

# Proposal for Emoji: FLUTE

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**Emoji Name:** FLUTE

**Sort Order:** in the MUSICAL-INSTRUMENT category, after SAXOPHONE

**Reference Emoji:** TENNIS

**Keywords:** Flute, toot, flautist, recorder, aerophone, music, woodwind



Credit: Apee Messer. Free for use in conjunction with this proposal

## Abstract

This proposal requests the addition of the FLUTE emoji to the Unicode emoji library. One of the oldest musical instruments in human history, the FLUTE dates back over 43,000 years, and can be found in various shapes and sizes in cultures across the globe. A rare “reedless woodwind,” FLUTEs create sweet sounds by manipulating air through the various holes in their surfaces.

FLUTEs have different names across cultures, and have been used in religious and secular ceremonies, songs, and concerts since the days of the Neanderthals. Despite the FLUTE's historical importance, though, there is no emoji that successfully captures this woodwind. Adding a FLUTE emoji would serve purposes around the world, and make sweet music for texters everywhere!

## Introduction

*“A tutor who tooted the flute / Was teaching two tooters to toot. / Said the two to the tutor, / Is it harder to toot, or / To tutor two tooters to toot?”--Carolyn Wells<sup>1</sup>*

Toot toot toot--it's the flute! This “king of the woodwinds” is a staple of music around the world, and has been played by humans, and even humanity's ancestors, for countless millennia. The relative simplicity of the flute--any hollowed tube that air passes through is considered one of the instruments--makes it ubiquitous, lightweight, and easy to use for recreation, ceremony, and religious rituals.

While flutes around the world have various names, they follow the same basic principles for making music. The flute player, or *flautist*, “blows a rapid jet of air across the *embouchre* [mouth] hole,” which makes the air within the flute itself vibrate, creating musical sounds.<sup>2</sup> By manipulating various openings on the flute, the air emerges in different ways, creating notes and melodies. Some flute types, including *ocarinas* or *fujara*, have a small “duct” atop the flute that concentrates air, creating a more distinct sound; others, like ancient flutes made of bamboo or bone, have air pushed directly into them.<sup>3</sup>

As the previous paragraph notes, flutes have a long, global history, and “played” (literally and figuratively) an important role in the formation of humanity. The world's oldest extant musical instrument was a flute carved from “the femur of a juvenile cave bear,” some 43,000 years ago.<sup>4</sup> Scholars argue that these precious flutes are proof of prehistoric music, and further that the development of such music was instrumental (literally!) in establishing what we now know as *culture*.<sup>5</sup> Other early flutes, carved from bone, ivory, and even mammoth tusks, have been found across the world, often developing independently of one another. Flutes made from bamboo and bone are found in China (some, indeed, are still playable!), while Sumerian culture is the first to have a written description of the instrument.<sup>6</sup> Since that time, flutes have remained an important part of music across the world, from India in its earliest days to Germany in the medieval era to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://nothingbutlimericks.blogspot.com/2009/09/blog-post.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://newt.phys.unsw.edu.au/jw/fluteacoustics.html#airjet>

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flute#Categories>

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paleolithic\\_flutes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paleolithic_flutes)

<sup>5</sup> <http://adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2009Natur.460..737C>

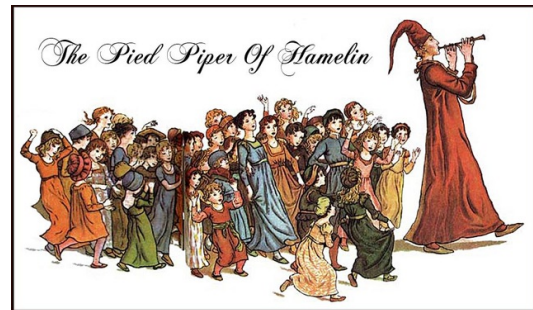
<sup>6</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flute#History>

George Washington's estate in the late eighteenth century (Washington was known for his love of flute playing)<sup>7</sup> to the magical Ocarina of Time in Nintendo's *Legend of Zelda* series.



*The legendary "Aurignacian flute." Carved from the bones of a bear, it is believed to be the world's oldest musical instrument, dating back some 43,000 years.*<sup>8</sup>

In addition to their commonality among humans, the myths and religions of global cultures also feature flutes of all kinds. Han Xiangzi, or "Philosopher Han Xiang," is one of the Eight Immortals of China, an octet of powerful deities; Han Xiangzi carries a Chinese flute known as a *dizi*, and is revered as the patron of musicians in general and flautists in particular.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Krishna, one of the avatars of the Hindu god Vishnu, is praised as a master of the bamboo flute, which in turn reflects his ability to make the world sing in harmony.<sup>10</sup> In a more "wicked" tale dating to the 13th century, the legendary Pied Piper of Hamelin is tasked to use his skills as a flautist to rid the titular German town of rats; when the elders of the village fail to pay him for his work, the Piper changes his tune and lures the children of Hamelin away instead, spiriting them to the realm of the fairies.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the flute's simplicity and ubiquity makes it an important part not only of orchestras and operas, but culture itself.



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<https://www.madelinefrankviola.com/george-washington-musician-and-a-60-minute-vacation-january-2013/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paleolithic\\_flutes#/media/File:Flauta\\_paleol%C3%ADtica.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paleolithic_flutes#/media/File:Flauta_paleol%C3%ADtica.jpg)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.godchecker.com/pantheon/chinese-mythology.php?deity=HAN-XIANGZI>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.yogamag.net/archives/2009/june09/flute.shtml>

<sup>11</sup> <https://theportalist.com/the-chilling-true-story-behind-the-pied-piper-of-hamelin>

*Images of legendary and deific flute-players from around the world. From left: Chinese Immortal Philosopher Han Xiang<sup>12</sup>; Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu in Hinduism<sup>13</sup>; the Pied Piper of Hamelin from the tales of the Brothers Grimm.<sup>14</sup>*

## Selection Factors – Inclusion

### Compatibility

Not applicable.

### Expected Usage Level

#### Frequency

I have selected TENNIS as the **reference emoji** for FLUTE. Both are tools used for a specific pursuit that overlaps with leisure and professionalism. Both are also found in cultures around the world, and even have a similar cylinder-based shape.

I anticipate that the emoji FLUTE will be used around the world. As noted above, FLUTES are the oldest musical instruments in human history, and can be found across six continents (excluding Antarctica). FLUTES are also one of the key instruments in orchestras and other classical musical performances; given that these performances are staged around the world, there is an incredibly wide audience for this emoji.

**NOTE: As a general rule, I have searched FLUTE (musical instrument) and RACKET (sports equipment) to make the results as specific as possible.**

#### Google Trends: Web Search

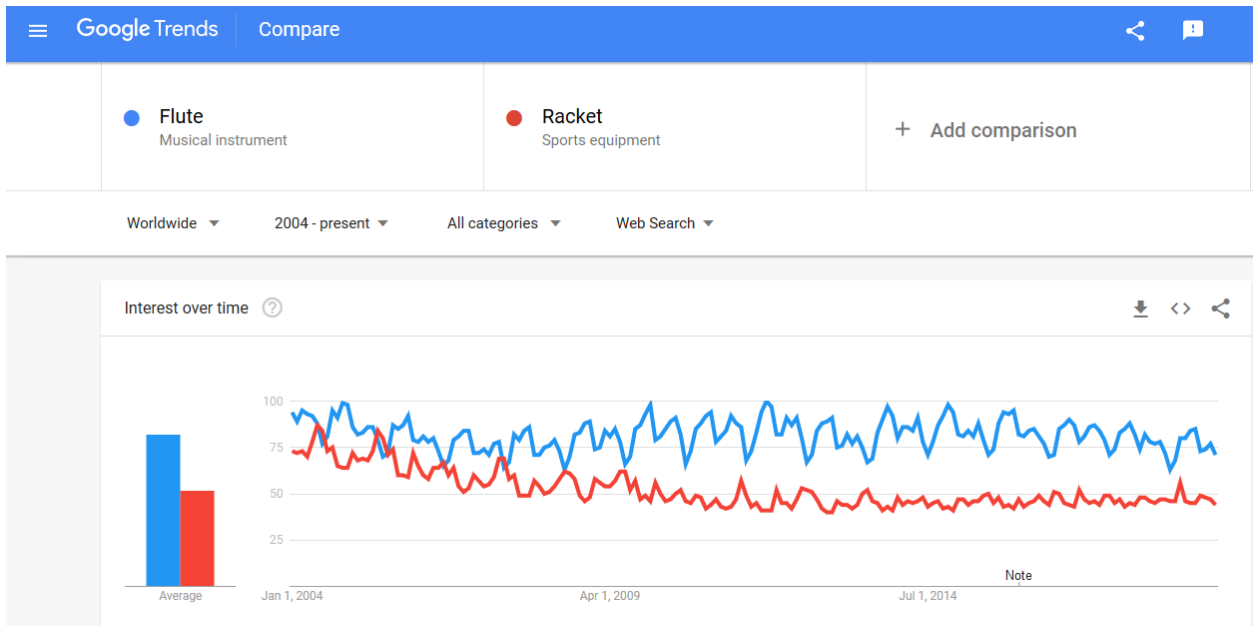
FLUTE, as a general rule, is searched more frequently than RACKET. The former has an interesting pattern of peaks and valleys across the years, but never dips lower than 60. RACKET gradually dips over time.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Han\\_Xiang\\_Zi](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Han_Xiang_Zi)

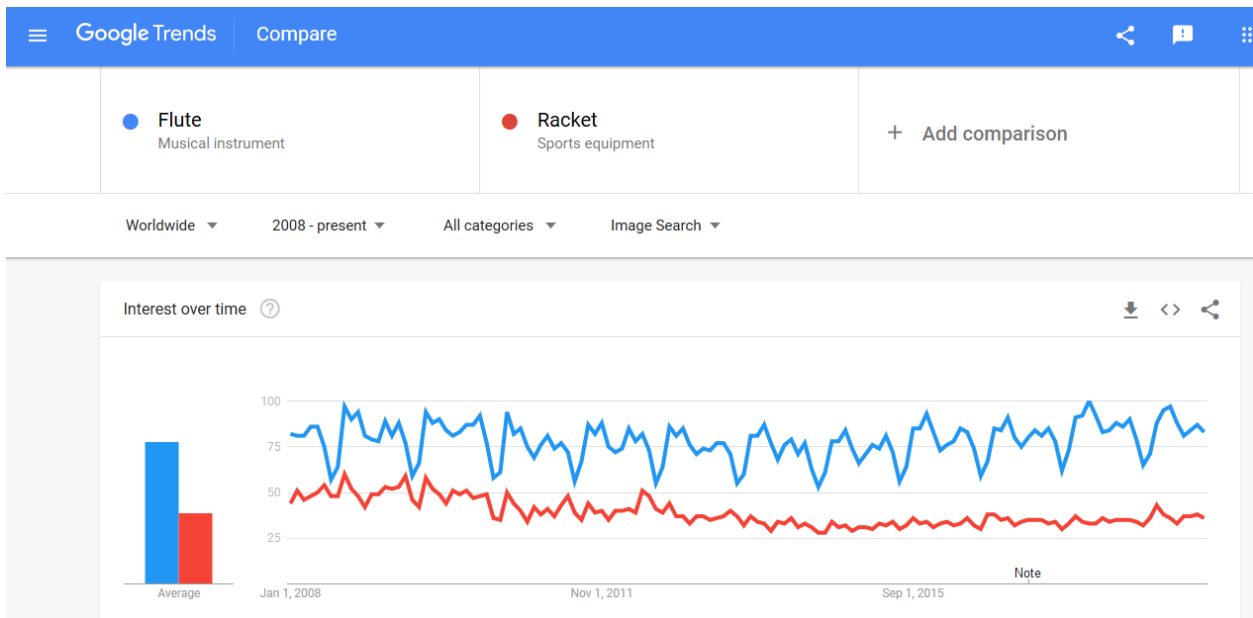
<sup>13</sup> <https://dominiqueamendola.com/print/krishna-playing-flute>

<sup>14</sup> <http://copycateffect.blogspot.com/2016/09/Pied-Piper.html>



### Google Trends: Image Search

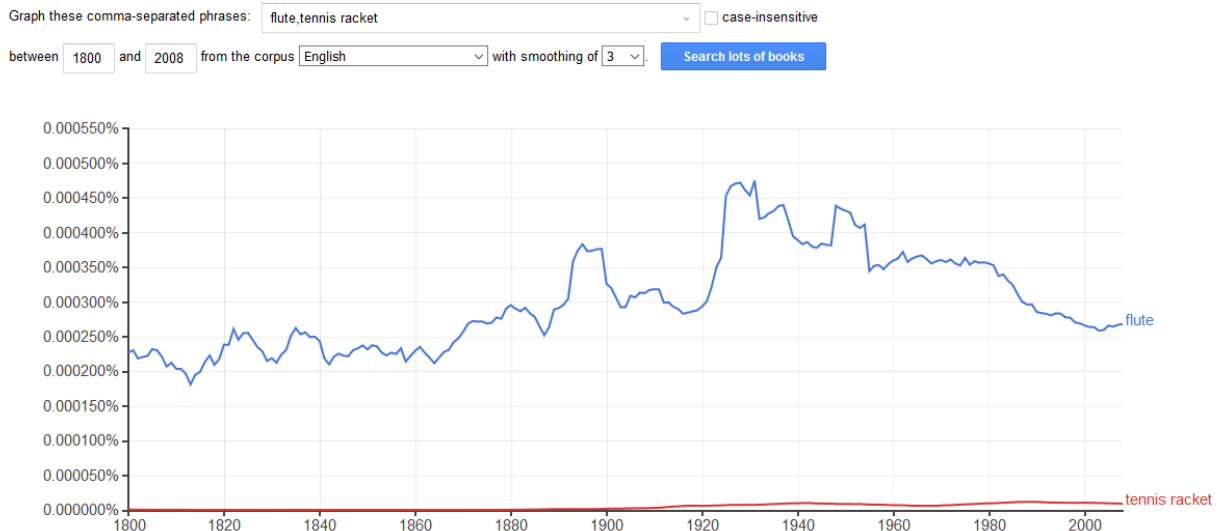
The Image Search trend essentially shows more extreme versions of the Web trend. FLUTE has greater peaks and valleys--though never dipping below 50--while RACKET begins strong and gradually diminishes over time.



## NGram Viewer

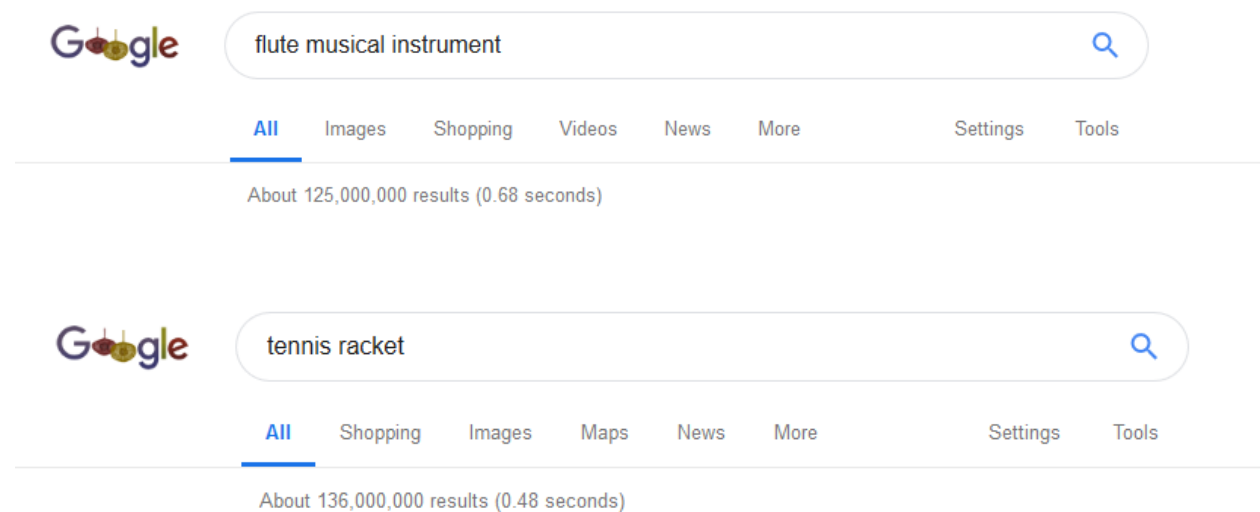
FLUTE appears far more often than TENNIS RACKET across books throughout history. This is unsurprising, as FLUTES are likely used more frequently than TENNIS RACKETS. The massive spike in FLUTE around the 1920s is interesting.

## Google Books Ngram Viewer



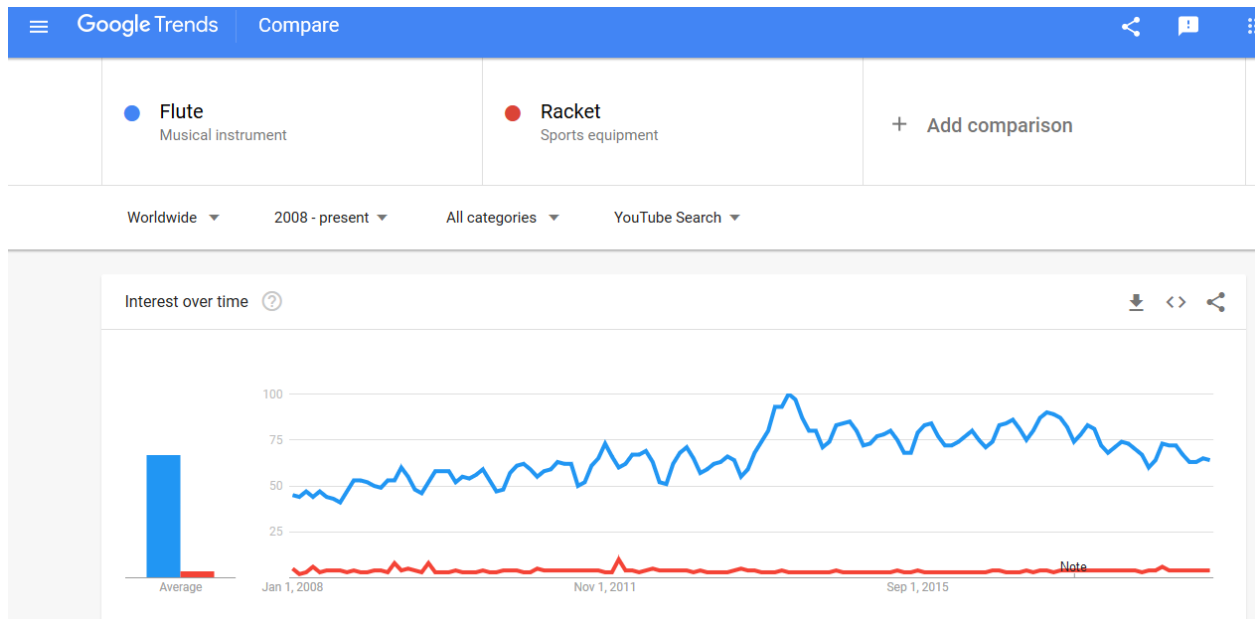
## Google Search

FLUTE (here specified with musical instrument) has a slightly lower search total than TENNIS RACKET, by a margin of roughly 11 million.



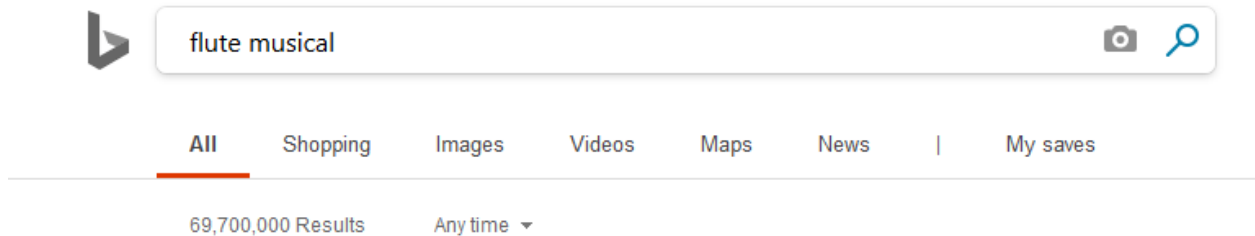
## YouTube Search

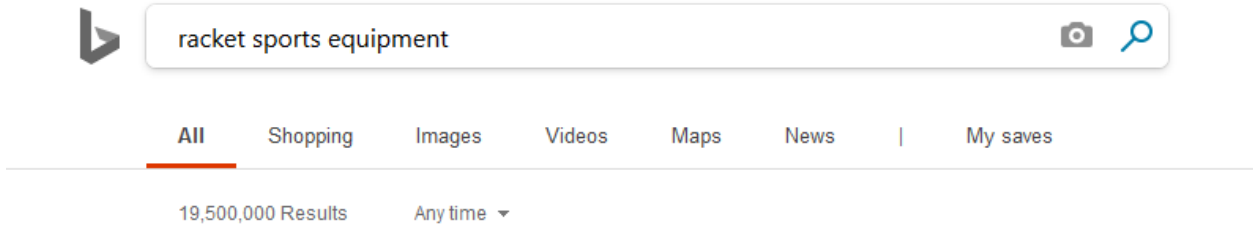
Perhaps unsurprisingly, FLUTE has a massively higher number of YouTube searches than RACKET. This makes sense--YouTube is primarily used to view performances, and FLUTES, more so than RACKETs, would be a key feature.



## Bing Search

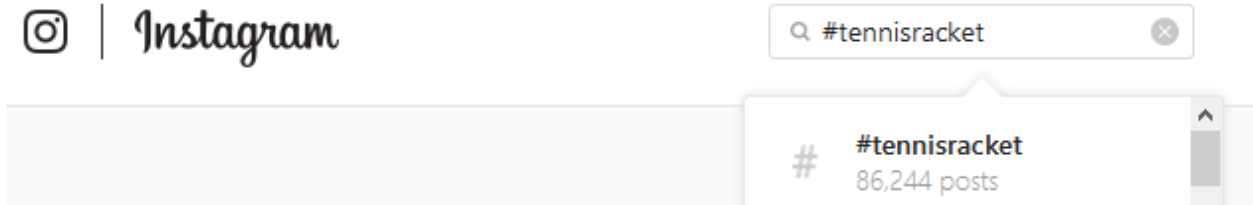
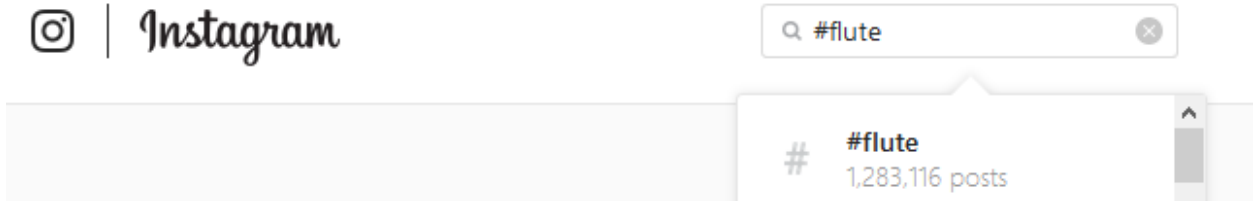
FLUTE (which must be paired with “musical” and not “musical instrument,” as the latter asks for specific materials) produces roughly 50,000,000 more hits than RACKET (sports equipment).





Instagram Search

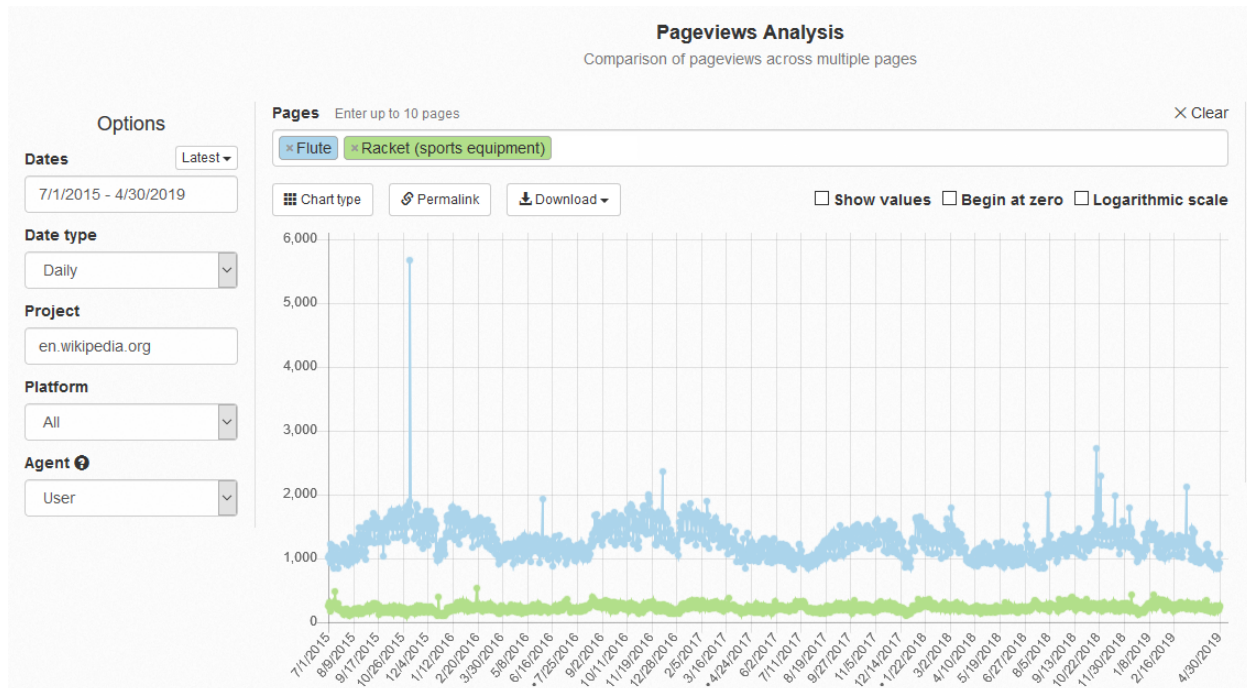
FLUTE has recently reached a new surge of popularity on Instagram, with over a *billion* more uses in hashtags than TENNIS RACKET. The reason is unclear.



Wikipedia Search

Here we see a continued trend from Google comparisons. FLUTE is steadily searched far more often than RACKET (SPORTS EQUIPMENT), indicating the greater interest in the musical instrument.





## Multiple Usages

The FLUTE, in addition to its unique musical sound, could be paired with other musical emoji (VIOLIN, SAXOPHONE, etc.) to symbolize the idea of an orchestra or band. FLUTES are also used by snake charmers, and in the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

## Use in sequences

The FLUTE could easily be paired with the emoji below to create interesting sequences:

FLUTE + PERSON= FLAUTIST (one who plays a flute)

FLUTE + VIOLIN + DRUM (possibly TRUMPET)= ORCHESTRA (a large group of instruments gathered to play classical music; the FLUTE is often the leader of the woodwind section of an orchestra)

FLUTE + SAXOPHONE= WOODWINDS (a type of musical instrument that creates pleasant sounds by blowing air through a reed)

FLUTE + MUSICAL SCORE = CLASSICAL MUSIC (like the VIOLIN, the FLUTE is an antique instrument that frequently leads orchestral sections--the VIOLIN on strings and the FLUTE on woodwinds)

FLUTE + SNAKE = SNAKE CHARMING/CHARMER (an art, frequently associated with Southern Asian countries, in which a snake “dances” to the music of a flute played by a charmer)

FLUTE + RAT + MAN (possibly + MOUSE FACE)= PIED PIPER (the famous musician who used a magical flute to lure away rats, and later children, from the town of Hamelin)

Breaking new ground.

The FLUTE is the oldest instrument in human history, and yet it has not and cannot be accurately represented by current emoji. The only other woodwind in the Emoji Library is the SAXOPHONE, which is much more contemporary and is frequently associated with jazz. The FLUTE, by contrast, has ties to classical music, which is currently only represented by the VIOLIN. The FLUTE could also pave the way for culturally-specific instruments, such as the Andean pipes or Chinese *dizi*.

## Image Distinctiveness

A FLUTE, when placed in the Instruments category, is instantly recognizable: unlike other woodwinds such as the clarinet or oboe, a FLUTE is often silver or brown (the former are black), and can be more easily represented (a FLUTE is shown as “musical tube with holes”, while oboes and clarinets would require images of moving parts).

## Completeness

Not applicable.

## Frequently Requested

N/A.

## Selection Factors – Exclusion

### Overly Specific

Among possible FLUTE emoji users are composers, classical musicians, flautists, and orchestra leaders. However, a FLUTE does not just appear in orchestras--it is also used in musical theatre, marching bands, and individual music groups. Given that the FLUTE has sacred usage in, among others, Hindu and Chinese culture, it is possible that religious groups will also use the emoji. Other, more metaphoric uses may be telling the

story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, snake charming, or generally getting people to follow a particular trail (“dance to my tune”).

## Open Ended

There are admittedly many different “types” of FLUTE, from the panpipe to the recorder to the ocarina; however, a single FLUTE emoji would best capture the idea of the aerophone. Similarly, world cultures share a rounded, carved cylinder that uses blown air to make noise--in other words, the FLUTE.

## Already Representable

Given that musical instruments produce unique sounds, it is impossible for any of the existing instrument emoji to represent FLUTE. The only one that comes close is SAXOPHONE, but these are two totally different instruments; the FLUTE is much older, and associated with classical music, as opposed to the SAXOPHONE's jazz.

## Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

The FLUTE is a ubiquitous musical instrument dating back for tens of thousands of millennia; as such, no one company, logo, or brand can claim ownership of it. The only known FLUTE “person” is Francis FLUTE, a minor character in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

## Transient

The earliest FLUTE in the fossil record dates back to pre-human history, some 43,000 years ago. It is the oldest of the world's musical instruments, and given that people are still playing FLUTES today, it can be safely said that they are not going anywhere.

## Faulty Comparison

The only instrument relatively close to FLUTE in the Emoji Library is the SAXOPHONE. The two may both be woodwind instruments, but the similarities end there: a FLUTE has a rounded cylinder shape and is smaller, lighter and associated with classical music, while the SAXOPHONE has a distinct “J”-shape and is longer, bigger, and associated with jazz.

## Exact Images

Any long, thin cylinder with small holes throughout, topped by a mouthpiece, will be recognizable as a FLUTE. The provided image is brown, representing the carved FLUTES of history. However, it may be possible to provide different colors; most orchestral FLUTES are silver. More culturally-specific FLUTES, such as the Andean pipes or ocarina, may require their own emoji.

## Other Character Properties

The other character properties are suggested to be defined as follows.

General Category: So

Canonical Combining Class: 0

Bidirectional Class: ON

Decomposition Type:

Decomposition Mapping:

Numeric Type:

Numeric Value:

Bidirectional Mirrored:

N Unicode 1 Name:

ISO Comment:

Simple Uppercase Mapping:

Simple Lowercase Mapping:

Simple Titlecase Mapping:

## Author Biographies

**Christian Krenek** ([Christian.Krenek@gmail.com](mailto:Christian.Krenek@gmail.com)) used to pretend to play an invisible flute as a child (it helps that he is rather good at whistling). Though he traded in his imaginary flute for real-life singing, he still appreciates the music of the aerophone. A classical music and musical theatre aficionado, he has helped provide flute orchestration books for various companies. Christian is proud to play a role in the creation of this emoji--not to toot his own flute, of course.