



## 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 11](#), Steve Hickman

**Steve Hickman** is a vaudeville-style entertainer skilled in the fine arts of hambone, nose playing and eefing. All are ways of making music that use the human body—no instrument required! Steve is also a master fiddler who has played countless concerts and social dances.

Hambone involves using hands against the body and face to create sound and rhythm. Its rich history begins in Africa. Artists and scholars identify the following possibilities on how hambone might have evolved:

- In West Africa, social and ceremonial dancing included the rhythmic accompaniment of drumming, hand clapping and singing.
- Enslaved people who came to the US brought their traditions with them, but they were not allowed to own drums; many Southern communities banned them after slave owners realized drums could be used to send secret messages. Hand clapping was already part of the African tradition, so it was a good substitute for drums.
- A dance called the "juba" was performed by enslaved Africans in various forms in North and South America. It was reminiscent of the African ring shout—a counterclockwise dance to call-and-response singing. Juba verses usually rhymed.
- "Patting juba"—slapping the hands, legs, face and body—provided rhythmic accompaniment for the dance. Hambone was born from these rhythms, which can be quite intricate. [In this video](#), Steve remarks on how complex hambone rhythms can be.

Hambone was passed down from one generation to another throughout the South and probably got its name from the part of the pig used to flavor food. A single hambone might be passed from one enslaved family to another, flavoring soups and other dishes along the way.

The complex rhythms of hambone and juba can be heard in later art forms like tap dance and rock and roll. Bo Diddley, an African American rock and roll guitarist, developed a distinctive rhythm, or beat, that may have been inspired by African American gospel and hambone street performers. Bo's beat can be heard [in this 1955 video](#); the words to his song are based on traditional hambone song lyrics, which usually went something like this:

*Hambone, hambone  
Where you been?  
Round the world and I'm going again  
What you gonna do when you come back?  
Take a little walk by the railroad track*

Bo Diddley's beat can also be heard in later songs like "[Not Fade Away](#)" (by Buddy Holly, a 1950s artist ) and "[Willie and the Hand Jive](#)" by Johnny Otis (another 1950s artist). "[Willie](#)" was also performed later by Eric Clapton in the 1970s. The beat lives on!

In our episode, Steve also demonstrates nose playing and eefing. Steve explains [HERE](#) how to "play" the nose by using it as a kind of kazoo, humming through one nostril. Eefing is a century-old Appalachian vocal technique similar to beatboxing, with rhythmic wheezing and hiccupping sounds. Steve demonstrates [HERE](#) how to "sing" on the inhale.

Steve learned hambone from traditional African American musician Doug Quimby, a member of the Georgia Sea Island Singers. The Singers were dedicated to preserving the traditions that perhaps remained a little stronger in the sea islands, which were isolated from the mainland. Steve also learned from other hambone artists along the way and invented many of his own hambone combinations—one he thought up while watching cheerleaders do a rhythmic hand-clapping combination.

## Vocabulary

**Beatbox** – A musical style and technique of using the mouth and the voice to create sounds that mimic percussion instruments or a drum machine.

**Call and response** – A type of singing in which the main singer "calls" with different statements and others "respond," often with a single, set phrase.

**Eefing** – A century-old Appalachian vocal technique similar to beatboxing. The original eefers probably imitated barnyard animals like hogs and turkeys with rhythmic wheezing and hiccupping sounds that involve singing on the inhale as well as the exhale. The term is spelled in various ways: eefing, eeping, eefin, or effing, to name just a few.

**Fiddle and violin** – two names for the same instrument, a portable 4-string instrument made of wood with pegs for tuning the strings. It's a fiddle if you play traditional or folk-based music; it's a violin if you play classical music on it.

**Jug band** – A group of musicians who use improvised instruments to play jazz, blues and traditional music. Instruments are often "primitive" objects like jugs, washboards, spoons, combs and kazoos.

**Lyrics** – The words of a song.

**Vaudeville** – A form of live entertainment popular from the 1880s through the early 1930s in the US, where shows included a variety of acts—music, song, dance, comedy, magic, acrobats, clowns, scenes from plays, and jugglers were a few of the possibilities. Humor was a big part of vaudeville, with entertainers cracking frequent jokes during their acts.

## Activities and Questions for Students

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

- Africa: West Central Africa, home of Africans brought to the US as slaves. Modern-day countries are Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of the Congo and Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- US: The sea islands of Georgia and South Carolina, including the islands of Kiawah, Edisto, Hunting, St. Helena, Hilton Head, Daufuskie, Tybee, Ossabaw, St. Catherine's, Sapelo, St. Simons, Jekyll and Cumberland.
- US: The Southern states in 1860 (before the Civil War) that allowed slavery: Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and Delaware.

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

1. Traditional music is passed down from one person to another. What has been passed down in your family or community? It could be a love of music or dance. You may have taken lessons from a music teacher or learned how to play a sport from a coach. Or your parents may have learned how to do something like woodworking from *their* parents.
2. During the pandemic, Steve and his wife put together an online show for friends called "Sing for Your Supper," with acts for every age. If you were putting together a 15-minute show for all ages, what would you include? (Steve describes himself as a vaudeville-type performer; it might help to read the definition of vaudeville under Vocabulary, above.)
3. You've heard how hambone probably came to be called "hambone." If it didn't have a name already, what might people call it? What possibilities for names can you think of that reflect the style, the movements and the rhythms?
4. Steve demonstrates a hambone move he calls the "diddily bop." [Learn the move](#) along with Steve. Practice it until you get it down. Now try it a little faster, and then a little faster, and then a little faster. How fast can you go? Now try it starting on the other hand—is it easier or harder? Now put in the big windmill motion that Steve does—is it easier with the windmill motion, or harder?

5. Steve describes how to "play" the nose [HERE](#). Use your nose to play a song you know. It can be simple, like Steve's performance of "Yankee Doodle" or this version of "[Happy Birthday](#)." Or it could be more complex, like a piece you're learning or a song you like.
6. Steve describes how to play your mouth [HERE](#). Try it with him and Hal. Now try playing a song that you know—try something simple like "Three Blind Mice" or just try playing higher and lower, like Steve demonstrates.
7. Steve demonstrates eefing [HERE](#). How long do you think it might take you to learn to do what Steve is doing?
8. Now try eefing! Steve explains exactly what to do [HERE](#), and he has host Hal practice it. Be careful not to hyperventilate—if you feel dizzy, stop and breathe normally. Now that you've tried it, how easy or hard do you think eefing is?
9. Listen to Steve [eefing the song "Soldier's Joy"](#) and compare it with the same tune [played by a string band](#). If you didn't know it was the same tune, would you recognize it in the eefing version?
10. Watch [this short video with Jimmie Riddle](#), a well-known eefer—what do you notice about his style of eefing?
11. Watch [Bobby McFerrin](#), the incredible vocal artist that Steve mentions (singing the song Steve mentioned, "Blackbird"). What do you notice about his way of making music? This could involve musical or vocal techniques he uses, or just the overall effect of his singing. Your personal opinion, please!
12. You are a reporter for your school's newspaper. Write and illustrate a review of Steve's episode, what he talked about, and the music you heard. Describe the hambone style of music making, 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.
13. Steve and host Hal have a little [hambone jam session](#) near the end of the episode. Try this with a friend, classmate or family member. Just have fun with rhythm and sound!
14. Steve shows host Hal how to do a juba rhythm and sing a juba song [HERE](#). Practice the rhythm with your hands. Once you've got it down, make up a song to go with it. Steve describes juba as a complaining song. Use this opportunity to complain about something!
15. Steve learned from other hambone artists, but he also heard and saw the rhythm in everyday life (for example, cheerleaders who use hand-clapping combinations). Keep your eyes and ears open and make up a hambone combination based on something you see or hear during the day.
16. Steve does a little "[facial serenade](#)" of a well-known Sousa march, "The Stars and Stripes Forever" (performed [HERE](#) by the US Marine Band). Compare to the two versions. Now invent your own short hambone to the first part of this [Star Wars medley](#), also performed by the US Marine Band. Use your hands, arms, face, mouth and legs.
17. Steve is an accomplished fiddler who especially likes playing for dances, which you can hear and see [HERE](#). Steve mentions what he likes about this kind of playing. What might be challenging about playing for dancers?

## Additional Resources

### Steve Hickman

Steve's [Facebook page](#), with [videos](#) of him playing fiddle tunes with a guitarist and demonstrating some hambone moves.

["How to Hambone"](#) (YouTube) – An interview with Steve on how he learned to hambone, and the complex, percussive nature of hamboning.

[Steve demonstrating hambone](#) for a concert audience (YouTube) – near the end, he does a "dueling face" routine (based on the song "Dueling Banjos") where he does some nose playing and eefing.

[Steve and beatboxer Christylez Bacon](#) (YouTube) – Steve starts out the session, and Christylez begins beatboxing and playing spoons [at this point](#). He and Steve end up having a "rhythm duel."

[Lesson in fiddle technique](#) (YouTube) – In this video, Steve teaches long-bow technique on a Bob Childs violin, also giving tips on double-stopping and slides.

### Hambone, Nose Playing and Eefing

[The Human Hambone](#) – An excerpt from the 2005 documentary that includes interviews and demonstrations from various hambone artists. Steve is interviewed at time mark 3:53, and hambone artist Derique McGee at 4:29. Notable quote from Howard Bloom, author and former music publicist: "Music is so inherent to our being that we never get away from it. We think music is something invented; in a sense, music invented us."

[Hambone artist Derique McGee](#) (YouTube) – From a live performance at Lincoln Center. [At this point in his performance](#), Derique sings part of the traditional hambone song. This is followed by standing-and-dancing hambone. From watching Derique's version of hambone, it's easy to see how tap dance might have evolved from it.

[Georgia Sea Island Singers](#) (YouTube audio of *Blues Routes*, a Smithsonian Folkways recording) – A long version of the hambone song.

David Holt's [State of Music](#) – This episode of the PBS show showcases the Georgia Sea Island Singers. It features an interview with Frankie and Doug Quimby; Doug taught Steve how to hambone. [Near the end](#), the show host and Doug Quimby do hambone together.

## 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!

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