

“The Glory-Beaming Banjo”

Read the music article.

Then follow the directions in the Text Marking box.

The banjo is a stringed instrument often heard in American folk, bluegrass, and country music. The banjo did not originate in our country, though it is often associated with our music. Rather, musicologists trace the banjo to various locations throughout Africa and the Middle East nearly a thousand years ago.

All early banjos were handmade from local materials. A hollow gourd made a body. An animal skin stretched over the gourd could capture sound and bounce it back. A long stick attached to the gourd served as a neck on which to anchor strings. Three or four strings, made of waxed grass, animal gut, or hair, ran from the body up the neck and were pegged in place. Vibrating strings made the notes.

The banjo probably arrived in America with slaves who had been kidnapped from Africa. Their instruments went by different names, including *bangoe*, *banza*, and *banzil*. Thomas Jefferson’s personal writings describe slaves playing “...the Banjar, which they brought hither from Africa.”

People react differently to banjo music. Many enjoy the bright, twangy, jazzy sounds a skilled banjoist can make. Some appreciate how cheerful and clear the banjo sounds. Others find banjo music scratchy, hollow, or tinny. Despite personal preferences, it is fair to regard the banjo as an “outstanding American contribution to the music of folklore.”



The title of this article comes from the writings of humorist Mark Twain.

Text Marking

Find the main idea and supporting details.



Circle the main idea in each paragraph.



Underline supporting details for each main idea.

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▶ Answer each question. Give evidence from the article.

- 1 Which of the following words is *opposite* in meaning to *anchor*, as it is used in paragraph 2?
- A. peg B. secure C. embark D. release

What in the text helped you answer? _____

- 2 Which statement about the banjo is *not* supported by information in the text?
- A. Banjo strings vibrate to make its sound.
- B. It was Mark Twain’s favorite instrument.
- C. American banjos probably had their roots in Africa.
- D. The banjo is heard in a variety of musical styles.

What in the text helped you answer? _____

- 3 In your own words, support the statement about the banjo as an “outstanding American contribution to the music of folklore.”

- 4 Suggest a different title that would be appropriate for this piece. Explain your thinking.
