



This session introduces learners to Seckou Keita and the kora.

### Background information

- The kora is also known as the West African harp. Most koras have 21 strings. Seckou's kora has 22 strings.
- Seckou is a griot (there is more about this in later sessions). Griots are historians, storytellers, praise singers, poets, and/or musicians.
- Why does Seckou's kora have 22 strings? According to griot tradition, centuries ago, when the djinns, the spirits of the African bush, gave the first ever kora to the griot Jali Mady 'Wuleng' (Jali Mady 'The Red') it had 22 strings. Then, when Jali Mady died, his fellow griots took one string away in his memory. Back in its birthplace in southern Senegal and Guinea Bissau, the 22-stringed kora survives, with the extra string giving the instrument special advantages in terms of tonal reach and groove.
- Seckou sings in several different languages – mainly Mandinka, Wolof, French and English.
- The kora can be tuned in different ways. More information can be found here <https://www.thekoracafe.com/learn/tuning/>

### The Session

1. Play the introductory video until asked to pause. Seckou asks "Have you heard of a kora before? Do you know what it looks like or sounds like?". There is then an image of the component parts of a kora. Ask learners to discuss what they think the kora is like. How might the component parts fit together? Gather feedback from the group.
2. Continue the video. Seckou talks through the parts of the kora and demonstrates how it is played. You might ask:
  - *How close was our description of the kora?*
  - *Is it similar to other instruments you have heard or know of?*
  - *How would you describe the sound?*
  - *What genres of music do you think the kora might be used for?*

### Resources

1. A powerpoint with a video showing the parts of the kora and photographs highlighting the key components. There are notes below the slides.
2. A printable worksheet where learners can label the parts of the kora, decorate their own and record thoughts and feelings about the music they listen to.
3. You will also need to access the songs:
  - *Future Strings in E* from the album *22 Strings* by Seckou Keita.
  - *Jula Kuta* from the album *Echo* by Seckou Keita and Catrin Finch.



3. Slide 2 shows an image of a traditional kora, tuned with leather bands that are pushed up and down the neck. Each string is attached to one of these bands.
4. Slides 3-6 show images of parts of the kora. Use these to recap the component parts.
5. Slide 7 shows the names of the strings. Each string on the kora has its own unique name in spoken Mandinka. The letters / numbers in brackets after the names below refer to the equivalent keys in English (when the kora is tuned in G). They have been spelt phonetically, as there is no official written 'word' for these strings in the Mandinka language.
6. Slide 8 shows Seckou's range of koras. The double-neck kora gives him greater versatility and the ability to play chromatic scales.
7. Slide 9 features two tracks: *Future Strings in E* from the album *22 Strings* and *Jula Kuta* from the album *Echo*. You could play all or part of the pieces.

While the group are listening, they might like to write, doodle or draw what comes to mind. Ask the group for their reflections on the piece.

- *What feelings came up for them?*
  - *What memories did it evoke?*
  - *What images came to mind?*
8. A downloadable worksheet is included in the resources. Use this to annotate the parts of the kora, decorate your own kora and note the images and words evoked by the songs *Future Strings in E* and / or *Jula Kuta*.