

Young Audiences of Massachusetts

Educational Materials

Please forward to teachers

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

Jeff Davis: *American Sampler*

Grade levels: 6-12

American Sampler demonstrates with song, story, and photographs a survey of American folk music. Jeff Davis introduces students to a younger America, a country in which people relied on local musical traditions. Within each region the old music was carried on for generations by word of mouth, but as cultures like the English and African-American mingled, they created new forms that thrilled the world. Among other highlights, Jeff performs African-American street cries, travel songs from Massachusetts to Dust Bowl-era California, and plays a homemade Appalachian banjo and "found" instruments such as spoons and bones.

LEARNING GOALS:

1. To get introduced to American folk music.
2. To examine the lives of American working people through their music.

PRE-ACTIVITY SUMMARY:

Define folk songs and discuss why they are usually found in poorer communities and isolated groups. Does folk music exist today? What is the relationship between the performer and listener today in contrast to 200 years ago?

POST-ACTIVITY SUMMARY:

Have students locate the source of each song mentioned and recall details of the lives of some of the singers. Identify the cultural differences between a country of passive listeners and active music makers. Discuss where folk songs might be found today.

CURRICULUM LINKS:

English Language Arts, History and Social Science, Music

PRE-ACTIVITY: FOLK THEN AND NOW

LEARNING GOAL:

To study the roots of American folk music.

MATERIALS/PREPARATION:

CD/Cassette player, books, CD's (see RESOURCES)

TIME:

45-minute class

STEP 1:

Discuss the idea of a folk song and what the term means to students. What is the difference between a pop song and a folk song? Who knows a folk song(s) by heart?

STEP 2:

Explain that folk songs are learned by word of mouth and usually have no author. They are found among people with relatively little wealth and without easy access to mass media. Speculate why?

STEP 3:

Ask students to remember songs (or verses, riddles, recipes, etc.) that they learned from their families exclusively.

STEP 4:

Have students name their favorite singers and ask these questions (more "no" answers in today's world than 200 years ago):

- Do you know that singer personally?
- Where the singer lives?
- Does she/he know your name and where you live?
- Have you ever sung a song to that singer?
- Do you know what sort of trade the singer knows and

EXTENSIONS:

- 1) **Listen** to almost any cut from The Alan Lomax Collection or The Anthology of American Folk Music (or any other recording of authentic folk music).
- 2) **Have** students ask relatives about songs (or recipes etc.) from the family history.



POST-ACTIVITY: TRACING FOLK SONGS

LEARNING GOAL:

To understand the idea of “folk song” and review the program

MATERIALS/PREPARATION:

recordings, books

TIME:

45-minute class

STEP 1:

Discuss whether any of the songs were new to the students. Identify their favorite instruments.

STEP 2:

On a map, locate the places mentioned (Appalachian/ Adirondack mountains, coastal Virginia, central Oklahoma, etc.). *Note: these places vary from program to program. Can students remember the names of any of the “source singers” (people in the photographs)? Can they recall any details of their lives?

STEP 3:

Folk songs are difficult to find now. Identify and Discuss the cultural differences between modern America and the era when homemade music was common.

STEP 4:

Where would Massachusetts’ students begin to look for folk songs today? Remember that they are often found in cohesive cultural groups, isolated geographically, economically, racially, etc.

EXTENSIONS:

- 1) **Have** students share their own famililal histories. How were the lives of their grandparents as children diffrent from their own?
- 2) **Have** students share songs that are sung in their famillies. When and why are these songs sung?



ENCLOSURE:

INSTRUMENTS

Five-string banjo: While the banjo is a truly representative American instrument, it is not native to this country. It came from western Africa with the slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries. The banjo's main characteristics, a resonating animal skin drum head and an extra, shorter fifth string, are found on instruments in Africa and India today. Originally black slaves played the banjo exclusively, but in the 19th and 20th centuries white musicians also started to play it. Banjos were not produced commercially until the 1850. Most rural banjos were hand-made and had smooth, unfretted fingerboards. The old playing styles, therefore, included a great deal of sliding from note to note.

Concertina: The concertina, sometimes called the "squeeze box" is a free-reed instrument similar to the accordion. Dr. Charles Wheatstone, an English scientist, developed the concertina in the 1830s. It did not become a popular folk instrument until the 1860s. The concertina employs a large number of metal reeds, but there is no accordion-like keyboard. Instead there is a system of buttons.

Fretted or Appalachian Mountain dulcimer: The German "Pennsylvania Dutch" settlers developed this instrument. It is an American "cousin" of instruments found throughout northern Europe. The dulcimer is constructed in an elongated hourglass shape with a fretted fingerboard, with strings running its length. It has been found almost exclusively in the mountains of the South. In recent years, however, it has had a renaissance, and is now found nationwide. In the 19th century, it was the primary instrument in the Appalachian Mountains, but at the time the churches thought that dance music was sinful and banned all fiddle and banjo playing. Luckily, the dulcimer escaped the wrath of the church.

Fiddle: The first European instrument brought to this country was the fiddle. It was our most important and popular instrument for several centuries. The fiddle was played in every state, and each region had its own styles and tunes. When used for folk music, it was played by a solo performer. Fiddlers, therefore, had to both carry the tune and provide a strong rhythm, so techniques developed along different lines than those of classical violin playing.

Guitar: The guitar is the preeminent folk instrument. Imported to the colonies from England in the 18th century, it was a late-comer to traditional music. The wealthier classes exclusively used the guitar for formal parlor music. In the 19th century, the guitar was used in minstrel shows but was not nearly as popular as the banjo. The guitar was adopted by black musicians in the south and subsequently picked up by white musicians.

Jew's harp: The Jew's harp is a free-reed related instrument. It is held against the teeth, using the mouth to provide both pitch and amplification. The oldest one on record dates from 14th century China, though the instrument is probably far older than that. It is found in most parts of the world. The name comes from a mis-hearing of its Dutch name, *jeugetrump* (child's trumpet), or from the French *jeu d'harp* (play harp). In Italian, it is called *scaccpensieri* (chase away all thought).

Spoons and Bones: Because standard instruments were not always available to rural people, they used anything at hand. This is how the common spoon, wooden or metal, became a musical instrument. Playing bones is, perhaps, even older than art. Drawings of figures playing bones adorn Egyptian vases dating from 3000 B.C. Today, "bones" are made of wood and the musician plays with one set in each hand. They are played by clacking the bones together in complicated rhythms.

RESOURCES:

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

Parkman, Francis. **The Oregon Trail**

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

Warner, Anneand Frank, **Traditional American Folk Songs**, Syracuse University Press, 1984

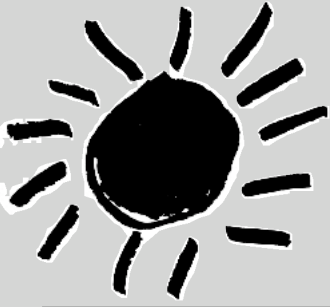
Recordings: *The Anthology of American Folk Music*, Smithsonian-Folkways Recordings, 1997;
The Alan Lomax Collection, Rounder Records, Cambridge, MA.

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.



Young Audiences of Massachusetts

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MASSACHUSETTS CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS CONNECTIONS

Jeff Davis:

American Sampler, The Oregon Trail

<i>Language Arts 6</i>	...describe and analyze how oral dialects differ from each other in English
<i>Language Arts 9</i>	...identify the basic facts and essential ideas in what they have read, heard, or viewed.
<i>History 1</i>	Chronology and Cause...understand the chronological order of historical events and recognize the complexity of historical cause and effect.
<i>History 2</i>	Historical Understanding...understand the meaning, implications, and import of historical events, while recognizing the contingency and unpredictability of history.
<i>History 8</i>	Places and Regions of the World...identify and explain the location and features of places and systems organized over time.
<i>History 13</i>	American and Massachusetts Economic history...describe the development of the American, New England, Massachusetts economy.
<i>Arts-Music 1</i>	Singing...sing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
<i>Arts-Music 3</i>	Playing Instruments...play instruments, alone and with others, to perform a varied repertoire of music.
<i>Arts-Music 5</i>	Critical Response...describe and analyze their own music and the music of others using appropriate music vocabulary.
<i>Arts-Music 6</i>	Purpose and Meaning in the Arts...describe the purpose for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created.
<i>Arts-Music 7</i>	Roles of Artists in Communities...describe the roles of artists, patrons, cultural organizations, and art institutions in societies of the past and present.
<i>Arts-Music 8</i>	Concepts of Style, Stylistic Influence, and Stylistic Change...demonstrate understanding of styles, influence, change.
<i>Arts-Music 9</i>	Inventions, Technologies, and the Arts...describe and analyze how performing and visual artists use and have used materials, inventions, and technologies in their work.
<i>Arts-Music 10</i>	Interdisciplinary Connections...apply knowledge of the arts to the study of English language arts, foreign languages, health, history, and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering.