

SANDBURG’S WANDERINGS



Objectives

- Student will be able to explain what motivated Carl Sandburg to become a writer.
- Students will be able to explain how Carl Sandburg came to know America.

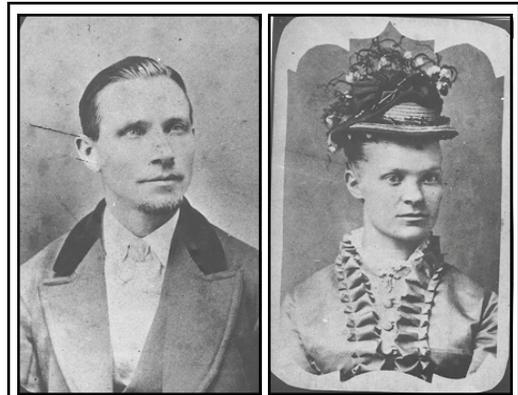
Background

(Note to teachers: If you want more information, please refer to Unit 3 Background for a more detailed look at Sandburg’s life.)

The late 1800’s brought many immigrants to the United States. People from Ireland, Scotland, Italy, Germany, Poland, Russia, China, Sweden, and elsewhere were coming in search of a better life in the “New World”. August Sandberg and Clara Anderson were two of more than thirty thousand Swedes bound for the United States. On the invitation of his cousin Magnus Holmes, August moved to Galesburg, Illinois. He met Clara Anderson and they were married August 7, 1874. They settled into a small clapboard house in Galesburg. Here, August worked as a blacksmith’s helper on the Chicago Burlington & Quincy Railroad 10 hours a day, six days a week for 35 years with no vacations. After work he would come home and work on the house, tinkering with something that needed to be fixed or working in the garden. Clara would give birth to seven Sandberg children and manage a household for nine persons.

*“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door”*
— from “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus
*(on pedestal of Statue of Liberty,
Ellis Island, New York)*

Galesburg was established by a group of missionaries from New York in 1827. The town grew out of the Knox Manual Labor College chartered there in 1837. Vaudeville shows, Broadway shows, political debates, circuses, and fairs would all stop in Galesburg on the way west to Denver or east to Chicago. Galesburg’s focus on education, religion, politics, farming and the railroad were the ingredients that lead to Galesburg becoming a “Little America” in the 19th century. This small prairie town is where Carl Sandberg would develop his character, his roots.



August and Clara Sandberg, Carl’s parents





August and Clara Sandberg did not speak English, although Clara learned enough to read and speak in a broken tongue. Swedish was spoken in the home and the Swedish Bible and Swedish newspaper were read. The Sandberg children learned English outside the home, which set their family apart from most Swedish immigrants in Galesburg who were eager to adopt their new country's language and culture. Carl was sensitive about this and was embarrassed to be the child of immigrants. Carl wanted to be an American; he wanted to fit in.

On his own accord, Carl began to call himself "Charlie" or "Charles". He along with his sister Mary and brother Mart, also changed their surname, from Sandberg to Sandburg. They wanted to be more "American" and since the Swedish language did not contain the letter "u" they replaced the "e" with the letter "u". The rest of the family also eventually changed the spelling of their last name to Sandburg.

Carl Sandburg's experience(s) as the child of immigrant parents, having to learn a new language and embrace a new culture, were instrumental to his love of words and his yearning to be an American and to know America.

During the depression of the 1890's, August Sandburg's salary was cut in half at the railroad. The Sandburgs decided they could only afford to allow their oldest child, Mary, to go on to high school. Carl was thirteen and had completed the eighth grade when he had to quit school to work, his wages helping to put Mary through school. Carl's education would come from books he would borrow from Mary or from the

library as well as his life experiences.

It was during this time in Carl Sandburg's life that he was able to learn first-hand the struggles, sweats, patience, and toil



Galesburg, Illinois, Carl's hometown



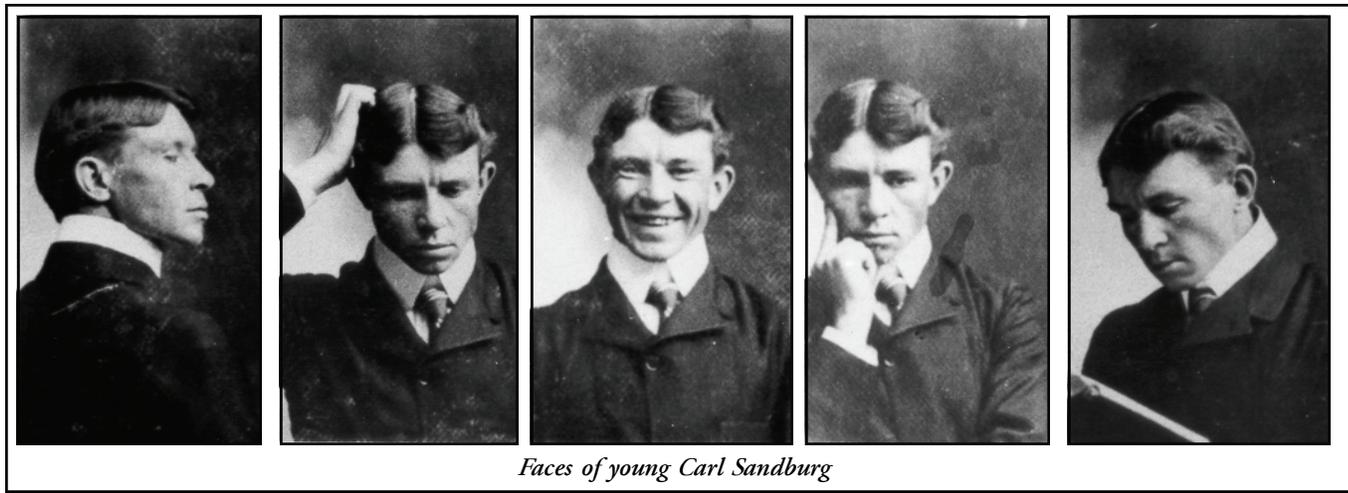
of the worker trapped in a life of hard labor. Carl was now working ten-hour days, six days a week. He was walking to and from work in frigid cold weather. He worked for men who did not have a smile to share or a sympathetic ear to hear about his grief after losing his two younger brothers to diphtheria.

When Mary graduated from high school and began teaching, her salary helped the Sandburg family, particularly Carl. Now Carl had more freedom to spend some of his wages as he wished.

This was when Carl's life could no longer be contained in the small prairie town of Galesburg. Carl was restless, tired of dead-end jobs, and hungry for excitement and adventure. First he took a trip to Peoria, Illinois, to see the State Fair, then a trip to the big city of Chicago for three days. The city had over one million people in the 1890's and was buzzing with commerce and culture. Carl was fascinated with the sights of the big city. He saw prostitutes, the inside of saloons, the expanse of Lake Michigan's beautiful waters, all of which he had only heard about. Shortly after returning from Chicago, Carl took a nearly four-month train ride around the Midwest that affected him deeply. He traveled from town to town working as he went, absorbing the rich subculture of vagrancy. This was the first time Carl Sandburg captured the events of his life on paper. Remembering this trip in his autobiography, *Always the Young Strangers*:

I was meeting fellow travelers and fellow Americans. What they were doing in my heart and mind, my personality, I couldn't say then nor later and be certain. I was getting a deeper self-respect than I had had in Galesburg, so much I

Handwriting practice lines with a pencil icon at the top right.



Faces of young Carl Sandburg





knew. I was getting to be a better storyteller. You can be loose and easy when from day to day you meet strangers you will know only for an hour or a day or two.... I was working out of my bashfulness.

Carl thrashed wheat in the fields of Kansas, chopped wood for a wealthy lawyer, washed dishes in a hotel, cooked at a local lunch counter, and harvested hay. He camped under the open prairie skies around campfires with other hoboes. Carl became an astute listener and observer of human nature; from this journey he took stories and ponderings that later influenced his poetry. This “hobo journey” opened Carl’s eyes to the underlying problems of society. He met people and heard stories that would help shape his understanding of right and wrong. He was learning about the land, his country’s people, and himself as well as learning how to record it in a way only he could.

Carl enlisted in the Army after the United States declared war on Spain in April 1898. He was going to fight for his country. The survival skills he learned on his hobo trip were crucial when this twenty-year-old was navigating the foreign land of Puerto Rico with its mosquitoes and excruciating heat. Once again, Carl found himself writing. He was becoming a recorder of history.

Carl had given up the dream of going to college when he quit school at age thirteen. He had no idea that being a soldier in the Spanish-American War would give him a chance to take back this dream. In 1899, after first attending prep school, Carl attended Lombard College in Galesburg, Illinois. It was here that he would discover his true passion for the written word. It was here that he would first try his hand at poetry and publishing, public speaking and debate. It was here he would discover that “books and writers can cross oceans carrying the heart’s blood of men who write” (Niven, p. 50). There could be voyages and wanderings of the mind through books: “...in the Illinois Corn Belt, in a classroom looking out on pastures and farm wagons hauling hogs, hay, tomatoes, turnips, [one could] feel and smell the noises of London a hundred years before.” (Niven, p. 50)

Carl attended Lombard College for four years, taking classes that interested him; by then, he felt he had gotten what he needed out of the experience and it was time to move on.





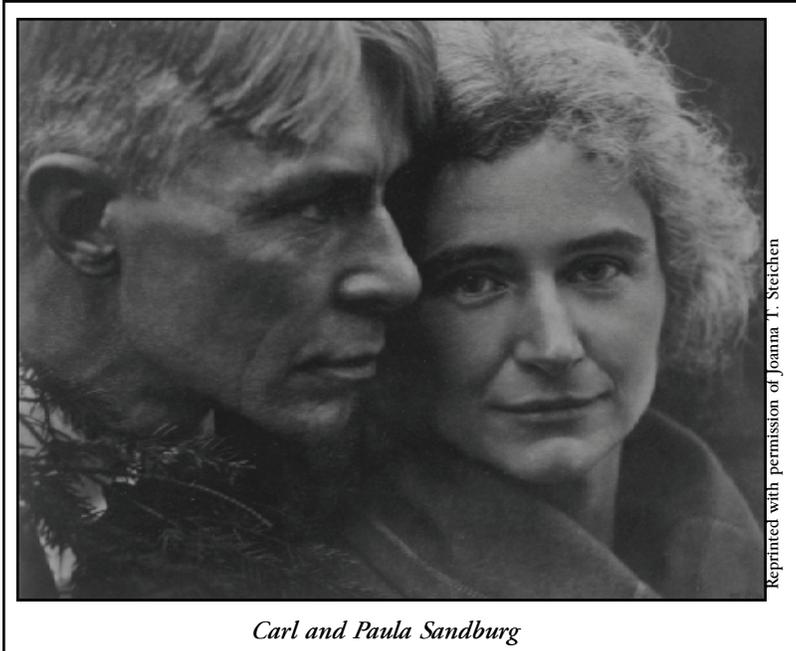
He still didn't know what he wanted to do for a profession but knew for sure he "...would read many books and would try my hand at many kinds of writing." (Niven, p. 63)

For the next four years Carl would wander the east coast selling stereographic scopes (much like modern viewfinders). He would sell these until he made enough money to have the free time to read, talk to people, and write. When he had run out of money he would hit the road again, selling scopes in a new territory. Again he was the keen observer, this time with a formal education under his wing.

Eventually he came to Chicago and began writing for a magazine called *To-Morrow, the magazine "For People Who Think"*. He also tried his hand at giving lectures and was quite successful with his lectures on "The American Vagabond" and "Bernard Shaw: Artist and Fool".

Carl was introduced to the Social-Democratic Party after giving his "The American Vagabond" lecture to a group of hard working middle class Americans in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. His lecture hit hard at the core of socialist views and Carl was soon invited to organize for the Social-Democratic party in northern Wisconsin.

It was through the Social-Democratic party that Carl Sandburg would meet his wife Lilian Steichen, later to be known as Paula Sandburg. She too worked for the Social-Democratic party of Wisconsin, but not as an organizer. She translated German socialist literature into English. Carl and Lilian shared a love for books, poetry, the outdoors, music, and socialism. Neither cared for material treasures. Each loved good food, good company, being treated fairly, having a warm home for a family, having a piece of land to grow food for the family, having a vote to support the candidate they believed in. They had simple dreams.



Carl and Paula Sandburg

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Subjects
American History
Geography

Materials

- Writing and drawing materials
- Access to internet
- Maps of world and United States
- Library

Teaching Techniques

-  Lecture
-  Writing assignment(s)
-  Class discussion
-  Small group discussion
-  Internet search
-  Additional research

LIVING IN AMERICA: THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Background

In the late 1870's thousands of Swedish families were emigrating from their native Sweden to escape a mandatory military policy, an overcrowded country, and severe climatic conditions which imperiled a farmer's livelihood. Many chose the United States because of the many advertisements in Swedish newspapers as it being the "Promised Land". Many Swedes who had emigrated in the 1840's and 1850's were luring their country men and women to join them...some of these "veteran emigrants" would even offer to cover the cost of travel.

Carl Sandburg's father, August Sandburg, was considered a "Black Swede" because - unlike the majority of Swedes who had blonde hair and blue eyes - he had dark hair and dark eyes. August became one of the thousands of Swedish people who came to the United States in search of a new life, arriving in New York City via steerage passage on a passenger or cargo liner. Like so many other Swedes before him, August found his way to the fertile land of America's mid-west. It has been said that Swedish people coming to the Corn Belt began their new lives as farmers, railroad workers, or lumberjacks. August Sandburg became a railroad man and eventually a landlord. He married, had seven children, worked hard, and was very frugal. He insulated himself from the burgeoning Swedish-American around him. He chose to remain a Swede in America.

Carl Sandburg grew up as a second generation Swedish-American living in Galesburg: a town with several other immigrant populations; a town in the heartland of America, the Corn Belt, known for its production of grains and corn; a town with a long established University, which brought culture and politics within a young man's reach. A town with railroad transportation going east and west as far as the eye could see. What was "Living in America" like for Carl Sandburg?

Procedures

1. Reinforce the unit by explaining the importance of



<p>Subjects Science Social Studies English Literature</p>
<p>Materials <i>(for 6 small groups)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> corn seeds (42 - 7 for each group) <input type="checkbox"/> resealable plastic sandwich bags <i>or</i> containers <input type="checkbox"/> paper towels -12 sheets (2 sheets per group) <input type="checkbox"/> chlorine bleach <input type="checkbox"/> metric rulers (12 - 2 per table) <input type="checkbox"/> small bowls, jars, or custard cups (labeled with masking tape with table#) <input type="checkbox"/> water <input type="checkbox"/> indelible markers - fine or med. point <input type="checkbox"/> masking tape <input type="checkbox"/> logs or journals
<p>Handouts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary list
<p>Teaching Techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Lecture  Writing assignment(s)  Handout(s)  Class discussion  Small group discussion  Internet search  Additional research

HARVEST HOME

Background

Corn, or maize as it was called by native people, could date as far back as 80,000 years ago in ancient Mexico. Corn as an agricultural crop is evidenced from about 5,000 years ago. It was grown by the Indians of North, Central, and South America for thousands of years before Christopher Columbus arrived in the West Indies. The survival of the first European settlers to North America depended on the use of corn as a food supply. The native people of the continent were generous to share their knowledge of this versatile and invaluable crop. Corn was so valuable to these settlers it was used as money to trade for meat and furs (Ontario Corn Producers' Association).

The United States is the top producer of corn in the world, producing 42% of the world's corn crop. The Corn Belt is an area within the United States with the ideal soil and weather conditions for growing corn. The states within this belt in order of highest yield are: Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, Minnesota, Indiana, Ohio, South Dakota, Kansas, Wisconsin, and Missouri (Ohio Corn Marketing Program).

According to the Ontario Corn Producers' Association, there are over 2,500 consumer products that use corn in some shape or form! Adhesives, aspirin, beer, baby food, sodas, chewing gum, cosmetics, plastics, dyes, oils, leather tanning, malts, mayonnaise, rugs, soaps, textiles, and toothpaste are just a sample of these consumer products.

Corn has become a significant part of our history, culture, and economics. Carl Sandburg grew up in the prairies of Illinois and was a part of this culture. While on his hobo trip across the Corn Belt, he helped harvest this important cash crop. Corn and other cash crops of the Midwest often found ways into Carl Sandburg's poetry.

Procedures

1. Distribute vocabulary list and introduce students to words. Explain harvest time of year with regard to ripening of crops, laying in food for people and livestock. Develop the



Vocabulary List for Harvest Home

cotyledon: the first leaf or pair of leaves which appear from the embryo of the seed plant

embryo: the place where the beginning of a seed plant develops, usually involves a “sac” which contains the nucleus of which the endosperm will be fertilized

endosperm: nutrient rich tissue inside embryonic sac that is the source of energy and protein for the germinating seed

germ (plasm): germ cells containing essential genetic information of seed plant; also contains vitamins and minerals necessary for germination

germination: the growth, the sprouting of a seed plant

autumnal equinox: the time in September when the sun crosses the equator and day and night everywhere on Earth are of equal length, occurs around Sept. 22; the first day of autumn/fall

winter solstice: when the sun crosses a celestial equator in the northern hemisphere, usually around Dec. 22; also known as the day with the least number of hours of daylight in a year in the northern hemisphere and the first day of winter

vernal equinox: the time in March when the sun crosses the equator and day and night everywhere on Earth are of equal length, occurs around March 21; the first day of spring.

summer solstice: when the sun crosses a celestial equator in the northern hemisphere, occurs around June 21; also known as the first day of summer, the day with the greatest number of hours of daylight in a year



WRITING DOWN WORDS

Background

As a young child Carl Sandburg was fascinated with language. Perhaps being the son of a Swedish immigrant who did not speak English gave him an appreciation for his adopted tongue that native speakers take for granted. Carl loved the way words sounded, loved the way they could be s-t-r-e-t-c-h-e-d out or be spoken quickly. He loved the way they could be linked together in multitudinous combinations...or the way the same phrase could be said or read in a way that meant something totally different. His hunger for words was never quenched whether he was using language to speak his mind or to record history or to sing from his belly.

The one word in the English language Carl Sandburg did not care for was “*exclusive*”. He felt if you were excluded, you were shut out and being shut out was something Carl Sandburg fought against most of his life.

Procedures

1. Introduce students to the essence of Carl Sandburg by reading some of his prose and poetry (suggest preface to Sandburg’s *Early Moon*, if available). Review with students the common literary style of poets during Carl Sandburg’s era, especially his early years. Explain the term *free verse* along with other poetic terms being studied. Point out these literary devices in Sandburg’s works and help students understand these devices so that they may recognize and employ them later.
2. Using selected Sandburg poetry, introduce students to a theme – in this case *Harvest Time* with his poems “Under the Harvest Moon”, “Theme in Yellow”, and “Haystacks”. These all refer to life in the Corn Belt. Have students write a poem about life in their area.
3. Poetry presentations (This may be a week or two later. Presentations can be a reading, a dramatic performance through dance or music, a drawing, or a video. This can be as simple or as in-depth as appropriate.)

Modification

- Have students choose another Sandburg theme – for instance, love poems, war poems, nature poems, political poems, etc.; have students read them and then write their own same-theme poem.

Subjects

Language Arts

Handouts

- “Under the Harvest Moon”
- “Theme in Yellow”
- “Haystacks”

Teaching Techniques

-  Lecture
-  Writing assignment(s)
-  Handout(s)
-  Class discussion
-  Additional research



Theme In Yellow

I spot the hills
With yellow balls of autumn.
I light the prairie cornfields
Orange and tawny gold clusters
And I am called pumpkins.
On the last of October
When dusk is fallen
Children join hands
And circle round me
Singing ghost songs
And love to the harvest moon;
I am a jack-o'-lantern
With terrible teeth
And the children know
I am fooling.

Under the Harvest Moon

Under the harvest moon
When the soft silver
Drips shimmering
Over the garden nights,
Death, the gray mocker,
Comes and whispers to you
As a beautiful friend
Who remembers.

Under the summer roses
When the flagrant crimson
Lurks in the dusk
Of the wild red leaves,
Love, with little hands,
Comes and touches you
with a thousand memories,
And asks you
Beautiful, unanswerable questions.

Haystacks

After the sunburn of the day
handling a pitchfork at a hayrack,
after the eggs and biscuit and coffee,
the pearl-gray haystacks
in the gloaming
are cool prayers
to the harvest hands.



TELLER OF TALES

Background

When Carl Sandburg was 19 years old he took a railroad journey around the Midwest. He wanted to live outside of Galesburg, Illinois, to see what else life had to offer. He traveled through the states of Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, and Iowa.

Carl was considered a “gaycat”, or a hobo who worked to pay his expenses... well, maybe everything but his traveling expenses! It was customary for hoboes and other vagabonds to jump in empty railroad boxcars and jump off whenever and wherever they felt like it. It certainly wasn't the safest mode of travel, there were some close calls, but it was a pretty efficient way to travel, and cheap as long as you didn't get caught and end up in jail!

Carl began for the first time to capture these experiences on paper. He met many different people from many walks of life who had their own personal stories for hitting the open road. He was beginning to lose his shy ways and to open up to strangers. It was an experience that changed the course of his life.

Carl Sandburg also wandered in his mind, using his imagination. In his children's stories, he took readers on some wild and crazy adventures like no other fairy tales did. He created his own words to describe characters, places and emotions in his stories, such as “zizzies” for zigzagging insects, “biddywiddy birds”, and the “hangjasts” of the prairie. All of Carl's experiences in his vagabond life came together in these imaginative and zany tales of the Rootabaga Country.

Procedures

1. Introduce students to Carl Sandburg's children's stories by reading together or in small groups two or three selected works from *Rootabaga Stories* or *Rootabaga Pigeons*. Discuss what makes these stories American fairy tales. Why was it important to Carl Sandburg to have American fairy tales?

Subjects

Language Arts
Art
Drama

Materials

- drawing paper
- colored pencils
- markers, paints
- binder material
- costumes
- selected *Rootabaga* stories

Teaching Techniques

-  Lecture
-  Writing assignment(s)
-  Class discussion
-  Small group discussion
-  Field trip
-  Internet search
-  Send for more info
-  Additional research



FOLKSONGS

Background

Folksongs consist of personal histories of a group of people passed orally from one generation to the next. Over time, different versions of a story/song, may appear, but the product will follow a basic formula or pattern consistent with the tradition. In order to collect these songs, we can record them, and record information about the people from whom we gain the songs as well as how and where these songs are performed.

One of the few things Carl Sandburg ever needed in his life was to sing. He acquired a guitar shortly after his marriage in 1908 that was to be his loyal partner as he sang and sang and sang. He sang after lectures, he sang on walks, he sang in the living room after dinner, he sang as he woke up in the afternoons. He loved to sing.

He felt folksongs told the history of the American people. On his hobo journey across the Midwest, he interacted with many groups of people and heard their stories, many of which were told in the form of a song. Carl was enamored with folksongs from then on. He felt there was a danger of losing these vital records of American history and vowed to do his best to preserve as many as he could. He collected these songs for many years in his personal journal, but then endeavored to compile and organize a collection in a book called *The American Songbag*. This book was considered to be a great service to America, a treasure chest of American folklore useful for a thousand years to come.

Procedures

1. Explain to the students that this lesson is meant to acquaint them with folklore. An example is the pattern of the knock-knock joke. Tell a knock-knock joke of your choice. Give students an opportunity to share knock-knock jokes that they know. They may wish to collect from family and friends. Continue the lesson by sharing with students that we collect a culture's folklore traditions in an effort to understand that culture.

Subjects

Language Arts
Social Studies
(American History,
Regional History,
Geography)
Science
Math
Music
Art

Materials

American folksongs

Handout

Responding to Folksongs

Teaching Techniques

-  Lecture
-  Writing assignment(s)
-  Handout(s)
-  Class discussion
-  Additional research





2. Examine a folksong collection and sing a few songs with students (if available, use Sandburg's *The American Songbag*). You may wish to bring in the music teacher for assistance. To begin you might use songs which are more commonly known, such as "John Henry," "Old Gray Mare," "Casey Jones," and "She'll be Comin' Round the Mountain." Language Arts teachers may use these songs to teach the characteristics of a ballad and to discuss the use of dialect. Also, discuss with the class the stories behind the songs. Who? What? Where? When? Why?
3. Have students examine and analyze the many genres of American folk music (labor songs, jail songs, prairie songs, war songs, love songs, ethnic songs, political songs, nonsense songs, etc.). Students should work in groups of four to read songs from different genres. The teacher may wish to assign a particular genre to a particular group. (There is an opportunity to address multiculturalism here, as well as an opportunity for native Spanish speakers in the classroom to shine with a genre of "Mexican Border Songs.") After students have familiarized themselves with the songs and information about the songs, students should answer the questions on the enclosed handout and then choose one of the four activities for further connection with the work. The teacher should decide whether to continue grouping after the questions have been answered. The activities can work individually, with partners, or with a group, dependent upon dynamics.

Modifications

- Choose several songs from students' CDs and analyze the stories they tell (censored beforehand!). With assistance from the music department, have students write a song that tells a story with lyrics and music. If possible and if time permits, record song!
- The teacher may wish to enlist the assistance of a Social Studies person to give students further insight into the historical and/or geographical background of some of the songs to increase their understanding.



Responding to Folksongs

After reading and/or singing songs from a folksong collection, answer the following questions as completely as possible.

Why are folksongs organized into genres?

How are the songs from different genres similar? How do they differ?

Folklore reflects the culture in which it exists. What do these songs reveal about the people who composed and/or sang them?

Which song or songs did you like best? Why? What does your preference say about you?

Choose at least one of the following activities to execute in response to your experience working with folksongs.

Create an original work of art based on one of the songs.

Choreograph movements or a dance to accompany one of the songs.

Find a local folk song and perform it for the class.

Interview friends or family about songs they may know. Find out why, when, and where they heard these songs.

