



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 12, Leonard Podolak](#)

Leonard Podolak is an innovative musician who has played at music festivals worldwide. His unique style of clawhammer banjo blends traditions from Appalachia, Ireland, Québec and Louisiana with diverse styles such as old-time music, blues, rock, Afro-Cuban and gospel.

Leonard literally grew up at a folk festival—his parents were founders of the Winnipeg Folk Festival in Manitoba, Canada. One of the world's best-known folk festivals, the Winnipeg festival is now a yearly, multi-day event attended by 70,000 people. It features performers from Canada, North America and around the world. Leonard was exposed to many different styles of traditional music there. As a child he didn't distinguish between genres: "It was all just folk music to me. This was the music the people made, and I liked it." Leonard's musical influences have included the following:

- Métis music in his home province of Canada. (See Vocabulary, below.) Leonard says the Métis "have an amazing fiddle tradition; tunes are all 'crooked,' they're really creative and dynamic, not held to the regular constructs of even numbers of beats in bars."
- [The Fiddle Puppets](#), a group specializing in Appalachian clogging and percussive dance. Musicians with the group played old-time music and hambone, a type of body percussion. (See Vocabulary, below.) [This is a news video](#) on one of their many tours.
- The tradition of old-time banjo playing, including the clawhammer technique—so called because of the "claw" shape of the strumming hand. Leonard has taken this tradition into new territory and genres including Celtic music like [this tune](#) based on traditional

British Isles songs. (The singer at the beginning is singing in Scottish Gaelic.) You can hear Leonard's clawhammer [at this point in the tune](#).

- Music and musicians from around the world. At folk festivals, Leonard heard styles and genres from Africa, Latin America, eastern and western Europe, Ireland, Scotland, England, Canada and the US.
- Fellow musicians he's played with in groups and bands like The DUHKS (pronounced "ducks"), whose style has been described as Neo-Celtic-Cajun-folk fusion. Sample their [Cajun-flavored version](#) of the traditional song "Lazy John," which probably came from Appalachia (and originally from Scotland). You can compare it to this [more traditional version](#) of the same tune to see how the Cajun flavor changes it.

Leonard introduces himself at the beginning of our episode with a little hambone, a type of body percussion that he learned from old-time musicians. He also plays the following tunes:

- "[Lost Gander](#)," an old-time banjo tune. Leonard uses a two-finger picking technique to play the song, which employs harmonics (see Vocabulary, below).
- "[Banjo Roustabout](#)" – A roustabout is a banjo and vocal tune that has a limited tonal range of just a few notes; a special tuning is used for the strings. There are different versions of roustabouts, which have been popular with both white and Black musicians. Some music historians think the roustabout predates the blues song—the banjo was originally an African instrument, and the verses and sound of a roustabout are like those of a blues song. Our episode also has a version of the [same song with The DUHKS](#), Leonard's band.
- [Irish reels](#), which are dance tunes in 4/4 time that Leonard learned from an Irish piper.

Vocabulary

Banjo – [A stringed instrument](#) with a drumhead and a long neck. Modern American banjos usually have five strings; the top-most string is a drone string that plays just one note. Enslaved Africans made early banjos out of anything they could find to mimic instruments from home. For the drum, they used cigar boxes or gourds (a pear-shaped vegetable that was hollowed out and dried). They used goat skin to cover the drum and cat gut or broom wires to make strings.

Clawhammer – A style of banjo playing, with the thumb out to strike the top-most drone string and the other fingers curled in a "claw" to brush the other strings. Clawhammer is sometimes called "frailing" or "knocking" to produce melody and rhythm at the same time.

Clogging – A type of percussive dance in the Appalachian Mountains and surrounding rural regions based primarily on Irish step dancing, with other influences from Scotland, England, Africa and American Indian traditions.

Fiddle and violin – Two names for the same instrument, a portable 4-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.

Genre – A particular style of music. For example, jazz, country, classical, hip hop and traditional are all different genres of music. There are often subgenres under main genres. For example, Baroque is a subgenre of classical music.

Hambone – Making music using hands against the body and face to create sound and rhythm. Motions involve clapping, smacking and slapping of hands.

Harmonics – On a stringed instrument, touching the string lightly at key points (instead of firmly pressing against the neck) to produce an "overtone" of the base note. Overtones are part of every musical note, but you don't hear them separately unless you isolate them. Harmonics produce a high, glassy-sounding note—a "ghost" of the string's base frequency.

Métis (may-TEE) – When European fur traders arrived in Canada in the 1700s, they began to mix with the indigenous people living there, creating a group known as the Métis (literally, "mixed blood"). The Métis people are one of three indigenous groups whose rights were recognized by Canada's Constitution Act of 1982. Their music is a blend of Scots-Irish jigs and reels (dance music), French tunes from Québec and elements of indigenous music that included irregular phrasing and a percussive, steady pulse.

Old-time music – A traditional music style of North America that comes from the 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.

Reel – A dance tune in quick 4/4 time.

Time signature (or meter) – The division of music into patterns of repeated rhythm, or beats. A 4/4 meter indicates four beats repeated over and over in units called measures, or bars. The bottom number (4) means that the quarter note gets one beat. You can usually identify the meter by tapping along and noticing how often the strong beats occur.

Activities and Questions for Students

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

Continents: Africa, Europe, North America.

Canada: Provinces of Manitoba (and the city of Winnipeg), British Columbia, Québec.

Countries: Ireland, Scotland, England, the US (states of Louisiana and North Carolina).

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

1. Try a little hambone. [Leonard starts out](#) with a "juba" rhythm. [A previous episode](#) of Carry On shows you how to do this basic hambone movement. Practice it until you've got it down, then try speeding it up little by little. Now put your own variation on it!
2. With just your body, try producing rhythmic percussion to accompany a favorite piece of music. You can use your hands (clap, slap your knees, snap your fingers)... you can use

your feet (tap, shuffle)... you can use your mouth (smack your lips)... and you can use your hand and mouth (gently slap your open mouth held in an open O, changing the shape of your mouth to change the pitch). Get some rhythm going!

3. Leonard's first tune is "Lost Gander." Use a dictionary or Google—what's a gander? Now listen to "[Lost Gander](#)." Leonard [has a little story](#) that he's made up on how he thinks about the piece. Make up your own story!
4. Leonard mentions a lot of musicians he's played with. It's clear that they've influenced his music making. Who has influenced you? Who has had a positive impact on your musical life, or your life in general? What effect have they had on your life?
5. There are two versions of the tune "Banjo Roustabout" on our episode, [the one Leonard plays by himself](#) and [the one he plays with his band The DUHKS](#). Listen to both versions. What do you like about each version?
6. Leonard talks [HERE](#) about the "amazing things" that happen at a folk festival. Write a short advertisement convincing people who've never attended a folk festival that they should go to one.
7. You are a reporter for your school's newspaper. Write a review (and illustrate it, if you like) of Leonard's episode, what he 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!
8. The tune "Lost Gander" employs harmonics. Read the description of "harmonics" under Vocabulary (above). [Listen to the tune](#) and see if you can hear the sections that employ harmonics. What does that sound do to the character of the tune?
9. [Listen to Leonard](#) play "Lost Gander" and [listen to Dee Hicks](#) playing the tune. Leonard mentions Hicks, who with his wife contributed hundreds of songs to the Library of Congress Archive of Folk Culture. Most were recorded in the 1970s. What differences can you hear between Hicks' version and Leonard's? Big or small differences? If this traditional song hadn't been recorded, how might it have been preserved?
10. Listen to one or more of these styles that have influenced Leonard: roots, [indie-rock](#), electronic, [country](#), [Celtic](#), [Americana](#), [Cajun](#), [blues](#), [rock](#), [Afro-Cuban](#) and [gospel](#). (Or find and listen to other artists in those genres—there are many!) Identify one you like, and why you like it. Your reasons can be musical (you like the rhythms and instruments) or social (you like the culture or history of the music) or you just like the way it feels.
11. Read the description of a roustabout above, then listen to the beginning of these versions of a roustabout: [Dink Roberts](#) and [Tom Collins](#). If you play an instrument, make up a roustabout instrumental; if you don't play an instrument, try tapping out a roustabout-type rhythm. Now make up words to a couple of roustabout verses. What are the attractions of this type of song? Why do you think it was "invented"?
12. Leonard talks about techniques and tricks for creating different sounds on his banjo. If you play an instrument, what techniques and tricks do you have at your disposal?
13. Leonard says, "If it weren't for the festival scene, there'd be very little interest in this kind of music." Why do you think this is? There's no right or wrong answer—just your opinion on why a folk festival sparks interest in traditional music. Think about the nature of traditional music, about why and how it's played, and look at the Winnipeg Folk Festival's [Info page](#).

Additional Resources

Leonard Podolak

Leonard's [website](#) and [official bio](#).

[Videos](#) on Leonard's website of his collaborations with different artists and groups.

Leonard's [Facebook page](#).

Traditional-Music Venues and Genres

[Winnipeg Folk Festival](#) – Website for the festival that Leonard's parents founded in 1974.

[Home Routes / Chemin Chez Nous](#) – Leonard is executive director of this organization, which began as a network of house concerts across Canada. It now includes online workshops and concerts. (Canada has two official languages—English and French—so the organization's name is in both languages, and it offers French and English programming.)

Leonard mentions several traditions and artists that appear on other episodes of our series:

[Episode 1](#) – Métis fiddle music

[Episode 3](#) – Old-time music

[Episode 5](#) – Percussive dance

[Episode 8](#) – Cajun music

[Episode 10](#) – Blues music

[Episode 11](#) – Hambone

[Episode 13](#) – Irish guitar

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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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