



Young Audiences of Massachusetts

Educational Materials

Please forward to teachers

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

Jeff Davis: *Massachusetts!*

Grade levels: 3-5

Massachusetts has a history that goes back to well before the first Europeans colonists. At every stage of that history there has been folk music to accompany the everyday lives of the people. The history of the Commonwealth is distinct and the geography is, too, making Massachusetts different from every other New England State, and also making New England distinct from every other region. This program views Massachusetts through instruments, music, and song: early colonial tunes and songs; textile mill songs from Lowell; sea songs from the tall ships; Portuguese fiddle tunes from Martha's Vineyard; ballads from the farms and mountains of the western reaches of the State.

LEARNING GOALS:

1. To study how folk music was part of the culture of the past.
2. To learn to appreciate why the folk music of Massachusetts has a particular quality.
3. To sing and hear folk songs to "enhance understanding of history and geography." (See Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, Current Curriculum Frameworks, preK-12, Standard 10, p. 104.)

PRE-ACTIVITY SUMMARY: *What is Massachusetts Folk Music?*

Definitions of folk and folk music; folk music in history and culture.

POST-ACTIVITY SUMMARY: *The Performance*

A review the program: What instruments were heard; what songs were sung? How did the music sound to the students? Can they imagine playing such music themselves?

CURRICULUM LINKS:

History and Social Science, English Language Arts, Music

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PRE-ACTIVITY: WHAT IS MASSACHUSETTS FOLK MUSIC?

LEARNING GOAL:

To study folk music in the American landscape in general and, very particularly, in Massachusetts. To define the term “folk music.” To study about where and from whom folk music might have been found in the Commonwealth.

MATERIALS/PREPARATION:

Books, recordings, CD player.

TIME:

45-minute class

STEP 1:

Discuss the definition of folk. What does the term folk music or folk song mean to the students. Do any of them know a folk song? If so, why is it a folk song? What is the difference between, say, a Pop song and a folk song? Can the students think of rimes, recipes, riddles—or anything else—that they learned from their families and are, therefore, family folklore.

STEP 2:

Explain that folksongs A) often have no known author and are usually learned by word of mouth, so B) the songs were often not written down but, instead, learned through a process called oral transmission, and the songs often changed through time—something like an extended game of Telephone. C) The music was usually (but not always) sung by working people with relatively little wealth and by people with little or no access to mass media or anything like it, and D) the oldest songs were often changed the least by people who lived most remotely (and had little contact with musical fads, immigration patterns, etc.).

(continued...)



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PRE-ACTIVITY: WHAT IS MASSACHUSETTS FOLK MUSIC?

STEP 3:

The nature and variety of folk music varies from region to region, State to State, even valley to valley. There are many reasons for this, including geography, immigration, and history. Massachusetts was settled very early by (mostly) English settlers and settled centuries earlier by Native-Americans. What might the music of, say, the Wampanoags have sounded like? If those first European settlers were English, from what country would most of their music have come? Since the Pilgrims lived in The Netherlands for ten years before making the trip across the ocean, is there a chance they might have spoken Dutch and know some Dutch music? From where else did settlers come to Massachusetts? What are some of the geographic features that might make the folk music of Massachusetts different from the music of other States, including those in nearby New England or of faraway Arizona? The names of two of the States to the north of Massachusetts are French. Why? All over Massachusetts there can be seen gigantic old factories called mills. What was made there and who worked in them? If some of the people were Irish, was their music Irish, too? If the people were called French-Canadian, where was there music from?

STEP 4:

What were the geographic features that influenced the folk music of Massachusetts? Is there a seacoast? What sort of work do people do on a coastline? What sorts of songs might have gone with the work? Were there rivers? How did rivers affect the history of the State and its music? Were there farms? Big cities? Canals? Were there big cities where immigrants might land? If so, who were they?

EXTENSIONS:

1) **The** bibliography and discography includes only books that are readily available. There is much available at local libraries that can be investigated.

While it is difficult to find traditional folk songs in the typical family these days, there is plenty of lore, that is, family stories, family photographs, family traditions that are almost invisible to the family members. An interesting project would be to have students collect some of these items.



POST-ACTIVITY: *THE PERFORMANCE*

LEARNING GOAL:

To review the assembly program and discuss the instruments that were used, and to remember some of the songs that were heard.

MATERIALS/PREPARATION:

Books, CD player

TIME:

30-minute class

STEP 1:

Were any of the instruments in the program familiar to the students? What were their favorites? Are there any songs they remember particularly? Can they make a list of all of the songs that they heard?

STEP 2:

Did most of the music sound complicated or did it sound straightforward? Did it sound like music that anybody could do? Did it sound like something that would “fit” in a living room or would you have to hear it on a stage? Can the students imagine playing any of the instruments themselves? Which ones? What do they think might be the hardest to learn?

STEP 3:

Did the music sound as if it might have been sung anywhere in the country? For example, were there any cowboy songs? Why not?

STEP 4:

Consider with the students if music (and all other aspects culture) in all the regions of the country are getting more similar or more different with the passage of time. What are the reasons for this? Has television, radio, and the Internet made a difference in the kind of music people play and sing? Do people still play and sing their own music? Does playing one’s own music seem like fun?

EXTENSIONS:

1) **Since** folks songs were such a local activity, almost always performed in small groups, try learning one easy song and singing it with your students.



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RESOURCES:

Books:

Lomax, Alan, **Folk Songs of North America**. Doubleday, 1960

Earle, Alice Morse. **Child Life in Colonial Days**. Detroit, 1989. [Originally published in 1899.]

Flanders, Helen Hartness. **Ballads Migrant in New England**. New York, 1953.

Linscott, Eloise Hubbard. MacMillian, 1939. [Includes many songs from Massachusetts.]

Parkman, Francis. **Montcalm and Wolfe**. Many editions available. [Copies of the Library of America edition are in most libraries. The book is Parkman's stunning narration of England's victory in the French and Indian War. Not a book for children, but a great work of history.]

Warner, Anne and Frank. **Traditional American Folk Songs**. Syracuse, 1984. [Now out of print but available at libraries.]

Seeger, Ruth Crawford. **American Folk Songs for Children**. Doubleday 1948.

Recordings:

The Anthology of American Folk Music, Smithsonian-Folkways Recordings, 1997 [These recordings are not generally from musicians in New England, but are a great look at what music was being played in rural America in the early 20th century.]

The Alan Lomax Collection, Rounder Records, Cambridge, MA. [This is dozens of CDs, and only some of them relate specifically to the music of the northeast. Still, a must for songs collectors.]

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ABOUT THE PERFORMER:

Jeff Davis is one of the nation's foremost performers, interpreters and collectors of traditional American folk songs, tunes, and stories. He plays banjo, guitar, bones, spoons, fiddle, Appalachian dulcimer, Jew's Harp, Native American flute, and several instruments in the mandolin family. Jeff has appeared at Sturbridge Village and Mystic Seaport regularly, and has performed at folk festivals in the United States and abroad. He has recorded for Flying Fish and Minstrel Records. Jeff received the 1992 UMass-Dartmouth "Eisteddfod" Award for service to the traditional arts. He graduated from Duke University with a degree in Russian history but spent much time in North Carolina learning songs from mountain musicians. After a brief tenure as a middle school history teacher, Jeff began playing music full time at schools, clubs, and festivals. Jeff has been a lecturer for the Smithsonian National Associates Program and has performed for school and community groups through the New York State Council for the Arts and the Ohio Arts Council-Arts in Education program. With his friend Jeff Warner, Jeff Davis has recorded two volumes of traditional music for children, *Old Time Songs for Kids* and *Two Little Boys*.

ABOUT YOUNG AUDIENCES:

Young Audiences of Massachusetts (YA) is the oldest, largest and most utilized arts-in-education organization in the state and one of the largest in a national network of 33 chapters. For over 45 years, YA has distinguished itself as the vital link between Massachusetts schoolchildren (K-12) and more than 95 of the region's most accomplished actors, dancers, singers, musicians, and storytellers. Its 36 ensembles offer 57 interactive arts programs that represent a range of cultures, historical periods and artistic disciplines. YA is unique in its flexibility to offer interactive performances, tailor-made residencies, workshops, teacher-training, curriculum planning and multi-year projects. All programs include educational materials and satisfy local, state and/or federal arts education standards.