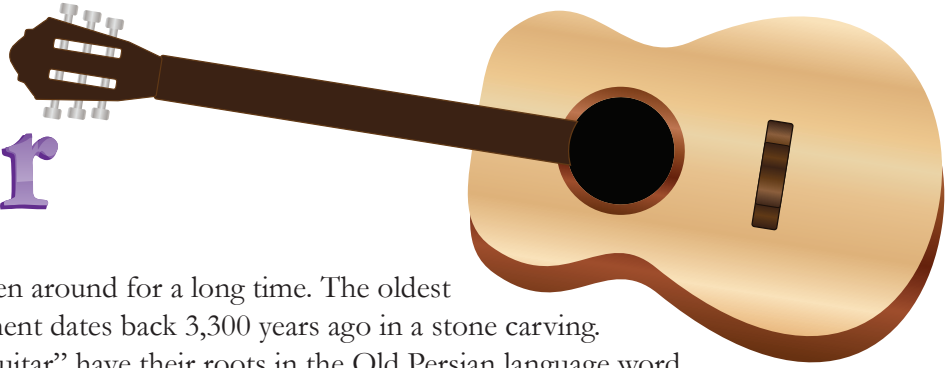
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## Answer Key

# Guitar



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1. **New terms:** See how these three terms are used in the text, and write a definition next to each one.

**fretboard** fingerboard, neck of the guitar usually made of wood with ingrained metal bars in measured sections

**resonate** echo

**genre** category or type

2. What language do all forms of the word “guitar” come from? What was the root word?

the Old Persian word “tar”

3. There are five categories of guitar types.

True or **False?**

4. Guitar music is used in many different genres of music.

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**versatile** can be used in many ways

**respectively** using the same order of the things referred to

**appealing** attractive or interesting

2. Where was the piano invented? in Italy in the early 1700s

3. The piano is a string instrument. True or **False?**

4. The piano was the first instrument with a keyboard. True or **False?**

# Saxophone

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**adaptive**    able to change easily

**synthetic**    man-made

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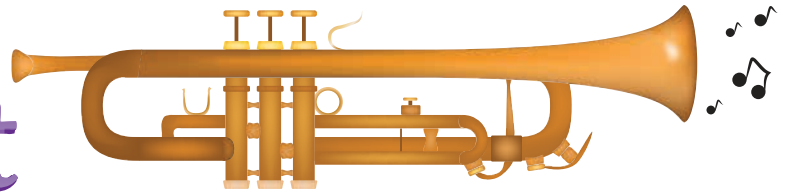
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True or False?

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**relay**      send, as in a message

**historians**      people who study history

**influential**      having great influence on someone or something

2. The text mentions an instrument that is made of brass but isn't in the brass family.

What is it? saxophone

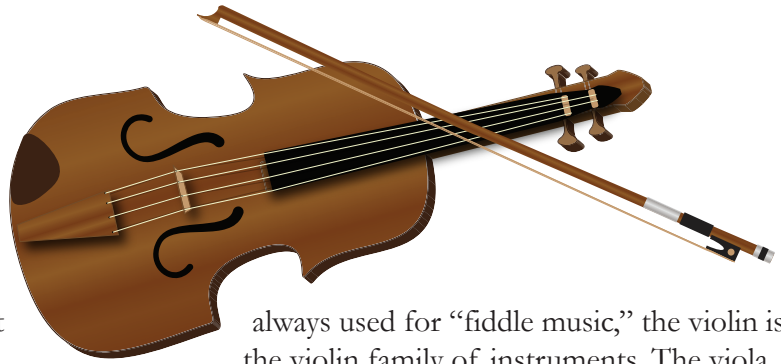
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**luthier**      a person who makes and repairs violins

**intonation**      pitch accuracy in music

**pizzicato**      another term for plucking strings in music

2. What material are bow strings made of?

horse hair

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True or False?

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the viola and the cello

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