



Smithsonian Folkways

Oh, John the Rabbit: From Story to Song

A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson

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Summary:

Students will learn to appreciate the process of telling a story through song, while learning basic musical skills like rhythm, singing on pitch, and call-and-response format. The featured song is “Oh, John the Rabbit”, a traditional story-song about a Rabbit that steals all the vegetables from the garden. The song and video are performed by Elizabeth Mitchell, her family, and friends. It is from her 2010 album *Sunny Day* (<http://www.folkways.si.edu/elizabeth-mitchell/sunny-day/childrens/music/album/smithsonian>).

Suggested Grade Levels: Pre-K, K-2

Country: United States

Region: North America

Culture Group: American

Genre: Folk, Children’s Music

Instruments: Voice, Rhythm Sticks

Language: English

Co-Curricular Areas: Phonics and Fine Motor Skills (drawing and writing)

National Standards: 1, 2, 8

Prerequisites: None

Objectives:

- Learn how to sing a melody and practice singing on pitch
- Practice keeping a steady beat and copying rhythm
- Learn call-and-response format
- Take musical initiative through singing the “call” part and leading peers in song
- Relate story to song, learning how a song can both tell a story and have a story behind it
- Exercise fine motor and phonics skill with writing and drawing about songs learned

Materials:

- “Oh, John the Rabbit” by Elizabeth Mitchell and family, on the Smithsonian Folkways album *Sunny Day*
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/elizabeth-mitchell/sunny-day/childrens/music/album/smithsonian>

- Rhythm sticks (optional, otherwise can just do hand clapping)

Lesson Segments:

- 1. Sing Me a Story** (National Standards 1, 8)
- 2. Rhythm and Song** (National Standards 1, 2, 8)

1. Sing Me a Story

a. Have you heard?

- i.** Ask students if they have ever heard of John the Rabbit?
- ii.** Play “Oh, John the Rabbit”

<http://www.folkways.si.edu/elizabeth-mitchell/sunny-day/childrens/music/album/smithsonian>

1. You can tell them that Ms. Elizabeth Mitchell is going to sing them the story

- iii.** Have each student share one thing that they learned about the story of John the Rabbit from Ms. Elizabeth’s song

b. Sing along.

- i.** Perform “Oh, John the Rabbit” with the teacher singing the call and prompting the students to sing the response
- ii.** Switch roles and play and sing through the song again with the students singing the call and the teachers singing the response

c. Owning the song.

- i.** Break the class into two and have one half sing the call and the other half sing the response
- ii.** Switch the roles of each group
- iii.** Try to have students sing through the song with and without the recording

Extension: Depending on the skill level of the students, have them either draw or draw and write a caption for or sentence about the story of “Oh, John the Rabbit”.

Assessment: Take note of the students’ ability to pay attention to the lesson, sing on pitch, and follow the call and response structure in order to know what elements to focus on for subsequent lessons.

2. Rhythm and Song

a. Rhythm sticks or hand clapping: simply rhythm exercise.

- i.** Model a simple four beat measure, using numbers for each beat (1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4...)
- ii.** Ask students to clap or play along with rhythm sticks on beat
- iii.** Once they’ve mastered playing on beat, ask them to play every other beat (on 1 and 3, or 2 and 4)
 1. If students are having trouble with keeping the beat have them say numbers or internalize the pulse by walking or stepping in place to the beat

b. Reviewing “Oh, John the Rabbit”.

