

3rd – 6th
Grades

Lesson 3 – The Erie Canal Song

Objective

Students will learn the American folksong *Low Bridge, Everybody Down*, and perform it at the concert with the BPO. They will understand several aspects of the Erie Canal's impact on New York State and the United States. Students will be able to characterize a folk song and describe oral tradition and its impact on the music of our culture.

Suggested Materials

- *Low Bridge, Everybody Down* music and lyrics (attached)
- Optional: A recording of *Low Bridge, Everybody Down* (audio links can be found at [youtube.com/user/BfloPhilharmonic](https://www.youtube.com/user/BfloPhilharmonic))
- Classroom resources for historical research
- Optional: Recorders

New York State Arts Standards

- 1 – Creating, Performing and Participating in the Arts
- 2 – Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources
- 4 – Understanding the Cultural Contributions of the Arts

New York State Social Studies Standards

- 1 – History of the United States and New York
- 3 – Geography
- 4 – Economics
- 5 – Civics, Citizenship, and Government

Common Core Learning Standards for ELA & Literacy

- Reading, CCR 1, 2, and 4
- Writing, CCR 9
- Speaking & Listening, CCR 1, 2, and 3
- Language, CCR 1, 4 and 6

Procedure

- 1) Introduce students to the music and lyrics of *Low Bridge, Everybody Down* through singing and/or listening to the recording.

Lesson 3 - The Erie Canal Song *(continued)*

2) Discuss and brainstorm with students - What are folk songs and why are they important?

Some points to include:

- a. Folk songs are a way for us to learn about the history and heritage of our region and country.
- b. These songs are passed down from one generation to the next, usually without any sort of notation. This is called an "oral tradition," meaning that we pass something along by saying or telling it, or in this case, singing it. Often times, there are no written records of the original versions of folk songs or folk tales.
- c. Folk songs were usually created to tell a story. Just like folk tales (folk stories), the songs aren't always completely true, but they were usually inspired by real things that were happening in the lives of the people who sang them.
- d. Many folk songs have been around for a long time and no one is sure who originally composed them. But, *Low Bridge, Everybody Down* is unique in that we know who wrote the song. It was originally composed by Thomas S. Allen (1876-1919)

3) Focus on the lyrics of the song. They describe life on the canal from the viewpoint of someone working on a barge traveling up and down the canal. What do students think the following lyrics mean? After taking their ideas, you can share the answers with the class.

- a. *What do they think the words "Low Bridge - Everybody Down," mean?*
Those who traveled on the boats would often ride up on the roof of the boat, if the weather was nice. But, when they came to a low bridge, they would have to either duck down or get off the roof in order for the boat to fit beneath the bridge. The cry of "Low Bridge" was a way to alert people to duck!
 - b. *How about "15 miles on the Erie Canal?"*
This refers to the average distance a mule would tow a barge before resting or being relieved by another mule.
 - c. *"Giddap there mule, we've passed that lock." What is a lock? What does this line mean?*
This line refers to how mules would get to rest while waiting for barges to travel through the locks. When the barge was through, the mule would have to "giddap" and get going again.
 - d. *What job did Sal the mule have on the canal? How long might a trip from one end to the other take?*
Ask students to think about what life would be like for someone doing this kind of work.
- 4) Practice the song frequently with your students and encourage them to sing with energy as they prepare for their performance with the BPO!

Lesson 3 - The Erie Canal Song *(continued)*

Extended Learning

Ask students to do some research with classroom resources to find the answers to some of these questions:

- a. By connecting the East with the West, how did the Canal change New York State? How did it change the country?
- b. How did the Canal help populate the new Western frontier?
- c. What types of ethnic groups of people moved away from the coast down the Canal?
- d. What kinds of goods traveled on the Canal?

Extended Learning — Recorders

Using the sheet music provided and your classroom recorders, teach students the chorus of *Low Bridge, Everybody Down* (simplified version is provided). Have students perform the song with one group singing the melody and one group playing the simplified harmony along at the "Low Bridge" section.

If students are able to play the melody, as is, on their recorders, try having the class sing the verses along with the piano and play the refrain on the recorder.

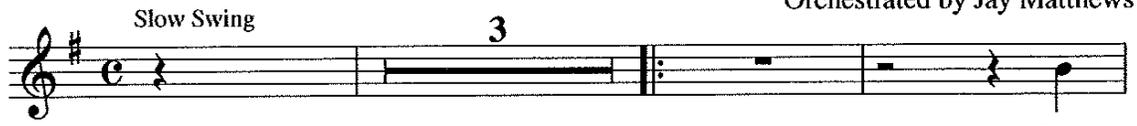
Erie Canal

(Low Bridge! - Everybody Down)

Singers

Words & Music by Thomas S. Allen
Orchestrated by Jay Matthews

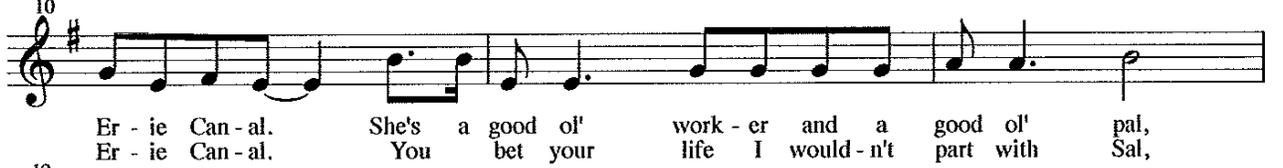
Slow Swing 3



I've
We'd



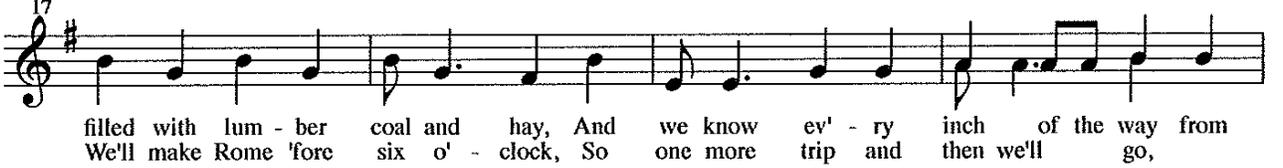
got an old mule, and her name is Sal, Fif-teen miles on the
bet-ter look a round for a job old gal, Fif-teen years on the



Er-ie Can-al. She's a good ol' work-er and a good ol' pal,
Er-ie Can-al. You bet your life I would-n't part with Sal,



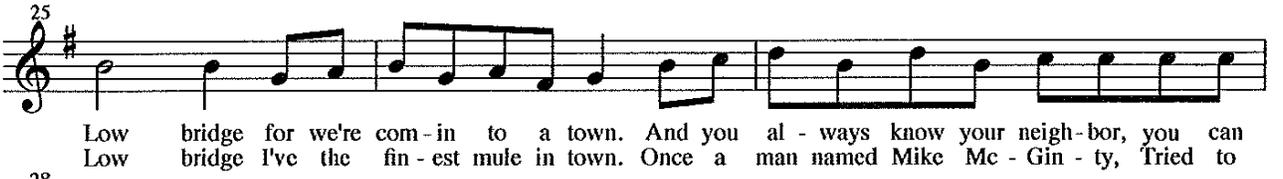
Fif-teen miles on the Er-ie Can-al. We've hauled some bar-ges in our day,
Fif-teen years on the Er-ie can-al. Gid-dap there gal we've passed that lock,



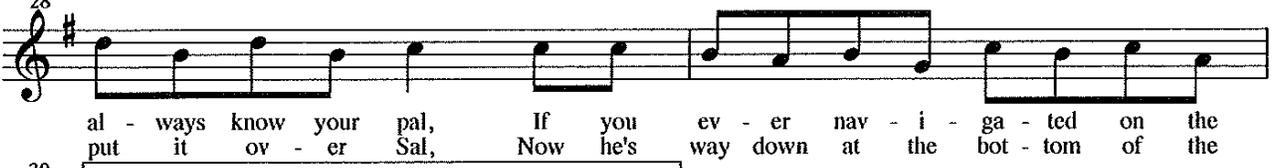
filled with lum-ber coal and hay, And we know ev'-ry inch of the way from
We'll make Rome 'fore six o'-clock, So one more trip and then we'll go,



Al-ban-y to Buf-fa-lo. Oh Low bridge ev'-ry-bod-y down.
Right back home to Buf-fa-lo. Oh Low bridge ev'-ry-bod-y down.



Low bridge for we're com-in to a town. And you al-ways know your neigh-bor, you can
Low bridge I've the fin-est mule in town. Once a man named Mike Mc-Gin-ty, Tried to



al-ways know your pal, If you ev-er nav-i-ga-ted on the
put it ov-er Sal, Now he's way down at the bot-tom of the



Er-ie Can-al. Er-ie Can-al.
Er-ie Can-al. Er-ie Can-al.

Erie Canal Song (Recorders)

"Low Bridge" - Full version

Alto Recorder 

A. Rec. 

A. Rec. 

A. Rec. 

"Low Bridge" - Simple version

A. Rec. 

A. Rec. 