

**Exploring Rural Kentucky Through Documentary Art:
Irvin Store, 1920s - Documentary Art Interactive
Unit 2 - Lesson Set 3 - Jammin' on the Porch
- For the Teacher -**

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES – Music, Reading and Writing, Media Art

Music

1. **The Music, Part One – Responding, Connecting**: Lead a classroom discussion about the role of musical soundtracks in movies and videos. Ask students what soundtracks contribute to our understanding as well as to our enjoyment of movies and videos.

Watch the short video [Rural Life](#) up until the section “Farm Life” begins. Ask students to focus on the music and to jot down impressions. What instruments do they hear? What is the tempo? What mood does the music create? Does the music seem to fit in with the themes of the video? Does it help to tie the interviews and narration together?

The music in this section is an old-time Appalachian tune called *Bonaparte’s Retreat*. Listen to Eli Bedel’s recording of the song [here](#). This is actually a double track, featuring Bedel playing the fiddle and the dulcimer.

Share this information about the song with your class:

Bonaparte’s Retreat is an archaic fiddle tune known by many variants throughout the Appalachian region and southern United States. Characteristic of this tune is the unique tuning, often called “Dead Man’s Tuning,” in which the G string is tuned an octave below the D string to imitate the drones of a bagpipe or other similar type of instruments.

The early English and Scots-Irish settlers of the Appalachian region likely brought this tune or a related predecessor with them to the New World. Unlike most fiddle tunes, this piece is more a performance or listening piece than a dancing reel.

This version comes from William Stepp of Magoffin County, Kentucky and differs from more common interpretations of the tune, as it has been turned into a hoedown.

Ask students to write a short journal entry or exit slip answering one of these questions:

- Did learning more about the song and the recording change your perception of the music?
- Do you think this recording was a good selection to accompany this portion of the video? Why or why not?

Music Standards

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

2. **The Music, Part Two – Responding, Connecting:** Watch the section of the short video **Rural Life**, beginning at 3:40 sec (“Farm Life”). Ask students to focus on the music in this section and to jot down words that describe the mood of the music. Ask them to also jot down a reason for the words they select that relates to the elements of music (words such as tempo, timbre, dynamics, melody).

After listening, have students share the words they wrote down and their justifications for the words in terms of the elements of music. Which words appeared in several student lists? Did all the students listing a descriptive word give the same justification for their interpretation? As a class, decide which two words best describe the mood of this music.

Share with the students that this music was an original instrumental composed by Bedel. His directions from the video producer/director, Tom Law, were to create a mood piece that sounded “calm and proud.”

Listen to the music one more time. Ask students to write a short entry answering one or both of these questions:

- Did Bedel achieve the mood that the producer wanted?
- Why did the producer want music that sounded “calm and proud” for this portion of the video?

Music Standards

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

Music, Reading and Writing

3. **The Instruments – Responding, Connecting:** In this section, Bedel plays the fiddle, the dulcimer, and the banjo. In the painting, there is also a guitar. Ask students to work alone or in small groups to research and prepare a multimedia presentation on the history of one of these instruments.

Helpful Resources for Activity 3 from PBS LearningMedia:

Bluegrass Music: Beginnings

Bluegrass music began in the mid-20th century, but its origins go back to the 1700s and the musical traditions of the Scots-Irish and the West Africans. From there, the music evolved from the folk ballads of working people, black and white, across Kentucky.

Traditional Bluegrass Instruments

The traditional five-piece bluegrass and is made up of banjo, guitar, mandolin, bass, and fiddle.

History of the Banjo

The American banjo has its roots in diverse African cultures. As Africans were forcibly brought to the Americas during the slave trade, they were not able to bring personal possessions with them, but they did bring their knowledge and traditions, including their knowledge of how to make and play musical instruments. They used the materials found in their new environments to create instruments that resembled the instruments of their homelands. Over time, these instruments continued to evolve.

The Fiddle and the Banjo: Origins

Country music's earliest instruments were the fiddle and the banjo. Early immigrants brought the fiddle to America, while the banjo was brought by enslaved Africans.

Instruments and Innovation. The Fiddle | Tapping the Roots of American Music

The Fiddle. The oldest and most basic instrument of roots music, however, is not the guitar but the fiddle. For years, the fiddle was virtually the only instrument found on the frontier, and in the South, it was used widely enough that as early as 1736, we find written accounts of fiddle contest.

Instruments and Innovation. The Banjo | Tapping the Roots of American Music

The Banjo. If the fiddle was the primary contribution to American music from Northern Europe, the banjo was the primary contribution from Africa. The banjo has been called "the outstanding American contribution to the music of folklore."

A Full Sound: Traditional Guitar Styles

Guitarists Eddie Pennington and Jesse Aldridge demonstrate the flat-picking guitar style that originated in Western Kentucky.

Helpful Resources for Activity 3 from DULCIMER.net:

Origin of the Mountain Dulcimer

The Appalachian dulcimer or mountain dulcimer is a uniquely American in addition to the fretted zither family. A zither is any instrument featuring strings running across a body without a neck. The name is a combination of Greek's dulce (*sweet*) and Latin's melos (*song*), so it means "sweet song."

Music Standards

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

Reading and Writing Standards - Composition

- Compose informative and/or explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.
 - a. Produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.
 - b. Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting, graphics and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
 - c. Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
 - d. Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.
 - e. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity.

Media Art

4. **Responding, Connecting:** Have students watch the video [**Eli Bedel: Soundtrack Musician**](#) (6:30 minutes), read [**The Music of Eli Bedel**](#), then share this information with students:

Eli Bedel: Soundtrack Musician is a “behind-the-scenes” video produced by a team of high-school students at *Fourthwall Youth Studios*. The video is designed to help younger generations connect with old-time music. It features comments from Eli Bedel, who was interviewed while recording the soundtrack for the documentary *Creelsboro and the Cumberland: A Living History*.

Fourthwall Youth Studios is a filmmaking and digital media program for junior high and high school students. Tom Law, Project Director, Voyageur Media Group, Inc. and producer/director of *Creelsboro and the Cumberland: A Living History*, says, “Most *Fourthwall* students have never worked in video production before this project. The students not only learned about the basics of script writing and editing, but also how to work together as a production team.”

Eli Bedel: Soundtrack Musician was written and edited by Ashley Wilson, Romel Suggs and Ella Dastillung. Archival sources: Library of Congress, Lomax Collection; Berea College, Hutchins Library, Special Collections & Archives; and Voyageur Media Group, Inc.

Ask students to identify the various elements of the video (interview clips, video clips, music, graphics, and credits) and how they work together.

Ask students what they learned from the video. Would the video have been as engaging if it had included only interview clips? Why or why not? What types of shots did the student videographers use?

If your students were planning a video to showcase a local artist or musician, what elements would they include? Why?

Media Art Standards

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

5. **Creating, Producing:** The video on Eli Bedel, **Eli Bedel: Soundtrack Musician**, was written and produced by a team of high school students. Ask your students if there are musicians, artists, or other creative people in your own community or school that would be interesting to highlight in a short video like this. Brainstorm ideas.

When you have determined possible people to showcase in your video, distribute the **Video Script for Rural Life**.

Place students in small groups and have them use highlighters of different colors to identify the different elements of the script (interview, narrator, video, audio, and graphics).

Ask students to consider what would be the first step in video production. Could they write the script before they recorded interviews and selected the portions of the interviews they would use? Would they need to identify the graphics they would be using before scripting the narration?

Watch and discuss the three videos in the PBS LearningMedia collection **Creating Media Art**.

Ask students what jobs need to be done - from planning to editing - to pull together the elements for an original video. What skills are needed for each phase of the production? What equipment is needed?

Divide students into teams to

- Research the topic and plan elements of the video.
- Conduct, video-record, and edit interviews with people who can add interest to the topic the students have selected.
- Collect and/or create photographs, artwork, and other graphics.
- (Optional) - identify music for the soundtrack, obtain any rights needed.

- Write the script.
- Create voice-over narration.
- Edit the script.

Teams will need to work together; the teacher will lead the process as the producer.

When the video is complete, consider how you can share it with a wider audience, perhaps on the school website or through a local TV station.

Media Art Standards

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.

Anchor Standard 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic technique and work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.