

18-A The Sources of Country Music, 1975

Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975)



18-A Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975), *The Sources of Country Music*, 1975. Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 120 in. (182.9 x 304.8 cm.). The Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum, Nashville, Tenn. The Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum is operated by the Country Music Foundation, Inc., a Section 501(c)(3) not-for-profit educational organization chartered by the State of Tennessee in 1964.

The Art

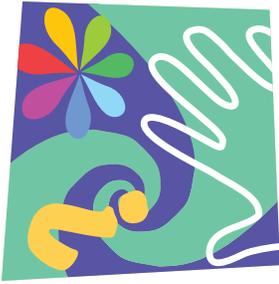
This mural was painted by Thomas Hart Benton. It was commissioned by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville, Tennessee, to tell the story of the history of country music. Five scenes in the painting show different kinds of American folk music that led to country music. Square dancers move in time to fiddlers, women sing in a church choir, barefoot mountain women sing to a dulcimer, a cowboy sings with one foot on his saddle, and an African American cotton picker strums on a banjo, while across the river African American women dance. Country singer Tex Ritter is the model for the cowboy and the train is modeled after the Cannonball Special.

The Artist

Benton was born in Neosho, Missouri, in 1889 into a political family. His father was a congressman and his father's uncle, for whom he was named, was one of the first two senators from Missouri. Benton spent much of his childhood in Washington, D.C., where he was being groomed for politics. Instead, he decided to study art and to paint the "living world of active men and women." Benton wanted his art to look real and attract an audience that did not go to art museums.

The Historical Perspective

American folk music, which Benton celebrates in his picture, was quickly disappearing in the 1970s, even in the country, where it began. Country music was turning into a big business, which was very different from its local and regional beginnings. The steam engine in the picture shows that change has come and an older style of country life in America was coming to an end. Traces of these local traditions, though, lived on in the new style of country music.



Conversations and Teaching Activities

Head Start Children ages 3 to 5

Encourage children to look closely at this painting—the objects, the background, the colors used. Ask questions, introduce new vocabulary, and find books that relate to the artwork.

Describing



- ✓ What do you see in this painting?
- ✓ What types of musical instruments do you see? Who is playing them?
- ✓ What other music do you see in the painting? Women are singing and dancing.
- ✓ What colors does the artist use?

Analyzing and Interpreting



Ask the following questions to stimulate thinking and discussion:

- The title of this artwork is *The Sources of Country Music*. Why do you think it has that name?
- How does the painting appear to be moving?
- Explain different types of transportation. What types of transportation do you see?
- Why do you think the train and boat are there?
- The artist was trying to decide if he was going to repaint the train. Why do you think he wanted to do this?
- Are there other things you would like to tell me about this painting? Children might talk about musical instruments, dancers, singers, the train, the boat.

Connecting and Extending

Introducing Vocabulary

banjo	overalls
chaps	riverboat
choir	spurs
dulcimer	square dance
fiddlers	steam boat
folk music	swaying
guitar	traditions
musicians	



Books

Abiyoyo by Pete Seeger (Maxwell Macmillan International, 1994)

Based on a South African folk song, this is a tale of a young boy and his father who return to their town after making an evil giant disappear.

Clementine by Robert Quackenbush (Lippincott, 1974)

An illustrated depiction of the famous song, this book also introduces children to how people used to search for gold.

Ol' Dan Tucker by John Langstaff (Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963)

Pictures tell the story of a banjo player as described in a folk song.

Books continued on page 112



Connecting and Extending continued...

Related Family Literacy Experiences

Parents and children can:

- ✓ make different instruments out of recycled materials.
- ✓ take turns teaching each other different dances.
- ✓ sing “Abiyoyo” together, especially during long waits or on long car or bus trips.



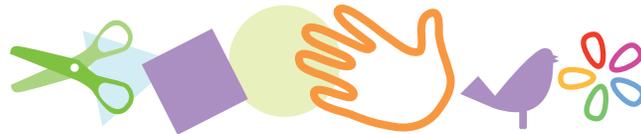
Books continued...

She’ll Be Comin’ Round the Mountain by Robert Quackenbush (Lippincott, 1973)
Illustrations portray the folk song, which also can be staged as a drama.

Skip to My Lou by Robert Quackenbush (Lippincott, 1975)
The story behind this folk song is accompanied by directions for dancing to the music.

Sweet Betsy from Pike by Glen Rounds (Children’s Press, 1973)
Betsy’s experiences as she travels to California during the Gold Rush are told in a folk song.

Ten Go Tango by Arthur Dorros (HarperCollins Publishers, 2000)
Ten groups of animals indulge in 10 different dances, from one osprey dancing ballet to 10 flamingos doing the tango.



Related Educational Experiences

- ✓ Invite a guitarist or other string players to visit the classroom, talk about their instruments, and play some music for the children.
- ✓ Use recorded folk and country music in the classroom to teach the children simple steps for country dance. Tap the beat with rhythm sticks.
- ✓ Take the children to a community children’s concert or performance to hear a live quartet or choral group.
- ✓ Compare different types of boats and what they are used for. Visit a train station, pier, or riverfront with the children.
- ✓ Add dress up props and musical instruments pictured in this painting to your dramatic play area.

The ideas listed are just a few of the many activities that could be used to introduce or extend children’s learning. Your knowledge of your children and families supports your ability to ensure positive learning experiences and outcomes for students. As an educator, you probably have ideas for books, songs, finger plays, and activities that you have thought of when introducing or extending children’s learning related to the “A Head Start on Picturing America” artworks. We encourage you to confer with your colleagues, visit the local library or bookstore, and share your ideas with others.