

2013 Cultural Art Lesson Plan

Goals of Lesson:

- Participants will learn a brief history of Appalachian music
- Participants will learn the influence on Appalachian music

Websites for lyrics of songs:

- Barbra Allen Song—[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara_Allen_\(song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara_Allen_(song))
- Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender—<http://ingeb.org/songs/lordthom.html>
- Pretty Polly—<http://murderballadblackjack.pbworks.com/w/page/10378662/Pretty%20Polly%20Lyrics>
- Arkansas Traveler—<http://freepages.music.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~edgmon/starkansastraveler.htm>

Items Needed:

- Handout on History of Appalachian Music
- Print out of songs (optional)

Possible Field Trip:

- Mountain Music Museum located in the Bristol Mall in Bristol, VA





History of Appalachian Music

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The Appalachian Mountains are over 1500 miles long and stretch across 18 states, from Maine to Georgia. Which in colonial times was called the 'Back Country.' Many behaviors and cultural identities are shared among the people that reside in the Appalachian Mountains. More over, they also share speech and dialect, folk music and dance, crafts, superstitions and religion, building practices, feuding and moonshining.

To understand how traditional Appalachian music grew, it is important to know how the mountains were shaped over 500 million years ago. Over three different building periods (Taconic, Acadian, and Alleghenian) the mountains were formed. In the Acadian period there was one land mass called Laurentia, which consisted of North America, Greenland, Ireland, and Scotland. During this time the Caledonia Mountains rose up and were worn down before the Atlantic Ocean started to split the continent. When the Atlantic Ocean split the continent the Scottish Highlands and the Appalachian ranges were formed. Finally during the third period, the Alleghenian, the West African and Laurentian continents collided. Creating the half moon shape the Appalachians resemble, which mirror the bulge in Africa.

Along with many other environmental factors, rough terrain was developed in the Appalachian Mountains creating undesirable land. Which tended to attract poorer people looking for cheap or unwanted land. In the 17th century immigrants from England, Scotland, Ireland, and

Wales began to settle on the Eastern Seaboard, while the French settled along the Mississippi River. In the 1700s westward immigration was limited by steep ridges of the Appalachians forcing the settlement to start North in PA and proceed South, rather than over the mountains going West. However, this was not the only reason the regions' settlement was postponed, but such factors as: a rivalry over fur trade between French and English in the region, land rights were uncertain, good farm land was annexed by land companies, and Native Americans were hostile to white settlement.

It wasn't until 1750 when the Cumberland Gap was discovered, the 1763 Treaty of Paris, and the lift on travel restrictions from Ireland that there was an explosion of Ireland immigrants to the U.S. Most of the Scot-Irish that came to PA came as contracted work. As their time was completed they began to find local land was to expensive and began to travel south into the mountains. Causing others to see them as a lower class and being referred to as "hillbillies."

Many communities were settled late and only consisted on average 3 generations back of family members. Since there was many unforeseen circumstances related to the mountains, it produced areas that were isolated geographically and were unstable, which created less law and order than that on the Eastern Seaboard. This caused people to rely on each other, in return, creating a highly religious population and where

music became an important link to the past that was passed down through the generations.

Music in the Appalachian Mountains was based upon Anglo-Celtic folk ballads and instrumental dance tunes. The ballads were mainly sung by women, since they were the memory keepers of the families cultural heritages but it also helped them get through the monotonous work of the day. Many of the ballads are from British traditions and of the 300 classic ballads, 100 or so variations, that are found in American tradition, are from the female standpoint on sexual struggles (i.e. ballads; *Barbara Allen*, *Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender*, and *Pretty Polly*).

Celtic ballads have also had an influence on the particular tonal and nasal quality that is preferred by many traditional Appalachian singers. Although, content was changed to reflect American contexts, the occupations and locations, in many of the Child ballads from the 19th century, still refer to Lords and Ladies, ghost, and castles, keeping their theme of love affairs and interpersonal relations. However, many churches of America had an influential part in cleaning up and softening the explicit lyrics in these ballads.

Broadside ballads were printed on cheap paper and sold on the street and showcased more male-dominated experiences. These ballads were about logging, ranching, mining, along with disasters, murders and tragedies. Lastly two other ballad types arose from American experience, that from African tradition and the other from popular music, which was a source of parlour or sentimental ballad. The African ballads reflected on actual events with real historical characters with the text being highlighted with an emotional mood rather than a plot line. Whereas popular music was presented in Minstrel Show or Music Hall and eventually was passed

down in folk tradition through repetition. As with many other types of music, African-American had the greatest influence on Appalachian music. With the slaves bringing distinct tradition of group singing in community songs of work and worship, which one individual calls out a word or phrase and a response from the group is generated. Not only did the lyrics have influence but also the rhythm from African music changed singing and dancing in Appalachian music.

In the 1860s, the introduction of the banjo only quickened the process of change in Appalachian music. The fiddle, however, was the main instrument and often alone since a piano was too expensive to purchase. The fiddle originally mirrored the tonal and stylistic qualities of a ballad. Neil Gow, a Scottish fiddler in the 1740s, is the one credited for creating the technique of powerful and rhythmic short bow sawstroke, which became the foundation for Appalachian mountain fiddling. Then the popularity of the guitar began in 1910.

In the 1930s and 1940s traditional mountain music began to give way to the beginnings of modern commercial country-western music, from the likes of Hank Williams, the Delmores, the Stanleys, and the Louvins. However, the old-time Appalachian music never really died off it's just considered 'folk' music now with Fiddlers' Conventions, house parties, and back porch jams keeping the music alive. And in the Southern Appalachians you can still find singers and musicians playing the *Soldier's Joy* and *Arkansas Traveler*.



Adapted from: McClatch, Debby. *Appalachian Traditional Music: A Short History*. <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/>