



Resource Guide for Educators and Students Grades 4–12

What is traditional music? It's music that's passed on from one person to another, music that arises from one or more cultures, from their history and geography. It's music that can tell a story or evoke emotions ranging from celebratory joy to quiet reflection. Traditional music is usually played live in community settings such as dances, people's houses and small halls.

In each 30-minute episode of Carry On™, musical explorer and TikTok sensation Hal Walker interviews a musician who plays traditional music. Episodes air live, allowing students to pose questions. Programs are then archived so you can listen to them any time from your classroom or home. Visit Carry On's [YouTube channel](#) for live shows and archived episodes.

[Episode 6, Aynsley Porchak](#)

Aynsley Porchak is a bluegrass fiddler from Woodstock, Ontario, Canada who began playing the fiddle at age 9. She is an experienced contest fiddler, winning the Grand Master Fiddle Championship in 2015 in Nashville, and the Canadian Grand Master Fiddle Championship in 2017. She is the first person to win both competitions. Aynsley has a bachelor's degree in Bluegrass, Old-Time and Country Music Studies from East Tennessee State University, as well as a bachelor's degree in English and a master's in Appalachian Studies. She teaches private fiddle lessons and will soon be a faculty member of the Bluegrass program at East Tennessee State.

Aynsley started out playing old-time and Celtic fiddle. Celtic fiddle music came to North America with immigrants from Ireland and Scotland, and old-time music layered other influences onto Celtic styles (see Vocabulary below). Aynsley's first teacher introduced her to bluegrass through the recordings of Kenny Baker, a well-known bluegrass fiddler from Kentucky. Baker was a long-time fiddler in the band of Bill Monroe, considered the father of bluegrass music; listening to Baker's recordings was a big part of Aynsley's bluegrass education.

Bluegrass as a style of music emerged in the late 1930s with the radio, which provided a way for people across the country to listen. Its influences include old-time, country, blues, jazz and gospel. Bluegrass is played by a band of acoustic stringed instruments, usually fiddle, banjo, mandolin, guitar, bass, and sometimes steel or dobro guitar. Classic bluegrass music features:

- A fast, driving rhythm that's almost ahead of the beat, creating a lot of energy and forward momentum.

- "Breaks" with players taking turns taking the lead, showcasing their instrumental virtuosity with improvisation and fast runs, string picking and finger work. A bluegrass "breakdown" is a tune that features a series of breaks, rotating through the different instruments.
- High, tight vocal harmonies that often create a "lonesome" sound.
- Masterful fiddle techniques like double stops (playing two strings at once, fingering both strings to produce independent moving lines or two-note harmony), plucking and imitation (trains are a favorite subject).

As bluegrass was played in different regions and decades, it picked up regional flavors and other styles; for example, influences from pop, rock and jazz have created a new form of bluegrass called "newgrass."

Aynsley is a member of the band Carolina Blue, based in Brevard, North Carolina, that plays "vintage" bluegrass in the style of Bill Monroe. In addition to performing bluegrass and gospel favorites, they write their own songs. The band has four other musicians besides Aynsley; the band's instrumentation is fiddle, guitar, double bass, mandolin and banjo.

Vocabulary

Fiddle and violin – two names for the same instrument, a portable four-string instrument made of wood with pegs for tuning the strings. The main difference between fiddle and violin is the style of music played on the instrument—it's a fiddle if you play traditional or folk-based music; it's a violin if you play Classical music on it.

Gospel – A genre of music that arose in the 1800s with religious revivals. Gospel developed differently in white and Black communities. White gospel is rooted in European traditions—hymns, spirituals and popular styles. Lyrics are usually about religious experiences. White gospel music is usually in a major key, in verses with a chorus, and in four-part harmony (like a hymn) with the melody on top. Black gospel's influences were white hymns, Black spirituals and songs of enslavement; syncopation became a feature of Black gospel, which developed alongside ragtime, blues and jazz.

Instrumentation – The group of instruments used to play a particular piece or style of music.

Old-time music – A traditional music style of North America that comes from music and cultures of settlers from the British Isles (Ireland, Scotland and England), France, Germany and Africa. Old-time music is sung or played live on acoustic instruments, often fiddle alone or with banjo, guitar and sometimes string bass. Many songs and tunes were imported by arriving immigrants, but many are purely North American, flavored by the immigrants who brought them and where they settled.

Rhythm – The time element of music and dance. Different elements of rhythm are the beat (the repeated emphasis you hear; what you can tap your foot to), patterns of sound, duration of sound, tempo (speed) and meter (or time signature).

Activities and Questions for Students

Before you watch the episode – Locate the following places on [Google Maps](#) or a printed map:

Countries & Continents: Canada, Ireland, Scotland, England, France, Germany and Africa.

US states: Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky.

City: Woodstock in Ontario, Canada (Aynsley's hometown).

After you watch the episode – Complete assigned activities and questions from this list, which progresses from simpler to more complex.

1. Aynsley mentions musicians who've influenced her. Pretend you're being interviewed about your "personal influencers," people who've had a positive impact on your musical life, or your life in general. Who would you mention? What effect would you say they've had on your life?
2. Trace the route that early settlers might have taken from Europe to places in Canada. What Canadian provinces would they encounter first?
3. What kind of instruments would be easy to take with you to a new country?
4. Does anyone you know play an instrument? When did they start? How much and how often do they practice?
5. Did any of your ancestors play an instrument? If they played in a musical tradition, what was it? If they practice another cultural tradition, what is it?
6. How would you describe this music to someone who hasn't heard it? What adjectives would you use?
7. When you're learning to play music by ear, you listen to learn—just like when you're a baby learning to talk, you listen to people talking. Listen to "[I Hear Bluegrass Calling Me](#)" on our episode. Now try to hum or sing the song from memory. Easy? Hard? Could you remember the whole thing or only parts? (If you're like most of us, it may take a few listens to learn the whole tune!)
8. The video "[I Hear Bluegrass Calling Me](#)" looks like it was filmed with the musicians standing in a field. Why would this be possible with these particular instruments? Think about the instruments themselves, and what you need to play them.
9. You are a reporter for your school's newspaper. Write a review (and illustrate it, if you like) of Aynsley's episode, what she talked about, and the music you heard. Describe the music, your favorite things about it, and what more you wish you could see or know about. Be sure to give your article a descriptive title!
10. Chose something from the video that made an impression on you and write a poem about it, whether it's the way the fiddle looked, the rhythms, what you learned about the people behind the tradition, maybe about what they experienced in the past.
11. Traditional fiddlers often have different technique than violinists. If you play a stringed instrument (violin, viola, cello or bass), what do you notice about Aynsley's technique? Her left hand and her bow hold? And how does she approach instrument maintenance differently than a violinist might?

12. In fiddle "breaks," Aynsley shows off her technique on the fiddle. What are your favorite techniques, fiddle tricks and sounds in her fiddling on this episode?
13. This is Aynsley in a video performing "[The Orange Blossom Special](#)," a well-known bluegrass fiddle tune. Do a little Internet research—what (in real life) was the Orange Blossom Special? How does this piece of music pay tribute to it?
14. Watch these two performances, [one by Aynsley](#) and [one by Kenny Baker](#), whose recordings inspired her to learn bluegrass fiddle. What similarities do you notice in their playing, in their sound or the way they hold the fiddle? What differences do you notice? See if you can name two similarities and two differences.
15. Aynsley plays a hymn tune written in 1868, "[Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior](#)." Here is a [gospel version of the song](#) (starting with Verse 3) by the Statler Brothers, a group that sang country and gospel. How does Aynsley adapt the tune (which was meant to be sung) to the fiddle? Does she follow the tune exactly? Use a different tempo?
16. Aynsley talks about the influence of gospel music on bluegrass. In this video, Carolina Blue performs a gospel tune, "[I'm Gonna Wait on Jesus](#)." Read the description of gospel music above (see Vocabulary). What musical elements of gospel do you notice in the video? What musical elements of bluegrass do you notice?

Additional Resources

Aynsley Porchak

[Aynsley's music page on Facebook](#) – Lots of bluegrass info and performance videos.

[Aynsley's music videos on Facebook](#) – Videos of Aynsley playing Kenny Baker tunes (a tune a day for a month), as well as lessons and request sessions.

[Carolina Blue](#) – Website for Aynsley's band.

Bluegrass Fiddling & Music

[Grand Master Fiddle Championship](#) (video) – Aynsley's performance in the final round of the 2015 contest. She plays three tunes that show her range of abilities.

[Double stops](#) (video) – Aynsley gives a lesson in how to play double stops on the fiddle.

Carolina Blue (videos) – Aynsley has been a member of this band since 2017. Notice the breaks the musicians take for solos on these two tunes: "[Rusty Rails](#)" and "[I Hear Bluegrass Calling Me](#)."

[Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys](#) (video) – Bill Monroe (the "father" of bluegrass) and his band in a performance on the show Austin City Limits. Kenny Baker is in this performance.

[Kenny Baker](#) (video) – One of the musicians who inspired Aynsley to learn bluegrass fiddle. The tune is "Jerusalem Ridge," which he often played at the end of a performance with Bill Monroe's iconic band.

Tell us what you think!

We want to make Carry On™ even more useful and enjoyable for students and educators across the country. [Send us your feedback!](#) Tell us what you liked and what we could do better. And please... tell other educators and schools about the show. Help us all carry on!

With the help of generous donors, [Carry On](#)™ is produced by the nonprofit [Northeast Ohio Musical Heritage Association](#) (NEOMHA). The show is programmed by [Laura Lewis](#), artistic director of NEOMHA's [Lake Erie Folk Fest](#). Carry On's resource guides are the work of writer and musician [Rita Lewis](#).

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