

# Songs to Learn by Telling a Story with Music

Theme: Cultural & Historical

Author: Valerie Vaughn

Singer and Songwriter

Anthiatrics Production

P.O. Box 1024, Tuckerton, NJ 08087

(609) 296-4089

## Subject Areas

Art, Language Arts, Social Studies

## Duration

One or two class periods (or more if actually producing song book or recordings)

## Setting

Classroom

## Skills

Interpreting, applying, analyzing, summarizing

## Charting the Course

The importance of folklife traditions is paramount to embracing and celebrating a sense of place. Songs were an important way that people expressed both their joy and hardships. Many songs immortalize traditional occupations related to life within the Down Jersey region. Virtually all of the topics and themes presented both in the film *Down Jersey* and in this packet lend themselves to this activity.

## Vocabulary

Folklife, shanty, lyrics, and others as identified by specific topics chosen

## Correlation to NJ Core Curriculum Content Standards

Art

1.1 (1, 2, 3)

1.2 (1, 2, 3)

1.3 (2)

1.5 (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

Language Arts

3.1 (5, 8, 12)

3.3 (2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

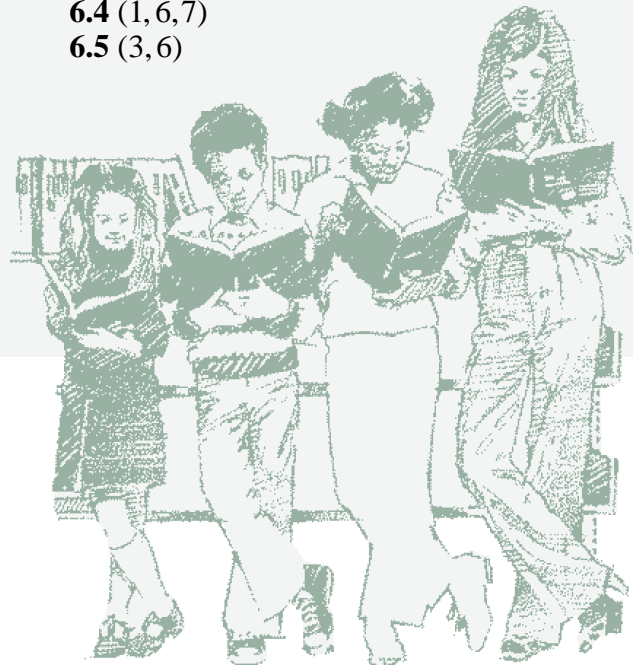
3.4 (3, 4, 9, 11, 12)

Social Studies

6.2 (1, 3, 4, 9)

6.4 (1, 6, 7)

6.5 (3, 6)



## Songs to Learn by — *Telling a Story with Music*

### ■ Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Discuss the media of song and chanty as it describes historical and/or natural phenomena and events.
2. Develop their own song lyrics based on a Down Jersey topic of their choice.
3. Realize and appreciate the value of songs for both entertainment and educational value.

### ■ Materials

Copies of the lyrics of *The Delaware Run* and *A Schooner from Delaware Bay*.

**Optional:** Copy of cassette or CD containing the songs available from Valerie Vaughn or other artists. Down Jersey Folklife Center Archive at Wheaton Village has over 300 audiotapes, mostly by New Jersey musicians. (609) 825-6800, ext. 2787

### ■ Making Connections

The film *Down Jersey* captures both the people and the places that make the region unique. One of the most encompassing and descriptive means of relating feelings of sense of place is through the spontaneous creation of songs, stories and rhymes. While this activity focuses on the songs that Valerie Vaughn recently wrote and recorded for the Delaware Bay Schooner Project, the region is rich with examples of such meaningful, personal expression. Any of the topics

and themes presented in the film *Down Jersey* and described in the *Blue Book — Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route*, US Department of the Interior, National Park Service (included with this packet) could be used as material for songs and stories.

### ■ Background

*“The song are in the fishermen, not in the boats”*

Robert Ames, a menhaden fisherman and shanty singer from Port Norris, from an interview: Mary Hufford and Rita Moonsammy with Robert Ames, Port Norris, February 19, 1983.

Excerpts from *Recitation and Song* (pages 59–62)

*One Space, Many Places — Folklife and Land Use in New Jersey’s Pinelands National Reserve*, by Mary Hufford, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, 1986

Folklife expressions survive because they are applicable. One of the oldest traditional applications for folklife expressions has been pedagogical. Folklife expressions thus perform an important function in recycling the knowledge and values of past generations. They tie past, present, and future together. Other original compositions convey images of an attitude toward places...

... In contrast we have songs about the workplace. The work shanties that menhaden

fishermen in Port Norris sang into the 1950s exemplify the use of a characteristically Afro-American musical form, the call-and-response pattern, to synchronize the movements of the men, fish, boats and tides when hauling menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*, locally called “bunkers”). For the most part, the introduction of mechanized purse seines and hydraulic pumps silenced the shanties of the Black fishermen who still live in Port Norris. Until the mid-1950s, most bunkers were hauled out of the bay by men in striker boats. The work was brutally hard, for menhaden swim in densely packed schools, and a single haul could weigh several tons.

... They synchronized their pulling so that all would be pulling together with their fingers moving simultaneously through three different leases in the net, the “bunting,” the “webbing,” and the “twine.” It was easy to spot a menhaden fisherman, according to Joe Gibbs of Port Norris, for the skin was split to the bone on his finger joints ... Menhaden fishermen had to work quickly to “harden” the net before the fish were smothered or crushed, because if the fish stopped jumping, their dead weight was impossible to raise. Thus, the rise and fall of the tide worked its way into many rhythms of the shanties. Robert Ames of Port Norris recalled:

“There’s no way in the world that thirty-two men can raise eighty ton of fish, unless they



do it in a way that the sea helps them. You know what they say? When you're down there holdin' on, they say, 'hold on, boys,' say, 'wait a minute,' say, 'the sea'll give it to you.' After awhile, she'll go down on a swell. She'll lighten up." (February 19, 1983)

The shanties gave the men the power to lift tons of fish, according to Ames, and a good shanty "blower" was worth his weight on any striker boat. He had to be experienced and therefore older. Said Ames:

"You know what a shanty man is? A shanty man is just someone on the boat that's old and knows how to make rhythms for you — and make you feel good and make the work easier. He don't have to be no captain, he don't have to be no mate. Just somebody with a lot of experience that likes to sing." (February 19, 1983)

... Similarly, Black workers in the oyster shucking houses relied on their gospel music for relief in otherwise difficult circumstances. Like other migrant workers in the region, they have little control over the land and its resources or their station on it. They are not celebrating their work, but they are enhancing their environment. It is no coincidence that the songs are generally the same as the hymns that Black congregations sing in church on Sunday throughout the region, hymns that speak of a better time in the world to come.

The songs brought the workers together and helped to make their work more synchronized and lightened the burden. Singing the songs helped develop a communal relationship among the workers, and probably made the day go faster — or at least seemed to.

*Valerie Vaughn — Singer, Songwriter and "Talespinner"*

Commentary provided by Terry O'Leary, Barnegat Bay Decoy and Baymen's Museum

Valerie Vaughn is a multi-talented musical educator from Tuckerton, New Jersey. She specializes in writing and singing tunes with South Jersey themes covering important environmental issues as well as historical sagas of people and places from the Jersey shore and pines. Performing interactive programs for children, Valerie brings to life through song: Coastal Heritage, Pirate Lore, Familiar Fairytales, Tales of the West, and, most recently, songs about the Delaware Bay and the AJ Meerwald.

Her renowned "Talespinner" program for young listeners evolved after years of experience as a musician and school counselor. Providing education through music and interactive programs, Valerie's message of protecting the environment and preserving history reaches audiences of all ages. Valerie covers a wide variety of musical styles

including folk, country, blues, traditional Irish, and musical story telling. She is available for school assembly programs and public appearances, and her recordings are available for purchase.

### ■ Procedure

#### *Warm Up*

Introduce the concept of shanties, folk, and story telling with music. Explain how such creative expressions are a means to share the past with the present. They are also an integral part of life as a baymen, a migrant worker, a shucker, a menhaden fishermen. They played an important role in people's sense of place. Play some recorded folk songs or invite a folk singer as a special guest.

#### *The Activity*

1. Distribute copies of the lyrics to *The Delaware Run* or *A Schooner from Delaware Bay* by Valerie Vaughn. Have students, either individually or in small groups, read the lyrics and summarize the song.
2. Groups should present their descriptions to the class.
3. Next, distribute the lyrics to *My Special Place* by Nick Miller (age 11). Have students discuss the song's lyrics. An optional art assignment: Have students illustrate this song by drawing or painting a picture.

## Songs to Learn by — *Telling a Story with Music*

4. From the topics shown in the film *Down Jersey*, students choose one to write a song about. This should be done in small groups. The teacher should provide time for research of the topic if needed. Students can utilize the music/tune from another song to have their lyrics accompany. This makes it easier to write words to go along with the tune.
5. Emphasis should be put on the songs being true to fact and accurate, and depicting the chosen theme or topic.

### **Wrap Up**

The students should present (perform) their songs to the class.

### ■ **Assessment**

Student participation in the song writing and group discussions.

### ■ **Extensions**

Students' songs could be assembled into a booklet and/or actually recorded. There are many high schools that have this capability in their in-house studios.

### ■ **Resources**

*Passing it on — Folk Artists and Education in Cumberland County, New Jersey*, by Rita Zorn Moonsammy, pages 38 - 48, Joseph Gibbs, *African-American Gospel Singer*

Call **Larry Sarner, NJDEP, Marine Educational Specialist** at (609) 748-2031 and ask for his list of environmental singer/song writers.

**Down Jersey Folklife Center** at Wheaton Village has an extensive collection of audiotapes and other resources related to traditional occupations from the region.

Definitely worth a call:  
(609) 825-6800 ext. 2787



**Words and music by Linda Reddington and Valerie Vaughn 1997**

Written from the perspective of the late forties, "The Delaware Run" depicts the state of the industry as it was just beginning to decline. A virus was not yet identified but the people's way of life was to change drastically.

## **The Delaware Run**

The Oysters have been spawning on set we left last spring and  
Daddy's taking me on crew to go out oystering  
On the Meerwald and the Mulford men like Fenton Anderson  
Will sail today out to the bay to make "The Delaware Run"

The water's smooth and easy, an eagle rides the sky  
The scow gang on the middle deck all wave as they go by  
The Yates and AJ Meerwald dredge oysters by the ton and  
Oysterin's a way of life out on "The Delaware Run"

### **CHORUS**

*What'll we leave our daughters' daughters? What'll we leave our sons?  
When nothing will live within these waters everything will be done  
They'll never know the life we had making "The Delaware Run"*

It's time to take the oysters and put them in the bay  
Where they can grow up big and fat so city folks will pay  
They're shipped to Philadelphia and some go to New York  
Where millionaires can eat our wares and pop a champagne cork

Jimmy has a buy boat he keeps along the shore and  
All the oysters we can catch ol' Jimmy takes and more and  
When this boat is my boat and I've a son or sons  
I'll take my young un's oysterin' out on "The Delaware Run"

### **CHORUS**

Something's wrong with the oysters, two or three are bad  
In all the years dad's worked this trade, it's the poorest catch he's had  
They say the bay is dying, the ocean's dying too  
And soon there will be no more work for a poor bayman to do

### **CHORUS**

# A Schooner from Delaware Bay

Written by Tom Callinan and Valerie Vaughn

The Meerwald's a schooner from Delaware Bay  
From Bivalve to Philly and down to Cape May  
Where hundreds just like her dredged oysters to eat  
She reminds us of the glorious days of the fleet

## CHORUS

*She's a Schooner from Delaware Bay  
A Schooner from Delaware Bay*

She worked on a bay for fourteen straight years  
Until World War Two when she was commandeered  
To serve with the Coast Guard who took down her sails  
And made her a fire boat so goes the tale

## CHORUS

At the end of the war it was back to the bay  
Where she was renamed "The Phillips," they say  
To dredge under power for 14 more years  
Clam dredging, surf clamming 'til she closed her career

## CHORUS

Then in '88, sixty years from her birth  
She inspired some folks who believed in her worth  
They worked to restore her again to set sail  
She was launched again in '96, we must hail her

## CHORUS

Now we can all sail her and join with her crew  
She's great things to teach and she's much work to do  
Now saving our waters is her new career  
This time she'll be sailing for many more years

## CHORUS

# My Special Place

Words by Nick Miller (age 11)

Music by Valerie Vaughn

There's a little path right down the street  
It has mud weeds and a mini creek  
I go there just to get away  
Its mouth leads right into the bay

## CHORUS

*Sometimes it has wonderful creatures  
Turtles, ducks and beautiful land features  
In the summer I take my friends there and  
Show them a little turtle lair;  
I go down and put my feet in  
Then I feel like I have a little fin*

There's a little path made by ducks  
It leads right into the dirty mucks  
This place is very special to me  
I hope it will last for eternity

## CHORUS