

“Froggie Went A Courtin’” Lesson Plan

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Description

This lesson introduces Appalachian balladry through group singing and the creation of new verses for the British ballad “Froggie Went A Courtin’.”

Goal

To engage students in group singing and songwriting while teaching about the British ballad tradition in Appalachia.

Objectives

Students will...

- learn about the tradition of ballad singing that was brought from the British Isles to the Appalachian Mountains.
- sing along with a song in a call-and-response pattern.
- practice rhyming and other elements of song-writing.
- brainstorm animals and adjectives to describe the animals.

Background

When people from the British Isles settled in the Appalachian Mountains, they brought with them folk songs called ballads. They also wrote new ballads. All of these ballads tell stories, many of which grew out of historical events such as marriages, murders, and train wrecks. Even “Froggie Went A Courtin’,” about a frog and a mouse getting married, likely refers to some courtship in some royal family, centuries ago. Some believe that it may even refer to a suitor of Queen Elizabeth I of England in the late 16th century.

For centuries these songs were generally sung a cappella, but by the 20th century in Appalachia, they began to be accompanied by instruments such as the guitar, banjo, or lap dulcimer. There are many versions of this song with differing words and melodies. This can largely be attributed to the fact that for many years, these songs existed mostly in the oral tradition. Many of them include some non-sense syllables. The version below works well for children because the non-sense syllables change with each verse and become animal sounds at the end of the song.

Materials

1. All you really need is a voice to sing. This is an easy song to sing with or without instrumental accompaniment. There are many recordings of this song including a free download available at www.seanmccollough.com. I highly recommend listening to some versions that are either a cappella or accompanied by traditional Appalachian stringed instruments such as the guitar, banjo or lap dulcimer.
2. White board and marker. You will need these if you are working as a group and would like to record the new verses.
3. Paper and pencils. The students will need these if they write verses on their own.
4. Paper and crayons – The students will need these if you are working with young children and choose to have them draw pictures to go along with their verses.

Vocabulary

Appalachia: A region in the eastern United States named after a mountain range that actually runs from Canada all the way down to Alabama. While there are many definitions, the region we most often think of as Appalachia is generally defined by the “southern Appalachian Mountains” that are in West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, east Tennessee, southwest Virginia, western North Carolina, north Georgia, and the northeastern tip of Alabama.

Ballad: A song that tells a story.

British Isles: A group of islands off the northwest coast of continental Europe. The islands are the home of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

Call and Response: The musical practice of a leader calling out a line of music (sung or played on an instrument) and others responding.

Oral Tradition: The tradition of music and other culture being handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation – as opposed to being written down or recorded in another way.

Rhyme: A word that has the same final sound as another word.

Adjective: A word that modifies or describes a person or thing (an animal in this lesson).

Procedure

1. Introduce the concept of a ballad. Ask the students if they know of any songs that tell stories?
2. Tell about the ballads being brought to the mountains with the first European settlers.
3. Introduce “Froggie Went A Courtin’” – i.e. it’s about a frog and mouse that get married, but it was probably actually written about real people.
4. Sing the song with the students repeating the non-sense syllables in call and response fashion.
5. Brainstorm animals that could come to the wedding and adjectives to describe them. You can either do this as a group or have students do this individually.
6. Either as a group or individually, have the students write new verses. To do this, simply choose more animals to come to the wedding. The students will have to come up with something to rhyme with each animal and with good adjectives to describe it. (Younger students enjoy drawing pictures to go along with their verse.)
7. With the new verses included, sing the song again as a group. (Put each animal’s sound in the place of the non-sense syllables.)

“Froggie Went A Courtin’” Lyrics

Froggie went a courtin’ and he did ride, uh huh, uh huh
Froggie went a courtin’ and he did ride, sword and pistol by his side, uh huh, uh huh

He went up to miss mousey’s hall, oh ho, oh ho
He went up to miss mousey’s hall and for miss mousey did loudly call, oh ho, oh ho

He took miss mousey on his knee, ee hee, ee, hee
He took miss mousey on his knee, he said “miss mousey would you marry me,” ee hee, ee hee

“Oh kind sir I couldn’t do that, oh no, oh no
Oh kind sir I couldn’t do that, without the consent of my dear uncle rat, oh no, oh no”

Uncle rat laughed and he shook his fat side, ha ha, ha ha
Uncle rat laughed and he shook his fat side, to think that his niece would be a bride, ha ha, ha ha

Who shall be the wedding guests, uh huh, uh huh
Who shall be the wedding guests, all the kinfolk from out west, uh huh, uh, huh

The first to come was the bumble bee, buzz buzz, buzz buzz
The first to come was the bumble bee, fiddle a bouncin’ on her knee, buzz buzz, buzz buzz

The next to come was the little pink pig, oink oink, oink oink
Next to come was the little pink pig, and with the bumble bee danced the jig, oink oink, oink oink

The next to come was the big brown cow, moo moo, moo moo
Next to come was the big brown cow, she tried to dance but she didn’t know how, moo moo, moo moo