

# THE WCR LEARNING COMMUNITY

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Inuit throat singers  
Photo by Ansgar Walk, Wikimedia Commons

## **Nelson Tagoona, hip hop artist from Nunavut, Canada**

Adapted from *The Vancouver Sun*

Level 1

Nelson Tagoona is nineteen years old. He is from Baker Lake, Nunavut. Baker Lake has less than 2,000 people. Nelson is a **hip hop** artist. But he is a different hip hop artist. Nelson learned something when he was little. He learned throat singing.

(Please see the YouTube video of Nelson in the “Links” section below.)

### **What is throat singing?**

Throat singing is a game for women. Two women stand. They face each other. Then they hold each other’s arms. One singer is the leader. She makes sounds by breathing in. She makes sounds by breathing out. She uses her voice, too. The leader starts to repeat sounds. The other woman follows with sounds. The first woman to stop is the loser. She starts to laugh. Then it is over.

### **How long is a throat song?**

Throat songs are one to three minutes long. Sometimes the singers move their feet. They move left and right. This is like a dance.

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### **Nelson's new singing**

Nelson does throat singing, too.  
But he uses it with hip hop music.  
He calls his new singing "throat boxing".  
He mixes throat singing with "beat boxing".  
Beat boxing uses the throat, too.  
In beat boxing, singers make sounds  
like drums and other musical instruments.  
They use their mouths, lips,  
tongues and voices to do this.  
The artist speaks in time with these sounds.

### **Nelson becomes famous**

Nelson does his throat boxing in the North.  
He does it in Canada and the U.S.  
The sound is new to people.  
People like this new music.  
This music has a different sound.  
Nelson is happy to teach about his culture.

### **Nelson sends a message**

Nelson wants young Inuit to have hope.  
Some young Inuit  
have sad things in their lives.  
He wants them to say, "...yeah, it's ok."  
He wants them to think about a good future.  
Nelson says, "You find your art and  
it helps you learn how to **heal** and **cope**."

### **Tanya Tagaq, throat singer**

Tanya Tagaq is a throat singer.  
She is from Cambridge Bay in Nunavut.  
Tanya does her throat singing alone.  
She mixes throat singing with pop music.  
She does this with famous artists.  
Tanya likes is to teach people about  
this old Inuit game.  
There are different kinds of throat singing  
all over the world.



Tanya Tagaq is a throat singer.  
Photo by williamaveryhudson  
(William Avery Hudson), Flickr

### **The body makes music**

Many cultures use  
other parts of the body, too.  
Dancers and singers tap or slap their arms.  
Or they tap or slap their legs.  
Miners in South Africa are famous  
for their **gumboot** dancing.

(See a video of gumboot dancing in the  
"Links" section below.)

### **Vocabulary for teachers:**

- **hip hop**: the popular culture of big-city teenagers, which includes spoken poetry, break dancing, and graffiti art.
- **gumboots**: heavy rubber boots used for wet or muddy work
- **heal**: to get well again, to return to good health in your body and mind
- **cope**: to handle hard times in a good way

(Links are on the next page)

## **Links:**

Throat singing of Inuit women:

<http://icor.ottawainuitchildrens.com/node/25>

Bobby McFerrin's vocal percussion:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktotbE4rN2g>

Nelson Tagoona with throat singers:

<http://www.vancouver.sun.com/entertainment/Video+Throat+boxer+Nelson+Tagoona+performs+with+throat+singers+Kathleen/8018141/story.html>

Tanya Tagaq, famous throat singer explains throat singing:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNb2ZDjeiU4>

Tanya Tagaq performing in Mexico in 2010:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKJbziZlogk>

South African Miners: gumboot dancing:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WdhA\\_i8YT0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WdhA_i8YT0)