Smithsonian Folkways

Lead Belly and His Legacy of Southern Song
A Smithsonian Folkways Unit of Lessons

Designed by: Patricia Shehan Campbell and Bethany Grant-Rodriguez
University of Washington

Summary:
This unit of four stand-alone or progressive lessons celebrates Lead Belly, a Louisiana-born songster who remembered, invented, and passed on a legacy of songs that opens ears and minds to the world of the American south in the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. The ballads, blues, work songs, and singing games in these lessons celebrate an African American sensibility that can be enjoyed in school settings by listening and participatory singing and playing. With such musical engagement can come a deeper understanding of the life, times, and place of Lead Belly and his early years on the plantation, his consciousness of the daily grind of manual labor, and his later experiences as a conveyor of southern song on radio and in on-stage concerts, clubs, and classrooms. For children and youth, the complexities of Lead Belly's life and times are caught up in these songs. His troubled years landed him in prison, where he learned songs from his inmates in Louisiana and Texas, when he worked on a chain gang until his time was served. (The reasons for his incarceration may not make for classroom-appropriate discussion, although the songs he acquired there became standard repertoire for him.) They lead to an exploration of the U.S. South in the post-Civil War period and the Jim Crow years, in the rural and remote places where sharecropping was common and where racial inequities were continued long past official declarations of freedom. The songs offer expressions of hardship, happiness (against all odds), and humor, and the lessons function as gateways to understanding the human condition for its universal and culture-specific elements. As a folk music giant, Lead Belly's influences spilled far and wide to the recordings of the Pete Seeger and the Weavers, 1960s skiffle artist Lonnie Donegan, and rock musicians Van Morrison, Kurt Cobain and Bruce Springsteen. Lead Belly made a musically meaningful life for those who would listen, and his songs of the rails, of cotton culture, and playful children are an invitation to take a deep collective breath and to sing out loud, in full voice, all together again.

Suggested Grade Levels: Grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12, C/U
Country: United States
Region: Southern U.S., especially Louisiana
Culture Group: African American
Genre: blues, ballad, work song, singing game
Instruments: Include voice, guitar, body percussion
Co-Curricular Areas: American History, Civics, Literature
National Standards: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites to listening, singing, and fundamental movement components of this unit. Some experience in simple guitars chording is useful but not necessary, as these skills can also be learned alongside the featured repertoire (and of course the songs can also be played on guitar by a teacher only, or sung either with the recording or without instrumental accompaniment, too.) Likewise, cultural and historical aims can be met through the lessons such that no previous understandings of the American South are necessary.

Objectives

- Be introduced to Lead Belly as an important musical voice of his time and place (#9)
- Gain exposure to African American song styles—blues, ballad, work song, singing game (#8, 9)
- Sing songs of an African American repertoire (#1, 2)
- Add rhythmic accompaniment via body percussion to selected songs (#1)
- Complement selected songs with gesture, movement, and games (#8)
- Understand the significance of the songs to African American identity (#9)

Materials:

- Lead Belly: The Smithsonian Folkways Collection (2015) http://www.folkways.si.edu/leadbelly
- Photos and videos of Lead Belly:
    - http://www.folkways.si.edu/images/galleries/album_galleries/SFW40201/SFW40201.jpg
    - http://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/images/album_covers/SF270/SFW40045.jpg
    - http://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/images/album_covers/SF270/SFW40044.jpg
    - http://www.folkways.si.edu/Media/Default/_Profiles/670ca782/bff63536/FBP10323.jpg?v=635602157551356172
    - Brief history of Lead Belly and other musicians who have covered his songs http://www.folkways.si.edu/archivist-jeff-place-on-lead-bellys-legacy/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/music/video/smithsonian (watch until 1:55)
    - Introduction to Lead Belly and the anniversary box set: http://www.folkways.si.edu/archivist-jeff-place-on-lead-belly-the-smithsonian-folkways-collection/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/music/video/smithsonian (watch until 3:15)
- Guitar(s)
- Map of the Southern U.S.

Lesson Segments:

1. **Singing Morning and Night** (National Standards #1, 2, 3, 6, 9)
    Good Mornin' Blues
    Goodnight Irene
    Midnight Special

2. **Riding the Rails by Song** (National Standards #1, 2, 6, 8, 9)
    John Henry
    Rock Island Line
    Linin' Track

3. **Gaming-the-Songs** (National Standards #1, 2, 6, 8, 9)

Ha-Ha This Away
Sally Walker
Bring Me a Little Water, Silvy

4. **Songs of the Cotton Culture** (National Standards #1, 2, 4, 6, 9)
   Pick a Bale of Cotton
   Boll Weevil
   Stewball

Lesson 1: Singing Morning and Night (National Standards #1, 2, 3, 6, 9)

- Good Mornin' Blues: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/good-morning-blues/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian
- Goodnight Irene: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/irene-goodnight-irene/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian
- Midnight Special: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/midnight-special/american-folk/music/track/smithsonian

1. Bring students into direct contact with a trademark song style, the rural blues, performed by African Americans living in the southern United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. As a human jukebox who listened and learned the song forms of his place and time, Lead Belly came out of a blues tradition that was reinforced by his time on the road with blues musician Blind Lemon Jefferson. He learned the blues on his Stella 12-string guitar, which he was fond of because of its sound to him of the early jazz-like style of wildly improvised barrelhouse piano. In giving students focus to their listening of one of Lead Belly's signature songs, "Good Mornin' Blues" http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/good-morning-blues/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian , ask them to identify the instruments they hear (guitar, harmonica, voice).
   a. As blues music conveys emotional messages via poetic verse, tempo and rhythm, vocal (and instrumental) timbre, and melodic shape, encourage students to express in their own words how this song makes them personally feel. (Accept all responses).
   b. Following on emotional messages that are musically conveyed, ask students how they think the singer, Lead Belly, is feeling. (Sad) Ask them to offers reasons why the music is conveying this message. (Tempo, lyrics) Ask them to imagine why Lead Belly is singing this song. (To help himself feel better. Perhaps he doesn't want to get up this morning and go to work or school.) Ask students whether they've ever felt this way, "blue" in the morning, and how music they sing, play, or listen to may help them improve their mood.
   c. Discuss how this style of "blues" music is a way for people to sing about the challenges in their lives, for example, loss of a friend, unemployment, financial restrictions, wondering where the next meal was coming from or how to pay the next month's rent. Encourage students to research lifestyles of African Americans in the early twentieth century, especially those working as farmers (and sharecroppers) on rural plantations. Discuss potential sources for feeling "blue".
   d. Show students a photograph of Lead Belly, the influential songster of folk song and blues,

http://www.folkways.si.edu/images/galleries/album_galleries/SFW40201/SFW40201.jpg , and the featured singer and guitar player in "Good Mornin' Blues". Share that Lead Belly and his African American contemporaries were living in hard times in the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, particularly as they were victims of the Jim Crow laws that continued racial segregation and unequal rights in the Southern U.S. long past the Civil War. Challenge students to consider how this song, and others in his repertoire, reflect these struggles for equitable treatment.

e. Play the recording again and ask students to sing along (on a neutral syllable such as "loo") with the harmonica part. Students can be encouraged to pantomime the sound of the harmonica. Show-and-tell the harmonica, send around to the students, and demonstrate its sound quality (whether or not it copies Lead Belly's blues style).
f. Encourage students to sing the bass line that Lead Belly is playing on his 12-string guitar, listening and tracking the rise and fall of the bass line pitches. Explain the technique of this string of pitches as a "walking bass line", which is a common characteristic of blues guitar.
g. Invite students to sing "Good Mornin' Blues", following the lyrics below. Note also that every performance of oral-tradition blues (or other folk song) may be unique, such that musicians may spontaneously change words, melodic nuances, or instrumental flourishes. (As an additional challenge, suggest that some students sing on "loo" the harmonica's part, others the walking bass line, and still others the melody—with or without the recording.)

Now this is the blues
There was a white man had the blues
Thought it was nothing to worry about
Now you lay down at night
You roll from one side of the bed to the other all
Night long
Ya can't sleep, what's the matter; the blues has gotcha
Ya get up you sit on the side of the bed in the mornin'
May have a sister a mother a brother n a father around
But you don't want no talk out of em
What's the matter; the blues has gotcha
When you go in put your feet under the table look down
At ya plate got everything you wanna eat
But ya shake ya head you get up you say "Lord I can't
Eat I can't sleep what's the matter"
The blues gotcha
Why not talk to ya

Tell what you gotta tell it

Well, good morning blues, blues how do you do
Well, good morning blues, blues how do you do
I'm doing all right well, good morning how are you.

I couldn't sleep last night, I was turning from side to
Side
Oh Lord, I was turning from side to side
I wasn't sad, I was just dissatisfied.

I couldn't sleep last night, you know the blues walking
'Round my bed,
Oh Lord, the blues walking 'round my bed
I went to eat my breakfast, the blues was in my bread.

Well good morning blues, blues how do you do.
Well, good morning blues, blues how do you do.
I'm doing all right, well, good morning how are you.

2. Direct student attention to a verse-and-refrain song, Lead Belly's "Goodnight Irene." http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/irene-goodnight-irene/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian Note that the song may originate in the repertoire of the minstrel show, an American entertainment in cities and towns, and on Mississippi riverboats, in the second half of the nineteenth century. The minstrel show consisted of music, dance, and comedy, and frequently featured white and black performers in "blackface". Lead Belly was performing it in his youth, and probably learned it from his uncle, Terrell.

a. Suggest to students that they listen to “Goodnight Irene” in order to identify the instruments they hear in this song (guitar, harmonica, voice). Are these the same instruments that were featured in “Good Mornin’ Blues?” (Yes). Ask them to describe the 12-string guitar’s style. (The guitar is playing broken chords in an “oom pa pa” pattern in a 1-2-3 meter, with the root of the chord playing on beat one and the rest of the chord playing on beats two and three).
b. Listen again to “Goodnight Irene”, and draw students into feeling the meter by swaying side to side once every three beats. As they listen, ask them to wonder about “Irene”. Who is she? (Accept creative short descriptions of Irene as a girlfriend being dropped back home after a school dance, or a concert, or a walk in the park, or a little girl being lulled to sleep by her father or mother.)
c. Demonstrate the feeling of meter in three “Goodnight Irene”, inviting students to join in patting laps on the strong beat of “1” and snapping fingers on the weak beats of “2, 3”). Once the movement is smooth and continuous, add the recording, adjusting the movement to the tempo as necessary.
d. Sing “Goodnight Irene”, adding guitar accompaniment that features D, G, and A7 chords.

Last Saturday night, I got married,
Me and my wife settled down
Now me and my wife are parted,
I'm gonna take another stroll downtown
Sometimes I live in the country,
Sometimes I live in town
Sometimes I take a great notion,
To jump into the river and drown

I love Irene, God knows I do,
I'll love her till the seas run dry
But if Irene should turn me down,
I'd take the morphine and die
Stop rambling, stop your gambling,
Stop staying out late at night
Go home to your wife and your family,
Stay there by your fireside bright

e. Consider writing new verses that fit the rhyme and rhythm of Lead Belly’s version of “Goodnight Irene”. Imagine the song as a lullaby to a child that recalls all of the high points of a child’s busy day, or imagine the song as a love song that celebrates how the couple met, what they enjoy doing together, how they feel about sharing food, favorite music, games, movies.
f. Share with students that this “Goodnight Irene” is Lead Belly’s most famous song. Ask them to wonder why he enjoyed this song (Accept all answers, including its calming nature, undulating and gently rolling melody, the smooth glide and slide of his own singing voice across the pitches). Note that this was Lead Belly’s theme song at the start and finish of his radio programs and concerts in schools for children and in clubs for adults.

3. Approach the subject of music as alive and well at nearly any time of the day and night, such that there are many folk and contemporary songs that refer to morning, noon, afternoon, evening, and night (and even more particular times such as “7 AM” or “One O’Clock”. Assign students to a project of discovering online and on their playlists songs and song lyrics that reference time, including midnight and Lead Belly’s rendition of the song known as “Midnight Special” http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/midnight-special/american-folk/music/track/smithsonian
    a. Introduce “Midnight Special” and encourage students to listen and decide what the meaning of the song title may be. (The Midnight Special is a passenger train, one that comes passes through a town at midnight to pick up people and/or goods.)
    b. Listen again to the song and sing softly with the refrain: “Let the Midnight Special shine her light on me. Let the Midnight Special shine her ever-loving light on me.” Explain that

the song was popular in prisons in the 1930s, especially in the southern prisons of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. The feeling was that if the headlights of a passing train engine (especially the one that passed at midnight) were to shine through the bars and into the cell of a prisoner, that the warden would be drawn to unlock the gate of the cell and set the prisoner free. The light of the train was metaphorical for salvation and absolution from sin (or the crime that had put the prisoner behind bars).

c. Sing the song, learning the lyrics by listening to Lead Belly's rendering of this song that has captured the imaginations of so many singers since.

Yonder comes Miss Rosie. How in the world do you know?
Well, I know her by the apron and the dress she wore.
Umbrella on her shoulder, piece of paper in her hand,
Well, I'm callin' that Captain, "Turn a-loose my man."

Let the Midnight Special shine her light on me.
Oh let the Midnight Special shine her ever-lovin' light on me.

When you gets up in the morning, when that big bell ring.
You go marching to the table, you meet the same old thing.
Knife and fork are on the table, ain't nothing in my pan.
And if you say a thing about it, you have a trouble with the man.

Let the Midnight Special shine her light on me.
Oh let the Midnight Special shine her ever-lovin' light on me.

If you ever go to Houston, boy, you better walk right,
And you better not squabble and you better not fight.
Benson Crocker will arrest you, Jimmy Boone will take you down.
You can bet your bottom dollar that you're penitentary bound.

Let the Midnight Special shine her light on me.
Oh let the Midnight Special shine her ever-lovin' light on me.

Well, jumping Little Judy, she was a mighty fine girl.
She brought jumping to this whole round world.
Well, she brought it in the morning just a while before day.
Well, she brought me the news that my wife was dead.
That started me to grieving, whooping, hollering, and crying.
And I began to worry about my very long time.

Let the Midnight Special shine her light on me.
Oh let the Midnight Special shine her ever-lovin' light on me.

d. Add guitars to accompany the song, strumming on chords D, G, and A7, using careful listening skills to guide the chord changes. A simple rhythmic strum on the beat is an acceptable start, and other rhythms, including subdividing the beat into two twice-as-fast strums on beats two and four (/ // / //) is also solid and certain.

e. Ask students to identify the refrain (or chorus) in the song and to sing it as it appears on the recording. In a live performance, divide the class into guitar-players, refrain singers, and verse-singers. Consider also featuring solo-singers on the verses and the whole group on the refrain.

f. Search online for covers of the song, that is, renditions of the song by artists other than Lead Belly. Listen to recordings by Pete Seeger, Johnny Rivers, Buckwheat Zydeco, Eric Clapton, The Beatles, Creedence Clearwater Revival. Compare and contract the renditions for tempo, instrumentation, vocal styles, and lyrics.

Extensions (Optional):

a. Regarding the "Good Mornin' Blues" recording, the guitar's walking bass line can be transferred to keyboard or xylophones, so that students can play along with Lead Belly or provide new accompaniments to their own singing. Consider also the possibility of a basic percussion pattern through the addition of a drum, sticks, or a cowbell.

b. For "Goodnight Irene", arrange a simple accompaniment to feature fundamental rhythms on drums and harmonies on guitars, keyboards or xylophones. Keep in mind the sound of the bass or root of the chord on the first beat, with third and fifth of the chord on beats two and three. For example, consider playing a D-chord harmony as (1) D on beat one, (2) F# and A together on beats two and three.

c. Encourage students to compose a song with the musical energy as is present in "Midnight Special". In small groups, assign students to begin by drafting a poem that refers to hope and promise—with or without trains in mind. Challenge students to turn this poetry into sung words, and to accompany the song on guitars, keyboards, xylophones, and non-pitched percussion instruments.

d. Consider the intentions of Lead Belly's songs, and encourage students to scan the internet in order to come to an understanding of the role of the blues, minstrel songs, prison songs, and other traditional folk songs in the lives of African Americans in period of the 1880s to the mid-twentieth century.

Assessment: By the end of this lesson, students will (1) Know Lead Belly as an important American roots and blues musician, (2) Identify, sing and/or play a walking bass line, (3) Identify and demonstrate meter in three and meter in four, and (4) sing one or more songs from the repertoire of American roots music, in tune and in rhythm.

Lesson 2: Riding the Rails by Song (National Standards #1, 2, 6, 8, 9)

- John Henry: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/john-henry/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian
- Rock Island Line: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/rock-island-line/african-american-music-american-folk-blues-childrens/track/smithsonian
- Linin' Track: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/linin-track/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian

1. Before playing the recordings, discuss the historic role of railroads in the American continental (and western) expansion. Challenge students to wonder about and research individually or in partners the 19th century development of American transportation and communications systems up and down the east coast, across the Appalachians in connecting the east and the midwest, and from the east coast to California in the transcontinental railway effort. Many strong male workers, including African Americans (and, in California, Chinese immigrants) were employed in laying out the tracks and driving in the steel spikes. Point out the importance of work songs whose rhythms, melodies, and verses propelled railway workers through their grueling manual labor. Clarify how ballads grew from the stories of these workers on the job when, at the end of the day, they might have had their evening meal and then taken a guitar into their hands to begin to weave a story of their work in songful expression.
2. Play "John Henry" http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/john-henry/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian framing student listening and fueling their interest in participating in musically expressive ways.
    a. Ask students questions that can be answered through a first listening to the recording: What instruments do you hear? (Guitar, harmonica, voice) How does this music make you feel? (Energetic, "like dancing") Who is John Henry? (He was a strong and energetic railroad worker who drove steel spikes in the process of laying the C&O railroad tracks between Newport News, Virginia and Cincinnati Ohio, especially in the Big Bend Tunnel of West Virginia.)
    b. Sing along with the recording of "John Henry", and also live and with the accompaniment of guitar playing D, G, and A chords. Note that there are many versions of John Henry, including Lead Belly's, which he describes as a "dance tune".

John Henry was a li'l baby, uh-huh,
Sittin' on his mama's knee, oh, yeah,
Said: "De Big Bend Tunnel on de C & O road
Gonna cause de death of me,
Lawd, Lawd. Gonna cause de death of me.

John Henry, he had a woman,
Her name was Mary Magdalene,
She would go to de tunnel and sing for John,
Jes' to hear John Henry's hammer ring, Lawd, Lawd,
Jes' to hear John Henry's hammer ring.

John Henry had a li'l woman,
Her name was Lucy Ann,
John Henry took sick an' had to go to bed,
Lucy Ann drove steel like a man,
Lawd, Lawd, Lucy Ann drove steel like a man.

Cap'n says to John Henry,
Gonna bring me a steam drill 'round,
Gonna take dat steam drill out on de job,
Gonna whop dat steel on down, Lawd, Lawd,
Gonna whop dat steel on down.

John Henry tol' his cap'n,
Lightnin' was in his eye;
Cap'n, bet yo' las' red cent on me,
Fo' I'll beat it to de bottom or I'll die, Lawd, Lawd,
I'll beat it to de bottom or I'll die."

Sun shine hot an' burnin',
Wer'n't no breeze a-tall,
Sweat ran down like water down a hill,
Dat day John Henry let his hammer fall,
Lawd, Lawd, dat day John Henry let his hammer fall.

John Henry went to de tunnel,
An' dey put him in de lead to drive,
De rock so tall an' John Henry so small,
Dat he lied down his hammer an' he cried,
Lawd, Lawd, dat he lied down his hammer an' he cried.

John Henry started out on de right hand,
De steam drill started on de lef'---
"Before I 'd let dis steam drill beat me down,
I'd hammer my fool self to death,
Lawd, Lawd, I'd hammer my fool self to death."
White man tol' John Henry,

"Nigger, damn yo' soul,
You might beat dis steam an' dr;ll of mine,
When de rocks in dis mountain turn to gol',
Lawd, Lawd, when de rocks in dis mountain turn to gol'.

John Henry said to his shaker,
"Nigger, why don' you sing?
I'm throwin' twelve poun's from my hips on down,
Jes' listen to de col' steel ring,
Lawd, Lawd, Jes' listen to de col' steel ring."

Oh, de captain said to John Henry,
"I b'lieve this mountain's sinkin' in,
John Henry said to his captain, oh my!
"Ain' nothin' but my hammer suckin' win',
Lawd, Lawd, ain' nothln' but my hammer suckin' win."

John Henry tol' his shaker,
Shaker, you better pray,
For if I miss dis six-foot steel,
Tomorrow'll be yo' buryin' day,
Lawd, Lawd, tomorrow'll be yo' buryin' day."

John Henry tol' his captain,
"Looka yonder what l see ---
Yo' drill's done broke an' yo' hole's done choke,
An' you cain' drive steel like me,
Lawd, Lawd, an' you cain' drive steel like me."

De man dat invented de steam drill,
Thought he was mighty fine.
John Henry drove his fifteen feet,
An' de steam drill only made nine,
Lawd, Lawd, an' de steam drill only made nine.

De hammer dat John Henry swung',
It weighed over nine pound ;
He broke a rib in his lef'-han' side,
An' his intrels fell on de groun',
Lawd, Lawd, an' his intrels fell on de groun'.

John Henry was hammerin' on de mountain,
An' his hammer was strikin' fire,
He drove so hard till he broke his pore heart,
An' he lied down his hammer an' he died,
Lawd, Lawd, he lied down his hammer an' he died.

All de womens in de wes',
When dey heared of John Henry's death,
Stood in de rain, flagged de eas'-boun' train,
Goin' where John Henry fell dead,
Lawd, Lawd, goin' where John Henry fell dead.

John Henry's lil mother,
She was all dressed in red,
She jumped in bed, covered up her head,
Said she didn' know her son was dead,
Lawd, Lawd, didn' know her son was dead.

John Henry had a pretty lil woman,
An' de dress she wo' was blue,
An' de las' wards she said to him:
"John Henry, I've been true to you,
Lawd, Lawd, John Henry I've been true to you."

"Oh, who's gonna shoe yo' lil feetses,
An' who's gonna glub yo' han's,
An' who'g gonna kiss yo' rosy, rosy lips,
An' who's gonna be yo' man,
Lawd, Lawd, an' who's gonna be yo' man?"

Dey took John Henry to de graveyard,
An' dey buried him in de san',

An' every locomotive come roarin' by,
Says, "Dere lays a steel-drivin' man,
Lawd, Lawd, dere lays a steel-drivin' man."

c. Encourage students to exhibit regularly recurring movements (to the pulse) while singing "John Henry", such as bending the elbow so that the arms are parallel to the floor and moving alternately forward and back like the axles at the wheel of the engine. This movement can be performed by students sitting down or standing in vertical lines close to one another and connecting hands to the elbows of the next person ahead in the line.
d. Piece the story of John Henry, a African American folk hero, through the lyrics of the song. Search the internet for further information about John Henry as a "steel drivin' man" who hammered a steel drill into hard rocks so to make holes for explosives that would then blast away the rock in the building of the Big Ben tunnel in West Virginia. The legend of John Henry is that he was a powerful man who one day entered into a competition against a steam-powered drill. He drilled harder and faster than the machine, proving then that human power exceeded the power of a machine. The story goes that he became sick following his victory and died the next day.
e. Compare Lead Belly's "John Henry" with the recordings of artists such as Paul Robeson, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Bill Monroe, Johnny Cash, and Bruce Springsteen. How is Lead Belly's version like (and unlike) renditions by singers across a span of musical styles ranging from "folk" to country, bluegrass, and rock.

3. Play "Rock Island Line" http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/rock-island-line/african-american-music-american-folk-blues-childrens/track/smithsonian as an example of a high-energy train song that musically moves the listener into the rhythms of trains, tracks, and travel.

a. Post these questions for students to contemplate as they listen: What is the meaning of "line" in the context of the song title? (A railroad route, or line) What sort of goods might be traveling by train across rural south, particularly in Arkansas as the caller claims, in the early 20th century? (As Lead Belly calls them out, there are goats, sheep, cows, hogs, horses, "all livestock". Other goods would have included bags and boxes of wheat, barley, cotton, corn potatoes, rice.)
b. Listen to the recording with a focus as to how the music conveys thoughts of the train's travel. Give attention especially to the regular and rigorous strum of the guitar that may sound like the quick roll of steel wheels over steel tracks.
c. Sing "Rock Island Line" with the recording, and then "live" with guitars that can add a simple and steady strumming of the chords in the key of A (with occasional transfer to D and E chords).

[Chorus:]
Oh that Rock Island Line is a mighty good road,
Oh that Rock Island Line is that road to ride,
Oh that Rock Island Line is a mighty good road,

If you want to ride, you got to ride it like you find it,
Get your ticket at the station on the Rock Island Line.
Jesus died to save our sins--hooray to God,
We're going to meet him again!

[Chorus:]
Oh that Rock Island Line is a mighty good road,
Oh that Rock Island Line is that road to ride,
Oh that Rock Island Line is a mighty good road

I may be right and I may be wrong,
You are going to miss me when I'm gone!

[Chorus:]
Oh that Rock Island Line is a mighty good road,
Oh that Rock Island Line is that road to ride,
Oh that Rock Island Line is a mighty good road

A, B, C, W, X, Y and Z

Cats in the cupboard, but they don't see me!

[Chorus:]

Oh that Rock Island Line is a mighty good road,
Oh that Rock Island Line is that road to ride,
Oh that Rock Island Line is a mighty good road

d. Add the same axle-elbow movement as described above (2.c) while singing and/or listening.

4. Play "Linin' Track" http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/linin-track/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian as an another example of a train song, this one thick in the rhythms of the railway workers.
    a. Heighten student attention to the song through these questions, whose answers can be found through attentive listening: Where (generally) might the singer may be located, given just the sound of his voice? (Outdoors, as his voice is loud and projecting, perhaps even in the work crew at the railroad tracks). In a careful listening to the singer's words, what is his message? (That it's very hard work to be "linin' track", that is, straightening out the steel beams of the railroad track that had been bent out of shape by the tremendous impact of trains running quickly along the tracks.) What happens a little ways into the song, and again later, in between the song of the lead singer? (There is a raspy spoken response to the singer's call that sounds like "dragga-lagga".)
    b. Consider the context and function of a railroad work song, and feel the working-singing pulse while listening to the recording. Tap the finger or pat the hand to the floor, table-top, or lap, or nod the head to the pulse. In another listening, stand up and walk to the pulse in place, around a circle, across the room.
    c. Sing the song with recording, choosing to follow Lead Belly's voluminous "outdoor voice" or responding with the "dragga-lagga" (or "jack-a jack-a")response. Note that the opening seems to be the singer's call to board the train (or maybe to get to work), and sing with feeling the expression of how the work on the track is "about to break my back".

Oh boys, is you right?
Done got right!
All I hate 'bout linin' track
These ol' bars 'bout to break my back

Oh boys, can't you line 'em, Jack-a Jack-a
Oh boys, can't you line 'em, Jack-a Jack-a
Oh boys, can't you line 'em, Jack-a Jack-a
See Eloise go linin' track

Moses stood on the Red Sea shore
Smotin' that water with a two-by-four

If I could I surely would
Stand on the rock where Moses stood

Mary an' the baby lyin' in the shade
Thinkin' on the money I ain't made

d. Clarify that railroad workers who "lined track" were sometimes referred to as "gandy dancers". They straightened the bent tracks (that were later straightened by machines, but certainly not so in the 19th and early 20th century). They also sometimes laid new rail, replaced rotten cross ties, repair tracks damaged by floods. One explanation for their designation was that the movement of their work rhythms seemed to outsiders to look a little like they might be dancing.
e. Play the recording and feel the rhythm of the song, moving to show the pulse and the regular recurring rhythm. Listen and sing the section of call-and-response that sounds "Oh boys, can't you line 'em (dragga lagga)" three times before closing on "See Eloise go linin' track". Turn this section into a live performance of song and dance, with small

group calling, large group responding, and everyone moving together in synchrony to a creative movement imitative of the work of a railroad worker.

Extensions (Optional):
Encourage students to explore further the importance of the railroad in American history, connecting big cities to small towns, transporting people and goods from one location to the next. Entice them to seek out responses to these questions independently or in small groups:

a. How did trains influence life in the 19th century and early 20th century? How do they influence us today?
b. What changes did the railroads make to various groups of American society, including populations by location (American east, south, midwest, west), by race, gender, socioeconomic class?
c. How might trains, like cars, have been a symbol of freedom for African Americans, lower incomes populations, manual laborers?
d. How did train songs function as a particular type of work song sung by laborers on the line? How did these songs serve to distract workers from the endless days of manual work?
e. Can you identify other train songs to sing and to share, by various artists, including those who "covered" (that is, played in their own style) some of Lead Belly's songs?

Assessment: Student will (1) know that train songs were an important part Lead Belly's musical output, (2) understand that train songs were a specific type of work song that allowed laborers to focus on melodies, rhythmic movements, and lyrics rather than the extent of their physical labor, (3) sing train songs in rhythm and in tune, (4) add guitar chords or movements to accompany their singing.

Lesson 3: Gaming-the-Songs (National Standards #1, 2, 6, 8, 9)

- Ha-Ha This A-way: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/ha-ha-this-a-way/african-american-music-american-folk-blues-childrens/track/smithsonian
- Sally Walker: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/sally-walker/african-american-music-american-folk-blues-childrens/track/smithsonian
- Bring Me a Little Water, Silvy: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/bring-me-a-little-water-silvy/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian

1. Before turning to the recordings, discuss the importance of musical play in children's lives. Note that they sing alone and together with friends, and that their songs are typically lively, characterized by kinesthetic activity in gestures and dance movements, and are often game-like in nature. Brainstorm examples of familiar singing games such as "Ring Around the Rosy", "London Bridge", "Apple Tree", "The Noble Duke of York", "Four White Horses", "Bob A Needle", "Sourwood Mountain", "Juba", "Johnny Cuckoo", "A La Rueda de San Miguel", and "Checki Morena". Discuss how some of these singing games can be traced to centuries of singing children, and how they have been transmitted intact or in variation from older to younger generations. Find some examples of long-standing and historic children's playful songs in The Singing Game by Peter and Iona Opie (1985). Discuss how more recent singing games continue to be added to the repertoire, too, such as "The Cup Game".

2. Play the recording of Lead Belly's "Ha-Ha This A-way" http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/ha-ha-this-a-way/african-american-music-american-folk-blues-childrens/track/smithsonian.

Direct student attention to the fact that Lead Belly first recorded it in 1942, but that his memory of the singing game stems to his own childhood in Louisiana in the late 1800s and early into the 20th century.

a. Guide students to listen to the language of the song, especially the repeated lines such as "When I was a little boy, little boy, little boy" and "mama come and got me, she got me, got me", the reappearance of the phrase "Man oh man", and the use of such older words as "whooped" and "preacher". Ask students to reflect on the power of a children's song, that it should have such a long life of (at least) 120 years and still hold the interest of new listeners and learners five generations later.
b. Join with Lead Belly in singing the song.

Ha ha this-a way,
Ha ha that-a way,
Ha ha this-a way,
Man oh man.

When I was a little boy, little boy, little boy,
When I was a little boy 12 years old.
Papa went and left me, left me,
Papa went and left me so I was told.

Ha ha this-a way,
Ha ha that-a way,
Ha ha this-a way,
Man oh man.

Mama come and got me, she got me, got me,
Mama come and got me to save my soul.
Mama never whooped me, whooped me,
Mama never whooped me so I was told.

Ha ha this-a way,
Ha ha that-a way,
Ha ha this-a way,
Man oh man.

I went to school, went to school, went to school boys,
Went to school when I was 12 years old.
I obeyed the rules, the rules, the rules boys,
I obeyed the rules as I was told.

Ha ha this-a way,
Ha ha that-a way,
Ha ha this-a way,
Man oh man.

I went to a teacher, teacher, teacher,
Went to a teacher to save my soul.
Teacher was a preacher, preacher, preacher,
Teacher was a preacher so I was told.

Ha ha this-a way,
Ha ha that-a way,
Ha ha this-a way,
Man oh man.

I liked my lesson, lesson lesson,
Liked my lesson to save my soul.
Wasn't that a blessing, blessing, blessing,
Wasn't that a blessing so I was told.

Ha ha this-a way,
Ha ha that-a way,
Ha ha this-a way,
Man oh man.

c. With one or more guitars strumming a steady pulse of chords, or in twice-as-fast rhythm featuring up-and-down strokes, play the two chords (D and A7, or G and D7) to accompany singing.
d. The song is a ring game, in that singers gather in a circle or "ring". They hold hands and swing their arms to the beat as they sing the verses. A lead singer-mover is at the center of the circle, and at the refrain, he or she invents a movement for "ha-ha this away" and "ha-ha that away"—jumping, hopping, squatting, twirling, popping and locking—which is immediately imitated by all in the circle. (Hands are dropped at the refrain in order to be freed up for any sort of movement that may involve feet, legs, hands, arms, torso, head; hands can be held again in the next verse as the circle-leader selects a new leader who will go to the center.) Play the singing game with full knowledge of the fact that this was one of Lead Belly's favorite childhood songs while growing up on a plantation in Louisiana.

3. Play the recording "Sally Walker" http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/sally-walker/african-american-music-american-folk-blues-childrens/track/smithsonian. Introduce it as a widely known children's singing game, and that Lead Belly had a hand in popularizing it through his children's concerts and recordings in the 1930s and 1940s.

    a. Challenge students to listen carefully to Lead Belly's instructions at the start of how to play the game, followed by his enthusiastic singing. Ask them to listen for and be prepared to explain (or to question) the meaning of "ring" (circle formation of the singers and players), "holler" (yell, or speak loudly and with excitement), "weeping eyes" (tears, from crying), "hankie" (handkerchief, like a Kleenex made of cloth), "fly" (run), "the chair what Sally got out of" (the chair that the lead singer, called "Sally", had been sitting in), "last name's gotta be Walker" (lead singers can be known by their real name, but their last name should always be "Walker"; thus, "Tracy Walker", "Shannon Walker", "Jimmie Walker", "Christopher Walker").
    b. Sing the song with the recording, which begins at 47" following Lead Belly's instructions.

Little Sally Walker, sittin' in a saucer
Weepin' and a-moanin' like a turtle dove
Rise Sally rise, wipe your weepin' eyes
Turn to the east, turn to the west
Turn to the one that you love the best

Little Jimmy Walker, sittin' in a saucer
Weepin' and a-moanin' like a turtle dove
Rise Jimmy rise, wipe your weepin' eyes
Turn to the east, turn to the west
Turn to the one that you love the best

    c. While children's songs need no harmonic accompaniment, a simple guitar strum on D—all the way through (or with a quick pulse of G and A at the cadences) will add the flavor of Lead Belly to the song.
    d. Play the singing game, following the instructions as per Lead Belly's opening description. Some modifications might be in suggesting that the center-circle child sit (or stand) on the floor, use a scarf (rather than a "hankie"), move one direction to the other on "fly to the east, fly to the west", and close hir or her eyes at the end of the verse while spinning around slowly and point their hand out to a new leader.
    e. Encourage students to research the origin of a "Sally Walker", also known as "Little Sally Walker" and "Sally Water". Find variants to the singing game, too, including older and more contemporary renditions.

4. Introduce "Bring Me a Little Water, Silvy" http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/bring-me-a-little-water-silvy/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian as a light-hearted song in its expression but which probably derived from the reality of the singer's request for water while working in the not sun. It was not a children's singing game in Lead Belly's repertoire but a remembering by him of his singing uncle "Bob", a farmer, who would call out to his wife, "Sylvy", to "get his water down there 'cause he's burning up."
    a. Imagine the scene in which this song might have been sung: An open expanse of farmland, a man at the plow, a blazing sun that makes for long and arduous labor, a call for water to quench his parched throat, and the provision of a tall glass of cool water by "Sylvy", the man's wife. Provide questions to facilitate this imagining, and accept students shaping of the circumstances of this work song.

b. Listen to the recording and follow the pulse by providing a four-beat body percussion pattern, “step-clap-snap-clap”.
c. Sing the song with the recording, continuing with the four-beat percussion pattern.

Won't you bring a little water Sylvie
Won't you bring a little water now
Won't you bring a little water Sylvie
Lord, ev'ry little once in a while

Well do you love me Sylvie
Oh do you love me now
Oh do you love me Sylvie
Yeah! ev'ry little once in a while

Well bring a little water Sylvie
Won't you bring a little water now
Won't you bring a little water Sylvie
Lord, ev'ry little once in a while

Won't you bring a little water Sylvie
Won't you bring a little water now
Won't you bring a little water Sylvie
Lord, ev'ry little once in a while

C'mon an' prove it to me Sylvie
Prove it to me now
Won't you prove it to me Sylvie
Yeah! ev'ry little once in a while

Well bring a little water Sylvie
Won't you bring a little water now
Won't you bring a little water Sylvie
Lord, ev'ry little once in a while

d. A two-chord accompaniment on the guitar, featuring just D and A (or G and D), can provide both harmonic and rhythmic support to the singing.
e. Given the many singing games that students may know, challenge them to invent a game that plays out the meaning of the song. They may choose a formation (one large circle, smaller circles, or parallel facing lines) and an activity on the inside or outside of the circle(s) or lines. They may play out the actions suggested by the song. One invention is that students form a circle and move in place to a four-beat “step-clap-snap-clap” pattern. A student plays the main character at the center of the circle, “plowing”. On the fourth line of the verse (or musical phrase), he or she points to another student who enters the circle with an imaginary cup of water. The game begins anew, this time with two players in plowing motion (while the outer circle of students continue to sing and perform the body percussion pattern). At the fourth line, both players point to individuals who move in to “bring them water”. The game ends when everyone is singing and moving their imaginary plows.

Extension (Optional)

Lead students to a further understanding of the importance of singing in human life prior to, or even in spite of, mediated song transmitted by radio, TV, films, and electronic devices. Not only children but also adults have sung through the centuries “because they must”, that is, because it is quite naturally human to sing. They have expressed in songs their joys, good humour, and playful selves (as well as their sorrows, senses of injustice, and solidarity). Invite students to consider individually or small groups why song is an elemental feature of humanity song, of societies and cultures. Guide them in thinking of how singing is necessary for children at play and adults at work and in social occasions, and to reflect upon Lead Belly’s place fostering song and singing where he lived.

a. Do only Grammy-award winning singing stars have the “talent” to sing? Or is singing a part of human nature? Search for the science of singing, and for indications of singing in infancy, when babies develop their capacity to sing and speak very early and young children of two and three years are singing invented songs all their own.
b. Beyond school music classes, what songs do children sing—in your family and neighborhood, in nearby American communities, in Bangkok, Beijing, Berlin, Boston, and

Buenos Aires? Talk with people and pursue online archives to listen to (and learn to sing) songs and singing games of children.

c. Why do people join choirs in churches, communities, and schools? Survey family members and friends to find out why they commit their time to sing together on a regular basis. Look for reasons that include emotional, personal, social, spiritual, and intellectual outcomes, and even physical well-being.
d. During the lifetime of Lead Belly in the southern U.S. of the late 19th century on into the mid-twentieth century, how was singing important to African-Americans? Look for accounts of the deep significance of singing as the sound of African American history and their struggle for freedom, especially in songs like "Oh Freedom", "Keep Your Hand on the Plough" ("Keep Your Eyes on the Prize"), "Every Time I Feel the Spirit", "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot", "Go Tell It on the Mountain", "Steal Away", and "Go Down, Moses".
e. Listen to the larger repertoire of Lead Belly's recorded songs, and find the songs that are fit for children—because they are playful and with game-like qualities about them, and because they may teach children something of an African-American heritage. Put together a playlist of songs that Lead Belly might have performed during his school visits in the 1930s and 1940s.

Assessment: Students will (1) know that children's songs were important to Lead Belly both for remembering his childhood as well as for performing for children, (2) sing the songs of this lesson in tune and in time, (3) experience the social nature of children's singing games by playing them, (4) provide guitar accompaniments to the songs, and (5) recognize that children sing naturally while at play.

Lesson 4: Songs of the Cotton Culture (National Standards #1, 2, 4, 6, 9)

- Pick a Bale of Cotton: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/pick-a-bale-of-cotton/african-american-music-american-folk-blues-childrens/track/smithsonian
- Boll Weevil: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/boll-weevil/african-american-music-american-folk-blues-childrens/track/smithsonian
- Stewball: http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/stewball/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian

1. In the American South in the early part of the twentieth century, many African-Americans worked as poor sharecroppers or farm laborers in the cotton fields of white land owners. Though slavery had been abolished for decades, generations of black men and women descended from former slaves still had little economic opportunity and the Jim Crow laws ensured that they would continue to live the lives of second-class citizens. Thus they were forced to work the most difficult and physically demanding jobs available (like picking cotton ten hours a day, six days on end) for very little wages. In the culture of the cotton fields, African American laborers formed camaraderie and helped each other to get through the long, hot days in the scorching sun by singing about their experience. Many of these songs were discovered and covered by popular musicians in the 1950's and 60's. We are going to explore a few of these songs today.

a. Play the song "Pick a Bale of Cotton" http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/pick-a-bale-of-cotton/african-american-music-american-folk-blues-childrens/track/smithsonian , and then read and reflect upon this quote from Lead Belly: "Now this is when I was around Dallas, Texas, pickin' cotton. I was pickin' a thousand pounds of cotton a day. And the way you get a thousand pounds of cotton a day, you've got to jump around to get it. You can't fool around

and pick a thousand pounds of cotton a day." Invite students to interpret the meaning of Lead Belly's comment. (You have to work hard to pick enough cotton to keep your boss happy and earn enough money to take care of yourself and your family. You can't relax and take your time – you have to hustle!) Do you think a thousand pounds of cotton is a lot? (Yes. Cotton is very light so to pick a thousand pounds you would have to labor from sunrise to sunset.)

b. Play the song again and ask students to keep the steady beat (clapping, tapping their toes, patting laps, etc.). Ask them to consider why this song may have motivated the workers singing it in the cotton fields. (It has a catchy tune, a steady beat, and a positive message of striving for the goal of picking a whole bale of cotton each day). Who is singing the song? (Lead Belly and a male group called the Oleander Quartet)

c. Invite students to sing the song with or without the recording, and with rhythmic energy. Add two-chord harmony on one or more guitars. Once the melody is clearly voiced and in full tune (and at a rather fast tempo), challenge students to add harmony of a third higher or with other pitches that follow the pitches of the two chords.

Great God Almighty gonna pick a bale of cotton
Great God Almighty gonna pick a bale a day
Great God Almighty gonna pick a bale of cotton
Great God Almighty gonna pick a bale a day

Oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day

You got to jump down, turn around and pick a bale of cotton
You got to jump down and turn around and pick a bale a day
You got to jump down and turn around and pick a bale of cotton
You got to jump down and turn around and pick a bale a day

Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day

Me and my wife can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my wife gonna pick a bale a day
Me and my wife can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my wife can pick a bale a day

Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day

Oh me and my gal gonna pick a bale of cotton
Well me and my gal gonna pick a bale a day
Well me and my gal gonna pick a bale of cotton
Me and my gal gonna pick a bale a day

Oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day

Oh me and my buddy can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my buddy can pick a bale a day
Me and my buddy can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my buddy can pick a bale a day

Oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day

Me and my partner can pick a bale of cotton
Well me and my partner can pick a bale a day
Well me and my partner can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my partner can pick a bale a day

Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day

You got to jump down and turn around and pick a bale of cotton
You got to jump down and turn around and pick a bale a day
You got to jump down and turn around and pick a bale of cotton
You got to jump down and turn around and pick a bale a day

Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day

Great God Almighty, I can pick a bale of cotton
Great God Almighty, I can pick a bale a day
I can pick a pick a pick a pick a bale of cotton
I can pick a pick a pick a pick a bale a day

Oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Well oh Lordy, pick a bale a day

d. Returning to the recording to check the tempo and vocal nuances, invite the class to sing in groups to Lead Belly's melody and the harmony of the Oleander Quarter. Consider also adding body percussion to accompany the song, such as clapping on beats one and three.

2. Prelude the musical experience with this question: Have you ever heard of a boll weevil? (Accept various answers) What is the relationship of boll weevils with cotton? Play "Boll Weevil" http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/boll-weevil/african-american-music-american-folk-blues-childrens/track/smithsonian. Discuss the devastating effect to boll weevils as pests that came to the American South from Central America in 1892, and which fed on cotton buds and flowers, reproduced rapidly, and devastated the cotton crops by the 1920s, bringing southern farmers to their knees just before the Great Depression).

a. Challenge students to think about the impact that boll weevils had on African American share croppers and farm laborers who worked in the cotton fields. (If there was no cotton to pick, they had no work, they could not feed their families, some families separated as men sought work elsewhere and often in factories in the north.)

b. Sing "Boll Weevil" along with the Lead Belly recording, and notice the blues sound he voices in the slide of pitches and harmonic progression. Catch the words he uses and compare them to a very different performance of the song by Lead Belly. Compare and contrast the lyrics, and list the various reasons for concern about the boll weevil as well as the response and outcomes of the arrival of the boll weevil to the cotton fields and farms.

(Wah-hoo)
Well the boll weevil and the little black bug
Come from a-Mexico they say
Came all the way to Texas
Just a-lookin' for a place to stay
Just a-lookin' for a home, just a-lookin' for a home
(Doo-doo-wop-wop)
Well the first time that I seen the boll weevil
He was a-sittin' on the square
Well the next time that I seen him
He had his a-family there
Just a-lookin' for a home, just a-lookin' for a home
(Doo-doo-wop-wop)
Well the farmer took the boll weevil
And he put him on the red hot sand
Well the weevil said this is a-mighty hot
But I take it like a man
This will be my home, this will be my home

Well the farmer took the boll weevil
And he put him on a keg of ice
Well the weevil said to the farmer
This is mighty cool and nice
This will be my home, this will be my home
(Doo-doo-wop-wop)
Well if anybody should ask you
Who it was who sang this song
Say a guitar picker from a-Oklahoma city
With a pair of blue jeans on
Just a-lookin' for a home, just a-lookin' for a home
(Doo-doo-wop-wop)

c. Further versions of "Boll Weevil" songs were sung and recorded in the early twentieth century. Many more were recorded in the folk music revival of the 1950's and 1960's, especially by artists such as Burl Ives and Brook Benton. Assign students to search for "Brook Benton Boll Weevil" and "Burl Ives Boll Weevil" (or do this yourself ahead of time), and look also to renditions by Charley Patton, Ma Rainey, and Bessie Smith. Listen to the different versions of the song and compare them to Lead Belly's version. How are they similar and different from one another by way of lyrics, melody, rhythm and tempo, harmony, instrumentation? Discuss how music of oral traditions often changes as it is passed on. Ask students to think of any other examples of songs that have changed in this way over time? (Accept various answers)

3. Play “Stewball” http://www.folkways.si.edu/lead-belly/stewball/african-american-music-american-folk-blues/track/smithsonian , welcoming students to follow the song, its pulse, and its lively call-and response form by snapping their fingers, patting their laps, or tapping their toes on the off-beats (beats 2 and 4) while singing the “hmmm-mmm” response.
    a. Tell students that “Stewball” is an example of a story song that can be traced all the way back to England over 275 years ago! Stewball (or “Skewball”, as he was originally known) was a racehorse that became famous for come-from-behind wins. The legend and the original ballad of the racehorse travelled to America with the English who settled the American south in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it was eventually adapted into a work song by African Americans. Along the way, the song has taken on many different forms and versions. Ask students where Lead Belly’s version of the song is set. (California) Discuss the nature of folk songs that change musical and textual elements, including the very setting of this ballad.
    b. Listen to the recording of “Stewball” again, keep the pulse, sing the response, and follow the story of the racehorse. Discuss the excitement there is in watching a horse come out from behind to take the lead in a race, and relate this phenomenon also to competitions such as marathons and 50-yard dashes.
    c. Note how Lead Belly’s version of “Stewball” was popular with African Americans working in cotton and sugar cane fields. Search for other versions and compare them to Lead Belly’s recording. One recommended version far from Lead Belly’s work song is the slow flow of Peter, Paul, and Mary’s harmonized ballad which they performed and recorded during the period of the folk song revival in the 1960s. Discuss the merits of the work song and ballad renditions.
    d. Ask student why a song about a racehorse would become popular, noting that everyone likes to root for the underdog. In a meaningful way, point out that Lead Belly might have identified with the underdog status of Stewball, as an African American with unequal rights and that he may have longed to experience a “come-from behind” victory in life.
    e. Using the lyrics below, have students sing through the song with the Lead Belly recording. Divide the group into callers and responders, or share the responsibility of the caller so that every phrase is sung by a new solo-caller, followed by a songful group response.

Way out in California
Where Stewball was born
All the jockeys in the country
Said he blew there in a storm

You bet on Stewball you might win, win, win
Bet on Stewball you might win

It was a big day in Dallas
Don't you wish you was there
You would'a bet your last dollar
On that iron gray mare

You bet on Stewball you might win, win, win
Bet on Stewball you might win

When the horses were saddled
And the word was given "go", given "go"
All the horses, they shot out
Like an arrow from a bow

You bet on Stewball you might win, win, win
Bet on Stewball you might win

When that big bell was a-ringing
And the horses was run
And that big bell was a-singing
And the horses did run

You bet on Stewball you might win, win, win
Bet on Stewball you might win

The old folks they hollered
The young folks did bawl
The children said look, look
At that noble Stewball

You bet on Stewball you might win, win, win
Bet on Stewball you might win
You bet on Stewball you might win, win, win
Bet on Stewball you might win

Extensions (Optional):

a. Offer students a chance to play a simple accompaniment on (A) and (E) to "Pick a Bale of Cotton" on guitars, pianos, or xylophones (with open fifths of A and E and E and B). In bringing the song up to speed, ensure that the chords are on the pulse, or every other pulse, so to keep the singing as lively as Lead Belly's rendition.
b. Challenge students to sing the two vocal parts of "Pick a Bale of Cotton", first without accompaniment and then in sync with the instruments.
c. In the spirit of oral-tradition folk music, assign students to write their own verses to "Boll Weevil" reflecting their own imagining of the conversation between the farmer and the boll weevil. In reflection of contemporary threats to American farms, discuss and follow in a song-writing experience the effects of global warming on crops of cotton, wheat, corn, and every other fruit and vegetable.
d. Lead students to create a compare/contrast chart, or to write a brief essay outlining and describing the similarities and differences between Lead Belly's and Peter, Paul and Mary's versions of "Stewball." Using a Venn diagram of two overlapping circles, place in the overlapping center those features that are the same between the versions (the song title, the story, some of the words) and then in each circle note the distinctive features of the verses, melody, harmony, form, and instrumentation of the work song and the ballad.

Assessment: By the end of this lesson, students will (1) be familiar with the history of the cotton culture in the American South during the early twentieth century, (2) sing songs from the cotton culture by ear and from memory, as sung and recorded by Lead Belly, (3) understand the transmission process of oral culture like folk songs, and (4) add body percussion, instruments, and additional vocal parts to further stylize the singing of these songs.