

# *Passing Down the Traditions*

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Author: Mary Lind

Big Ideas: Passing Down Traditions

Essential Question: Can exploring the traditional old-time music of West Virginia help students understand the value and importance of handing down traditions through generations?

## **Social Studies Standards**

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SS.K.11 compare and contrast the ways humans adapt based on seasons and weather.

SS.K.16 investigate the past and explore the differences in other people, time and cultures through stories of people, heroes, pictures, songs, holidays, customs, traditions or legends.

## **English/Language Arts Standards**

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ELA.K.W.C11.1. participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., explore a number of books by a favorite author and express opinions about them).

## **Visual Arts Standards**

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VA.O.K.5.01. discuss the work that artists do by viewing or visiting displayed artwork, e.g., slides, museums, internet sites, digital media.

## **Exercise Part 1**

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Appalachian music is the traditional music of West Virginia, and it has a long history rooted in the mountains. This lesson can stand alone or can be used with the two previous lessons.

“Expand the Experience” in the online resource for grades K-1 and you can read about the target vocabulary list in this lesson: tradition, Appalachian, and culture.

Review that for years, stories were passed down through “oral tradition.” People did not write down or “record” stories. Many times, tales were told as bedtime stories. Ask students, “What could happen to stories if they are not written down and are told for years and years?” Guide students’ thinking that the stories can

change and indeed did change. Stories were passed down for several generations: grandparents to grandkids to then their grandkids, and on and on! Explain that this doesn't or didn't just happen to stories but also to music. If this concept seems too abstract, play the game "Telephone" with a simple sentence so they can experience how words and phrases can get twisted. Eventually, stories did get written down and sometimes you can find several versions of the same story.

Continue their thinking by discussing different types of music. What kind of music do they like and do their parents like? How about their grandparents? Do they like the same music as these people or is it different? Then, ask if they have ever heard a fiddle or banjo. Have they ever heard of old-time music or mountain music? Refer to the book *My Great-Aunt Arizona*. Arizona liked to square dance to the fiddle player. As a pre-assessment, have students draw either a happy face or a sad face to indicate if they have ever heard music being played by a fiddle.

*Passing the Music Down* is a children's fictional picture book based on the true lives of two old-time fiddler players. Melvin Wine, a native West Virginian, and young Jake Krack who moved to West Virginia to learn Melvin's tunes and fiddling style. Read more about Melvin Wine below. Allow students the chance to examine a real fiddle would also accentuate their experience.

## **Exercise Part 2**

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Melvin Wine is considered a treasure in our state, and it is exciting to kids to read about a real West Virginian. Many times, traditional music was inspired by regular life and the hard times of living in the mountains. Brainstorm a list of why living in the mountains was challenging. Refer to the past two lessons if needed.

Read the book *Passing the Music Down* by Sarah Sullivan. Do not stop unless briefly to help clarify a word meaning. After reading the story, ask the students what the young boy promised to the older man. Guide students in a discussion about what it means to "pass the music down." Do they think the young boy will keep his promise? Do they think the older man was keeping a promise to the people that taught him the songs?

Have students listen to one of the many songs on YouTube by Melvin Wine. To continue their appreciation of traditional mountain music, guide students in a discussion of why people like listening to music. Explain that music can evoke feelings from people. Music can make people sad or happy or maybe make them think about something from their past. Painting or drawing is a fun way to express how music makes us feel sometimes when we can't explain it.

Pass out the recording sheet. Play the song again, this time without the image. Explain to students that they will draw what the song means to them. What does the song make them think of?

For students that cannot write, have them dictate to the teacher. For a more advanced lesson, use the sheet without the extra words. This lesson can become as detailed as the teacher would like. Use watercolors and thick white paper rather than the recording sheet. Perhaps, have students use only one color in various media.

### **Exercise Part 3**

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This part is to extend the lesson by exploring more old-time music through YouTube and the museum resources.

Make sure to come explore the West Virginia State Museum Discovery Room 26. “This exhibit underscores that West Virginia's history and music are intertwined. While focusing on traditional music, the room also addresses classical and jazz music.”

“Expand the Experience” then “Fairs and Festivals”

Jake Krack playing [Yew Piney Mountain](#)(mentioned in story)

Online resource, use the WV e-Encyclopedia [maps](#) to find Braxton County where Melvin Wine was from.

### **Melvin Wine**

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Melvin Wine was born and raised in Braxton County, where his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had all been known as musicians. Melvin and his wife, Etta, had ten children. To support his family, Melvin worked in and around the coal mines for thirty-seven years. He put his fiddle away while his children were young and did not play again until after they were grown.

During the 1960s, he played in competitions and at the State Folk Festival in Glenville. Throughout the sixties and seventies, Melvin's participation in competitions and festivals increased, as the nation saw a revival of interest in traditional folk music. He was the recipient of The Division of Culture and History Vandalia Award in 1981. Melvin continued to play through the eighties and nineties and even into the twenty-first century. In 1991, he received a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.



Figure 1: Source: Sarah Sullivan. *Passing the Music Down*. Candlewick Press, 2011.

## **Exercise Materials and a Few Extra Helpful Links**

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Online access to the West Virginia State Museum

*Passing the Music Down* by Sarah Sullivan

Access to YouTube or a recording

A fiddle you can borrow to allow students to examine more closely

Music Response Sheet

[Jake Crack](#)

[Clifftop 2013](#): Fiddle Finals: Jake Crack tune "Yew Piney Mountain"

[The Old-Time Herald](#): Remembering Melvin Wine