

The Zither King



Historical Fiction
for
Elementary Grades

Zither is more than just a word used for the letter Z in Scrabble!

Learn about this beautiful instrument, the zither, and the man that made them popular in the 1800's. Read about the history of a man who found the "American Dream" in the late 1800's when he and his wife came to America.

The lesson combines history, music, language arts and geography. The Zither King tells the story of the man, Franz Schwarzer, who came to America in 1864 from Austria. Franz became famous worldwide in 1873 when he won the Gold Medal of Progress at the Vienna Exposition. "The Zither King" tells his story through the eyes of a ten-year-old boy, Ulysses.

5E

Zither King Lesson Plan

ENGAGE

Ask students, “What is a zither?” Be prepared with pictures or an actual zither to show. Share it is one of only a few instruments that is three in one. Playing a zither is like playing three guitars at one time.

EXPLORE

Using the Internet, have students research the zither and share what they find. Check your historical society and see if they have examples or information. The music score for the movie “The Third Man” was written entirely for the zither. Find recording of the movie and people playing the zither. Google North American Zither Gathering for more information.

EXPLAIN

Read “The Zither King” aloud to the class. Use the Thinking Questions with the class. Have a “Grand Conversation” about what we would call a “self-made man.” Point out that we all can have dreams and with hard work and perseverance we can accomplish much. Point out the many historic photographs in the text.

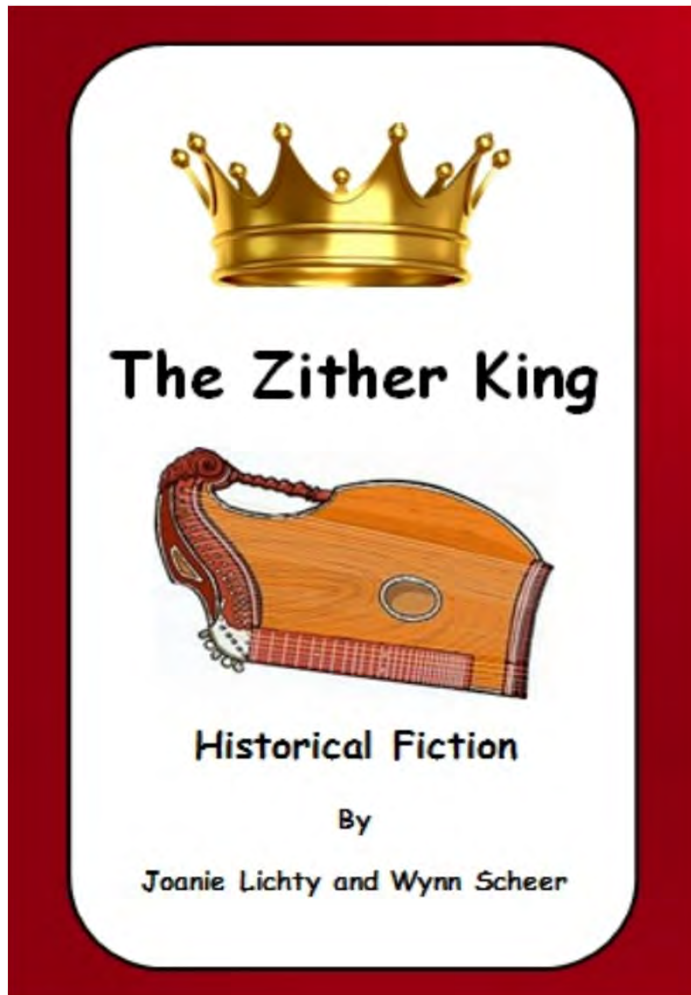
ELABORATE

Review the vocabulary from the text. Display a map and point out Austria and Missouri. Review the history timeline with students. Assign students the task of reporting on one of the following: History and Origin of the Zither, The Life of Franz Schwarzer, Music for the Zither, or German Immigrants in 1800’s. Have students write a reader’s theater about Franz Schwarzer, including his eccentric likes and interests. Discuss the qualities you see in this man and how they helped make him successful.

EVALUATE

Informally assess students by information they share in reports, quizzing of vocabulary.

This lesson plan is written for the historical fiction book “The Zither King”



Step back in time and meet the Zither King through the eyes of ten-year-old Ulysses. Learn about the eccentric man, Franz Schwarzer, who surprised the world with his zither making skills and found a home in a small town in Missouri.



Vocabulary



Alligator- large, semiaquatic reptile, head is shorter and broader than crocodile

Admire- to think highly of

Ample- enough, plentiful

Apprentice- a person learning a task from someone experienced in that task

Asset- something useful or valuable

Eccentric- departing from established norms

Expertise- skill or knowledge in an area

Fascination- the power to attract and hold attention



Vocabulary



Fictitious- made up or created by imagination

Harp- musical instrument, triangular in shape with strings you pluck

Immigrated- to go and live in another country

Mandolin- musical, stringed instrument that looks like a small guitar

Memorable- worth remembering

Overwhelmed- very strongly affected

Parlor- a room in a home for receiving or entertaining

Perch- to sit near or on the edge of something



Vocabulary



Resembled- to be like or similar

Strummed- to run fingers over strings of instrument to make music

Telegram- message sent by telegraph and delivered in written form

Thrive- prosper, succeed

Unique- unlike anything else, one of a kind

Vocation- an occupation you are well qualified for

Zither- a stringed instrument with shallow sound board, played with pick and fingers

Franz Schwarzer

The Zither King

Timeline



October 8, 1828	Franz Schwarzer born in Olmutz, Austria
1846	Franz graduates from Vienna Polytechnic Institute
March 1, 1859	Franz marries Josephine Pettera, an actress
April 3, 1860	Pony Express begins
1856	Louis Pasteur experiments with pasteurization
1861	American Civil War begins, Abraham Lincoln president.
Spring 1864	Franz and Josephine immigrate to the United States and buy land in Holstein, Missouri
1865	Abraham Lincoln assassinated. Andrew Johnson becomes the 17 th president
1866	Alfred Nobel invents dynamite
1867	Franz and Josephine move across the Missouri River to Washington, Mo. and start a furniture factory.
1867	United States purchases Alaska from Russia. Andrew Johnson is president

March 4, 1869	Ulysses Grant becomes 18 th president
May 10, 1869	Transcontinental Railroad completed
1872	A. M. Ward starts the first mail order catalog
1873	Franz sends 3 of his zithers to the Vienna Exhibition in Austria and wins the Gold Medal of Progress
1873	Franz organizes the Washington Fire Brigade and is the first fire chief
March 10, 1876	Alexander Graham Bell makes the first successful telephone call.
October 15, 1878	Edison Electric Company begins operation
March 4, 1881	James Garfield elected president
October 22, 1885	Thomas Edison invents the light bulb
1885	Completion of larger Schwarzer factory, employs 5-8 men
March 4, 1885	Grover Cleveland elected president

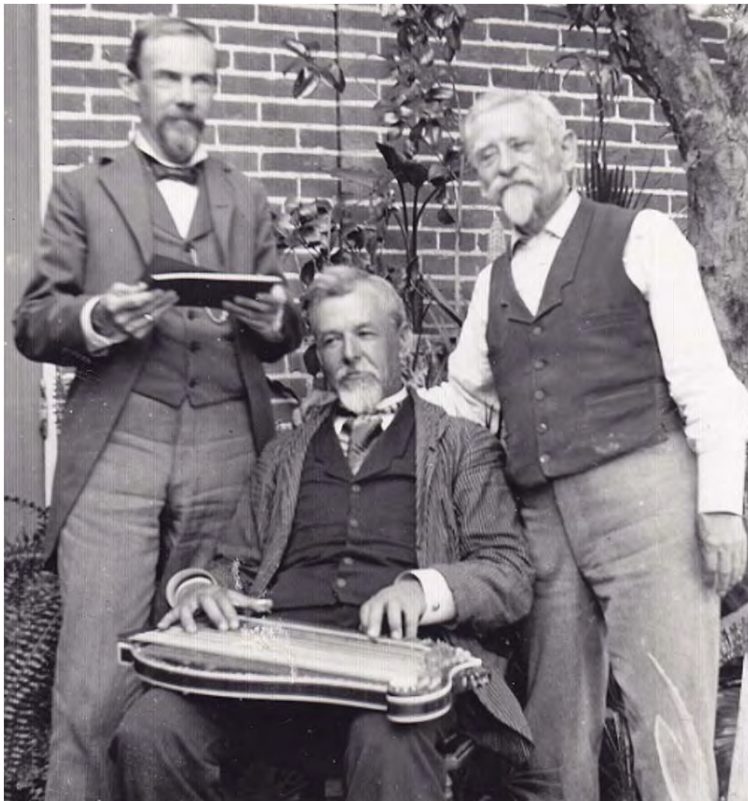


Franz Schwarzer

The

Zither King

Timeline



1885	Franz begins putting serial numbers on his zithers, starting with the number 2,000 (indicating that from 1868-1885 he had made 2000 zithers)
March 4, 1885	Benjamin Harrison elected president
1890-1895	Peak years of production. More than two instruments a day.
May 8, 1886	John Pemberton invents Coca Cola
1890's	Franz develops Schwarzer Park on his property and adds a fountain.
March 4, 1893	Grover Cleveland is elected president again
1893	W. L. Judson invents a zipper
March 4, 1897	William McKinley is sworn in as president
Sept. 14, 1901	Theodore Roosevelt becomes the 26 th president
February 21, 1904	Franz Schwarzer dies

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Thinking Questions

1. Franz Schwarzer sold his zithers all over the world. Even as far away as Peru. Think about the location of his factory. Why was this helpful?
2. Why did WWI affect the sale of the zither?
3. What do you think happened to the alligator? Use your imagination. Research has not revealed the fate of the alligator.

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4. Why would someone leave their home in Austria and come to America in 1864?

5. The 1700–1800's was the time of the Industrial Revolution. What impact would this have had on furniture makers?

6. How do you think the master craftsman in Austria felt about an unknown furniture maker in Missouri winning the prize at the Vienna Exposition?

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7. Locate Olmutz, Austria and Washington, Missouri on a world map. What means of transportation would Franz have taken in 1864 when he traveled to America?

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