

Write your own Sea Shanty

Objectives: For students to demonstrate their ability to use appropriate language structures and to compose verses that keep the theme and the rhythm of the song.

Learning Standards:

English Language Arts: 1.A.2b, 1.B.2c, 2.A.2c, 2.B.2c, 3.B.2b, 4.B.2a

Fine Arts (Music): 26.A.3c, 26.B.3c

Musical Resources:

*There are many different shanty recordings on YouTube, such as:

“South Australia” at www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vUqeDPZZ80

“Haul Away Joe” at www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvBHdw-EqLM

& “Drunken Sailor” at www.youtube.com/watch?v=xby7cH3kl6M

*Listen to the audio file for “Blow the Man Down” at

www.atlantictallships.ca

(Choose the Sea Chest, click on the Folklore button, and find the song title under “Shanties.”)



*Additional shanty resources and background information can be found at www.shanty.rendance.org.

Background:

- Shanties were work songs sung by sailors. With their strong, simple rhythms, shanties helped sailors keep in time with each other as they worked.
- Different shanties accompanied different tasks. Some with long, repetitive rhythms, such as “South Australia,” were sung when turning the capstan to haul up the anchor. Others with short, jerky beats, like “Haul Away Joe,” were sung as sailors made the short, steady tugs required to adjust the sails of the ship.
- Shanties often had a call and response component to them. Sailors would repeat a phrase in response to a specific line sung by the lead shantyman or stomp their feet at designated moments in the song.
- Sailors often made up verses that reflected the ship or voyage they were on. They could use the occasion to make fun of the ship's captain and first mate without fear of punishment. Shanties such as “Drunken Sailor” and “Blow the Man Down” poked fun at the foolish mistakes of mischievous sailors.

Procedure:

- The teacher will split the students up into small groups.
- Each group will choose a task that they must complete in their own lives (i.e. doing their homework, doing a chore, babysitting, etc.). They will search for an existing sea shanty (preferably one that matches the rhythm of that task.)
- Each group will then write its own lyrics to accompany the song and practice singing the shanty as a group.
- Each group will perform and teach their sea shanty to the class.