



## 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 13](#), John Doyle

**John Doyle** is an Irish musician known for his innovative rhythm guitar playing. He's also a singer, songwriter, recording artist and music producer.

John's love of traditional Irish music began in early childhood. His grandfather, uncle and father were all Irish musicians who played fiddle or accordion and/or sang. John learned from listening to them and other musicians in "sessions" held at pubs. He started playing professionally at age 16, founding several bands and playing with numerous independent artists. Along the way, he received three NAIRD awards from the American Association of Independent Music, and he was nominated for a GRAMMY award.

John has helped make guitar an important instrument in Irish music. [As he mentions in our episode](#), he reinvented his playing early on to create the big sound needed to replace drums and bass. The result was his powerhouse guitar style—rhythmic and percussive with emphasis on the bass, like a backup band in one instrument. He also plays intricate melody lines when the situation demands. Because the key of D is so common in Irish music, he often uses a "drop D" tuning—meaning he drops the lowest string down to D from its usual E.

John is known for playing with Irish fiddlers like Liz Carroll, [here in a video with John](#) from our episode. He performed with her one St. Patrick's Day for President Obama and members of Congress; as you [listen to the beginning of that performance](#), note the way his guitar sounds almost like a drum.

Instruments typically used in traditional Irish music include [fiddle](#), [bodhrán](#) (drum), [concertina](#) or [accordion](#), [uilleann pipes](#), [flute](#), [tin whistle](#), [Celtic harp](#), [bouzouki](#) and guitar. On our episode, John plays a hybrid version of bouzouki and guitar that he requested from instrument maker Kevin Muiderman, who calls the instrument a "[guizouki](#)."

Irish music is known for fast jigs and reels, tunes originally used for dancing. The difference is in how many fast notes are between each main beat. If you can tap out three quick notes between beats, it's a jig, often in a 6/8 meter. If you can tap out two quick notes between beats, it's a reel, often in 4/4.

Songs that tell stories are also important in Irish music. A good example is John's song "[The Arabic](#)," about his great-grandfather and a shipwreck. John has also accompanied many folk singers, including his father, Sean Doyle. (See Resources, below.)

## Vocabulary

**Accompany, or play backup** – Supporting a solo or lead musician with your playing. Backup singers sing harmony behind the lead singer's melody, and backup musicians play in the background to complement lead instruments or singers.

**Bass** – Low notes (in terms of pitch). Also the name of a stringed instrument that plays the bass line in a group. It can also refer to any instrument that takes this role ("play the bass line").

**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.

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

**Key and key signature** – The set of notes around which the music is organized. The key is named after the "home base," or tonic, note. In the key of C major (the tonic), the notes are C, D, E, F, G, A and B—the notes of the C major scale. A "key signature" consists of the sharps and flats on lines of the musical staff to indicate which notes are raised (sharps) or lowered (flats) in the key. In the key of D major, used often in Irish traditional music, F and C are raised: D, E, F#, G, A B C#.

**Lyrics** – The words of a song.

**Pub** – A "public house" that serves food and drink, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic. In Ireland, the atmosphere is friendly and often includes live music. [The Irish Times](#) offers an unusual history of Irish pubs.

**Time signature (or meter)** – The division of music into patterns of repeated rhythm, or beats. A 2/4 meter indicates two 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.

Ireland: [On this map of Ireland](#), find the counties John mentions: Cork, Kerry, Clare, the Connemarra district in county Galway, and Sligo (his family's home county).

Ireland: The city of Dublin, where John was born.

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

1. Does anyone you know play an instrument? When did they start? How much and how often do they practice?
2. Did your ancestors come from another country or a specific culture? What was it? Did any play an instrument? Which one, and did they play in a specific musical tradition?
3. John made a record with his father, Sean Doyle, called *The Light and the Half-Light*. This song, "[Let Mr. McGuire Sit Down](#)," is a good example of using the guitar to play backup (accompany) *and* as a solo instrument (see Vocabulary, above). Where does John play backup and where does he play solo? Listen to the song and describe the difference between those styles of playing. There are no wrong answers! You can describe the difference in any terms you like. ([Here is a YouTube](#) of them in a live performance.)
4. John tells us that his family owned mills in going back seven generations. Do a little Internet research—how many years do you think that is? A mill is both a machine that grinds grain and a building that houses the machines. A mill requires a power source. Without electricity, what could John's ancestors have used to power the mill? (This might take a little research as well.)
5. Watch [this YouTube](#) of a man who spoke only Irish (also called Gaelic). He's telling a story. Subtitles give the translation, and someone also translates line by line. What adjectives would you use to describe the sound of the language? If you spoke both languages well, and you went by sound only, would you rather write a song with lyrics in English or Irish?
6. When our host Hal asks for a song, John jokes about singing and writing songs of death and destruction, and then he sings about the shipwreck that befell his great-grandfather. What incident from your or someone else's life would make a good subject for an Irish song like this?
7. You are a reporter for your school's newspaper. Write a review (and illustrate it, if you like) of John'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. [Do a little reading](#) on the Irish, or Celtic, harp. Its history is bound up with the history of Ireland and Irish music. What is most surprising to you about this history?
9. John calls counties Cork, Clare and Kerry and the Connemara district (in county Galway) "hotbeds of traditional dancing." Look at a Google map of the United Kingdom and Ireland and compare it with [this map](#) of Ireland's counties. Why do you think the traditions of Irish dance have remained so strong in these counties? For a clue, think about the next question.

10. The percentage of Irish speakers is lowest in the city of Dublin (in county Dublin). It's highest in counties Galway, Cork, Mayo and Kerry. Look at [this map](#) of Ireland's counties. Why do you think this is? For a clue, think about the previous question.
11. John talks about developing [his style of guitar playing](#) to compensate for not having a drummer or a bass player. How would you adapt your instrumentation (see Vocabulary, above) if your marching band suddenly had no horns? What could you do to compensate? There are no wrong answers!
12. In our episode, John plays a slow tune he wrote called "[Alone Together](#)." Analyze the structure of the tune using different letters—A, B, etc.—for sections that are substantially different (don't be thrown by variations). What do you come up with?
13. Right after the tune "Alone Together," John plays two quick tunes. Listen to him [discuss Irish reels and jigs](#). Now [listen to the quick tunes](#). Which does he play first—the reel or the jig? You'll have to listen to the rhythm and figure out the time signature.
14. John talks about the tradition of songwriting in Ireland. Listen to his song "[The Arabic](#)." The song is a story told in rhymed verses. Write a poem in verses telling a story—the subject and length are up to you. If you're a musician (or even if you're not!), do the next activity.
15. Write a "story song" using the poem you wrote in the previous activity. [Listen to John's song](#) and use it as a model for a melody. You don't have to play it—just sing it. The song can be as long as the story demands, and as short as you want to make it!
16. Find the moment in John's song "[The Arabic](#)" where the music has a dramatic chord change. Why do you think he chose this moment to break the steady pattern of chords and volume?

## Additional Resources

### John Doyle

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

John's [Facebook page](#).

[John's discography](#) – A list of the artists and records he's played for.

John and Sean Doyle – Son and father made an album together; [this link](#) takes you to an interview with John's father about the music and a YouTube of a live performance (scroll down). Audio of the entire album is available from [Compass Records on YouTube](#).

John Doyle and Solas – John performing with his band Solas on these tunes: "[Newry Highwayman](#)," "[Pastures of Plenty](#)," "[Tommy Clifford's Jig](#)," and the slower Irish folk tune "[A Chomaraigh Aoibhinn Ó](#)," a good example of John accompanying a singer.

[John Doyle and Mick McAuley](#) – John mentions that he's working on a project with Mick, who's an accordion player. This is an example of how guitar and accordion sound together.

### Irish Music, Language and Culture

[TheSession.org](#) – A community website dedicated to Irish traditional music. For a donation, "you can [find tunes](#) to play, [find sessions](#) to play them in, and [join in discussions](#) about the

music. You can also [find events](#) (like concerts and festivals), or [explore the track listings of recordings](#)."

[Irish music](#) – A short article on the basics—history, styles and instruments.

[Irish language](#) – A YouTube video of an Irish speaker telling stories in Irish (or Gaelic), with discussion and translation. The speaker is monolingual, meaning he speaks Irish only.

[The Irish Language and Beauty](#) – TED talk from an Irish actor who discusses the beauty of the language and [sings a song in Irish](#).

[Irish music with step dancers](#) at Augusta Heritage Center's Irish Week in West Virginia.

### 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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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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