

## Goals/Objectives/Student Outcomes:

Students will:

- Become aware of the use of folk music in Iowa and how it is used to provide entertainment, chronicle events, and teach young people about their culture.
- Develop an understanding of folk music as an oral tradition that has a tendency to change as it is passed from one person to another.
- Identify forms of traditional music and song.

## Materials:

1. Folk songs
2. Paper
3. Pencils

## Background:

Folk music includes both vocal and instrumental traditions, from a child singing a parody of a television commercial to a camp song. Folk music is composed by an individual, but as it is passed from person to person it often changes. Sometimes only a few words change and in other cases all the words are changed. Different groups of people change the words to fit their own circumstances or conditions.

Folk songs are learned informally and shared within family or community groups. What is called folk music is often the creation of an individual songwriter, perhaps in the style of traditional music but not truly a traditional song or performance. "Happy Birthday" is a good example of a folk song, as are all the parodies it has spawned, and which your students doubtless know and would be glad to sing.

Students know lots of parodies, many of them about school and teachers. Parodies like "On Top of Spaghetti" also are examples of traditional homemade music. Students also parody popular songs and commercials.

Traditional music is a form of expression that is passed on by word of mouth and by example. There are many kinds of traditional music and

songs in Iowa. We have: African American (rap, gospel, and blues), Anglo American (bluegrass), Finnish, German, Czech, Dutch, Danish, Hispanic, Scottish, Norwegian, Swedish, Italian, Jewish, and Amish music.

Other traditional songs include such favorites as "Ninety-Nine Bottles of Beer," sports cheers and songs, congratulatory songs like "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," cowboy songs, Native-American chants and songs, and songs from different ethnic cultures. Traditional music and song can be found in almost all folk groups. Hand clap and jump rope songs are common on many school grounds. Camp songs are another example from children's own folk groups.

## Procedure:

Begin this unit by describing traditional music and song as an activity that is learned just like all of the other traditions you have been discussing. Ask students for examples of music and song that they like to listen to and that they like to sing. Talk about the topics of those songs, pointing out that they can be about anything. Explain that music and song do not require musical accompaniment, but if there is musical accompaniment, learning how to play a musical instrument may also be a tradition.

1. Ask the students to share examples of their traditional music, the parody. Describe the parody with an example such as, "Glory, glory hallelujah /Teacher hit me with a ruler..." Have each volunteer name the parody and who he or she learned it from. Ask the student to recite or sing the song. Record the session.
2. Present folk songs or songs you have found that were part of the folk music heritage of Iowa. Discuss the lyrics and how they might relate to Iowa life. Divide the class into smaller groups to do this as a cooperative learning activity.
3. Have the students use tunes to familiar folk songs and write new lyrics to them. The lyrics should reflect aspects of their daily life in Iowa. They need to know that they may have to change the melody slightly to fit their new lyrics and that this is in keeping with the folk music tradition.
4. Remind the students that lyrics to a song follow a rhyming pattern.
5. When they have finished a final copy of their song to be turned in, each group will teach its new lyrics to the rest of the class or another group in the oral tradition of folk music.

## Assessment of Outcomes:

The student's written project and performance will show an understanding of the concept that change is part of the folk music tradition and that the words to folk songs reflect the culture in which they were created and in which they are being used.

## Extensions and Adaptations:

There are artists in residence available who could extend this activity with the introduction of folk instruments that were used in Iowa. There may be performers in your community who would be able to teach folk songs that were brought to Iowa by immigrants who settled in your area. Contact the Iowa Art Council, Department of Cultural Affairs, for a roster of artists: (515) 281-4451.

This lesson could fit into a language arts unit. Or, students could be asked to illustrate either their new verse or the original as part of an art lesson.

Have kids sing and record their songs and see if a local radio station will air the songs.

## Resources:

Greg Brown. This nationally renowned recording artist, who appeared on *A Prairie Home Companion*, is an Iowan whose many albums (available on LP, cassette, and CD) often deal with Iowa and rural topics.

Burl Ives. *The Burl Ives Song Book*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1953.

James F. Leisy. *The Folk Song Abecedary*. New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1996.

Marcia Pankake and Jon Pankake. *Joe's Got a Head Like a Ping-Pong Ball: A Prairie Home Companion Folk Song Book*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.

Carl Sandberg. *The American Songbag*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1927.

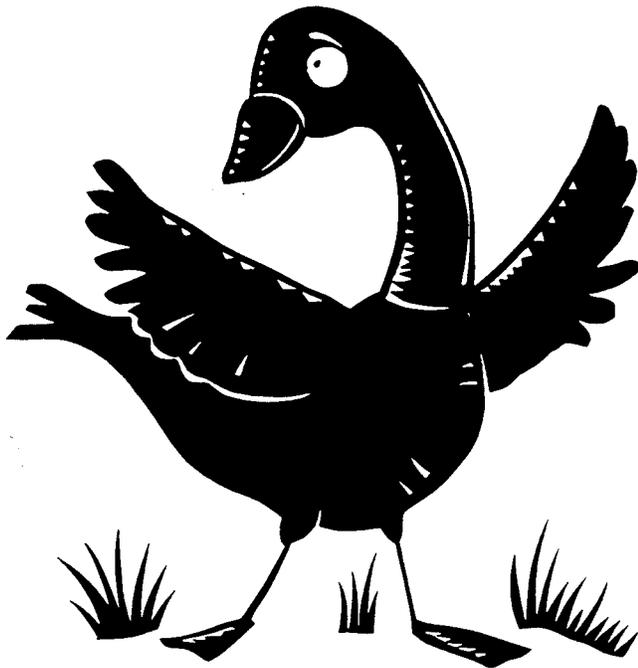
Earl J. Stout. *Folk Lore From Iowa*. New York: G.F. Stechert and Co., 1936.

Bruno Nettl. *Folk Music in the United States: An Introduction*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976.

Alton C. Morris. *Folksongs of Florida*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1950.

"Iowa Folklife." *The Goldfinch* 10 (April 1989): 20-21.

# Folk Songs



Chip Wass



Shelly Cilek

*D*O-RE-ME-fa-sol-la-ti-do. . . . Whether you sing a scale or belt out a traditional tune in the car with your family, you could be singing folk songs. Folk songs are traditional music usually learned by word-of-mouth. Some folk songs are **ballads** (songs that tell stories). Others are play songs like "London Bridge," while tunes such as "Happy Birthday to You" celebrate events.

Below is a favorite folk song heard in Iowa. Do you know of any others?

## Go Tell Aunt Rhody

*Chorus:*

Go tell Aunt Rhody  
Go tell Aunt Rhody  
Go tell Aunt Rhody  
The old gray goose is dead.

The one she'd been saving  
The one she'd been saving  
The one she'd been saving  
To make a feather bed.

The goslin's are cryin'  
The goslin's are cryin'  
The goslin's are cryin'  
Because their mama's dead.

The gander is weepin'  
The gander is weepin'  
The gander is weepin'  
Because his wife is dead.

She died in the millpond  
She died in the millpond  
She died in the millpond  
Standin' on her head.

*The following songs were written by Iowa City singer/songwriter Dave Moore and Iowa elementary students. As part of the Artist-in-Schools program sponsored by the Iowa Arts Council, Moore visits Iowa schools and performs and writes songs with children.*

### **Elmo the Hungry Overhead Projector**

One night a boy went to bed on Halloween  
Just about midnight, he awoke from a dream  
He stared at the closet, saw a light through the cracks  
And he rose from his bed and he froze in his tracks

#### *Chorus*

You've heard of Dracula and Frankenstein  
All evil spectors  
Now you will hear of Elmo, the hungry  
overhead projector

Then the door flew open, and out of the blue  
He saw an overhead projector he knew from school  
Then the boy shook, and he burst into tears  
And he barely could utter, "Why are you here?"

It said "I remember the time you knocked me off  
my cart  
Now I have come to collect a few missing parts  
I need some new plastic, so to begin  
I think I will start by removing your skin

I want your eyes for new lamps, you ears for a  
crank  
And when I get done your little face will be blank  
I want your toes for a fan, your bones for rollers  
And when I need bolts, I'll pull out your molars



I want your nose for a plug, your veins for a cord  
I'm gonna nibble on your brains, when I get bored  
Now I'm almost done, I just need one more part  
For a motor I think I will pry out your heart.

—Written with Clinton, Iowa students



Chip Wass

### **Jake the Snake**

One sad day when the zoo came to town  
They left a cage open and a snake jumped down  
He crawled all the way from the town of Victor  
The biggest and the baddest boa constrictor

He said "the one thing I just love to eat  
Is plump little children, third grade meat"  
They named that monster, for heaven's sake  
For the first kid he ate by the name of Jake

#### *Chorus*

We're talking snake, he ain't no toy  
We're talking Jake, Jake the snake, oh boy

He crawled to the Amanas, to every seven village  
Looking for kids, to eat and to pillage  
He came and ate Jenny, Joy, Eric and Tim

And after that he gobbled up their teacher named  
Kim

He got fat and long as the Iowa River  
Five foot teeth and a ten foot liver  
Ugly as sin, it seemed he'd never die  
He even ate the houses with the people inside

One day when Jake was up in a tree  
Catching cars and eating them like sweet peas  
Along came a girl and took out an axe  
And she chopped down the tree and Jake fell on  
his back

Jake burst like sausage and the kids ran free  
And they built a factory right under that tree  
To freeze the meat from Jake and one day later  
They called the place Amana Refrigerator  
—Written with students in Amana, Iowa

