

Celebrating WNY

Lesson – *The Erie Canal Song*

Companion Video – “Low Bridge, Everybody Down”

Suggested Grade Level

Grades 1-4

Objective

Students will learn the American folk song “Low Bridge, Everybody Down.” 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

- BPO video of “Low Bridge, Everybody Down”
- “Low Bridge, Everybody Down” music and lyrics (provided)
- Resources for historical research
- Optional: Recorders

New York State Arts Standards

MU:Pr4.1.1a-4a

MU:Pr4.2.1a-4a

MU:Cn11.1a-4a

New York State English Language Arts & Literacy Standards

Speaking & Listening, Standard 1, 2, 4 & 6

Language, Standard 1, 3, 4 & 6

New York State Social Studies Standards

Standard 1: History of the United States and New York

Standard 3: Geography

Standard 4: Economics

Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship, and Government

Procedure

- 1) Introduce students to the music and lyrics of “Low Bridge, Everybody Down” by watching the BPO video. Students can learn the lyrics and sing along.
- 2) Discuss with students - What are folk songs and why are they important?



Lesson – *The Erie Canal Song* (continued)

- 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 folksongs 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. However, “Low Bridge, Everybody Down” is unique in that we know who wrote the original song. It was composed by Thomas S. Allen (1876-1919). Throughout its long life, many versions of the lyrics have been sung though.
- 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) “Low Bridge - Everybody Down:” 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) “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:” Mules would get a rest break while waiting for barges to travel through the locks. When the barge was through, the mule would have to “giddap” and get going again.
- 4) Discuss with students: 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 might be like for someone doing this kind of work.

Extended Learning

Ask students to do some research 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 kinds of goods traveled on the Canal?



Erie Canal Sing-along

"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 Sing-along

"Low Bridge! - Everybody Down"

Words & Music by Thomas S. Allen
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Singers

Piano

The first system shows the beginning of the piece. The Singers part consists of a single staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The first measure contains a whole rest. The Piano part is written for a grand piano with two staves (treble and bass clefs). It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. The piano part features a series of chords and moving lines in both hands, setting the harmonic foundation for the song.

S

Pn

I've got an old mule, and her name is Sal,
We'd bet-ter look a round for a - job old - gal,

The second system contains the first vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is on a single staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. It begins with a four-measure rest, then starts with the lyrics. The piano accompaniment continues with two staves (treble and bass clefs), maintaining the harmonic support with chords and moving lines.

S

Pn

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

The third system contains the second vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is on a single staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. It begins with an eight-measure rest, then starts with the lyrics. The piano accompaniment continues with two staves (treble and bass clefs), providing harmonic support for the second vocal line.

A

S
12
Fif - teen miles on the Er - ie Can - al. We've hauled some bar - ges
Fif - teen years on the Er - ie can - al. Gid - dap there gal we've

Pn
12

S
15
in our day, filled with lum - ber coal and hay, And we know ev' - ry
passed that lock, We'll make Rome 'fore six o' - clock, So one more trip and

Pn
15

S
19
inch of the way, from Al - ban - y to Buf - fa - lo. Oh
then we'll go, Right back home to Buf - fa - lo. Oh

Pn
19

B

S
22
Low bridge ev'-ry-bod-y down. Low bridge for we're com-in to a town. And you
Low bridge ev'-ry-bod-y down. Low bridge I've the fin-est mule in town. Once a

Pn
22

S
26
al - ways know your neigh - bor, you can al - ways know your pal, If you ev - er nav - i - ga - ted on the
man named Mike Mc - Gin - ty, Tried to put it ov - er Sal, Now he's way down at the bot - tom of the

Pn
26

S
29
Er - ie Can - al. Er - ie Can - al.
Er - ie Can - al. Er - ie Can - al.

Pn
29