

How Are Folk Ballads Being Used in Current Educational Curriculums?

Matthew Patterson

Lakeland University

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The traditional folk ballad can be simply defined as a folksong that tells a story. English ballads date back to the early 1600s. Many of the most well-known folk songs that we recognize are folk ballads (Library of Congress, 2014). These songs can be found in many different music curriculums, but as one who teaches in an elementary music classroom can verify, finding the time to teach a multi-verse song and maintaining the attention of the students can often be a difficult task. Ballads are stories, and stories can strengthen neural networking and retention. Kara Lukin, of the University of Colorado and the Western Governors University in Utah, explains that, “anecdotes facilitate the incorporation of context into pre-existing knowledge and neural networks that enhance retention” (Lukin, 2019). There is an often untapped potential in using ballads to help teach concepts. After thoroughly researching the origins and dissemination of the ballad in North America, I became very curious as to how this style of folk music could be utilized in a classroom setting.

I chose to highlight and review four difficult current elementary music education curriculum series which include: GamePlan, MusicPlay Online, First Steps in Music, and Quaver Music. Each curriculum does not solely feature the ballad, but the ballad is only a relatively small part of the total songs that are used. The First Steps in Music curriculum has the largest collection of ballads of the four sources I have reviewed, with two books that only contain ballads and songs that tell stories. GamePlan had the least number of ballads. I included songs from that curriculum that would normally contain multiple verses. I will answer the same questions for each curriculum: What is the goal of the curriculum? This is asked to help to better understand why the different sources chose to do what they do with their treatment of

the ballads. Which ballads are used? How much of the ballad is used? This is referring to how many verses in general do the curriculums choose to use? Is the story relevant to the lesson? Since a ballad is a song that tells a story, I was curious to see if the defining trait of the ballad played a part in how it was used. What grades are the ballads geared towards? That is to say, which grades are these ballads suggested to be used with? Lastly, I ask how the different ballads are used. The details of the lessons presented are summarized and not listed in complete detail. It is recommended that one purchases the curriculum if one wants the complete lesson.

GamePlan

What are the goals of the curriculum?

“GamePlan is an active music curriculum for children. Organized by grade level and presented chronologically in weekly lessons, GAMEPLAN sequences musical skills and objectives that support the National Standards for Arts Education. As good teaching is diverse, this curriculum is eclectic. It embraces several philosophies, including the principles of Orff Schulwerk and the Kodaly approach to reading rhythm and melody. Folk songs, folk rhymes, and traditional children’s games and dances form an integral part of the repertoire included” (Kriske, 2007).

The main goals of the curriculum towards the educators are to “organize musical objectives in a logical progression that is educationally sound and developmentally appropriate” and “to present the lessons in a concise format that is practical, easy to follow, and user-friendly” (Kriske, 2007).

The student objectives for each unit and lesson include:

Move – explore locomotor and nonlocomotory response in metered and non-metered settings and begin organized dance

Speak – use the voice rhythmically or freely to explore vocal expression

Sing – match pitch independently and within a group

Listen – develop aural recognition

Play – explore the body as an instrument as well as pitched and unpitched percussion

Notate – demonstrate an understanding of the visual representation of rhythm, melody, and form

The lessons are designed to supply material for about 60 minutes of activities per week.

There are no student textbooks for this curriculum. There are sections of the curriculums that use material from Carl Orff's and Gunlid Keetman's first volume of *Music for Children*.

The methodology is similar to Orff Schulwerk in that it emphasizes imitation, exploration, and improvisation before anything is presented visually.

Which ballads are being used?

- *Old Joe Clark*
- *Hill and Gully Rider*
- *America*
- *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*
- *Over the River and Through the Wood*
- *Follow the Drinking Gourd*
- *Skin and Bones*

- *Cumberland Gap*

How much of the ballad is used?

Only one verse for each song is used. Even if the song normally has multiple verses.

Is the story relevant to the curriculum/lesson/activity?

No, this is because the story and text itself is not the focus of the songs. The focus is all based on other musical elements.

What grades are the ballads geared towards?

Ballads and songs that are normally multi-versed were found in grades three through five.

How is the ballad being used?

Old Joe Clarke is used as an opportunity to create and improvise rhythmic ostinato with body percussion and unpitched percussion. This ballad is found in the third-grade lesson book.

Hill and Gully Rider is used as a song to transfer onto barred. It breaks up parts of the song into parts for the various instruments - xylophones, glockenspiels, metallophones, and then all together. They also recommended using this song as an opportunity for students to improvise on the instruments as a response to each playthrough of the song. This is in the third-grade book.

America is used to prepare the dotted half note. They begin by having students pat a pattern of three quarter notes with an accent on the first. This becomes an ostinato used throughout the song. This is recommended for the third grade.

When Johnny Comes Marching Home is accompanied by a dance. This song is in the third-grade curriculum. They recommend teaching the song in phrases by rote first. Then the students sing the song while the teacher plays an accompaniment. These are the directions for the dance:

Formation:	alley
Ms. 1-4	One side of alley marches four steps forward and four steps backward
Ms. 5-8	Other side of alley marches four steps forward and four steps backward
Ms. 9-10	Boys pantomime cheering
Ms. 11-12	Girls turn in own circle
Ms. 13-16	All perform the following:

It is also suggested that an ostinato be added on the hand drums:

Hand drum

March - ing, John - ny come home.

Over the River and Through the Woods is used as a song in which the students can give suggestions to create a movement activity to go with the song. It is also suggested that the teacher can create an additional section that would allow for question/answer patterns using body percussion. This song is within the fourth-grade curriculum.

Follow the Drinking Gourd is used as vocal/recorder repertoire. They suggest teaching it alongside the children's book by the same name and a brief discussion about the Underground Railroad. Student later identify and perform the piece using rhythm syllables, identify the note names, and sing the song with the letter names. The song is also used to identify ties, slurs, and pick up notes. There is also an arrangement for Orff instruments. This song is in the fourth-grade curriculum.

Skin and Bones is found in the fifth-grade curriculum book. This song is closely linked to recorder practice. It suggests starting the lesson by echoing patterns on the recorder using the notes that are mainly used in this song. It then presents the notation and has students follow along. This song also includes an Orff arrangement which uses bass xylophone/metallophone, vibraslap, claves, glockenspiel, recorder, and voice. To help to teach the instrumental parts it is recommended that one uses phrases related to the song that can be transferred to specific instruments.

Cumberland Gap is found in the fifth-grade curriculum book. There is a large Orff orchestration for this song that uses bass xylophone/metallophone, alto xylophone/metallophone, tempo blocks, glockenspiels, and voice. The process of teaching this orchestration breaks down the parts into similar melodic fragments. These parts are song in solfege first before they are put on instruments. Phrases relevant to the song are taught that transfer to specific instrument parts. Students can create an additional improvisation section using questions and answers on the instruments.

Musicplay Online

What are the goals of the curriculum?

“Music Play Online is a versatile teaching tool that encourages active music making in and out of the classroom” (Gagne, 2022). This online curriculum contains pre-built lesson plans and the ability to create your own using their resources and your own. It contains songs and lesson ideas of both the Kodaly and the Orff methods. Each song has a video recording, printable resources, and accompaniment tracks. They also include interactive games and activities for different lessons and units (Gagne, 2022).

Which ballads are being used?

- *Old Joe Clark*
- *Old Blue*
- *The Titanic*
- *Home on the Range*

- *Cockles and Mussels*
- *Scarborough Fair*
- *Greensleeves*
- *Wild Mountain Thyme*
- *Boll Weevil*
- *Clementine*
- *Banks of the Don*
- *Waltzing Matilda*

How much of the ballad is used?

All or most of the verses for each ballad are used. Some are slightly modified from their most familiar versions to be more age appropriate.

Is the story relevant to the curriculum/lesson/activity?

Questions to ask students and discussion ideas related to the story and historical context are part of the “Teaching Suggestions” section of most of the ballads used. In a few ballads in the curriculum, the discussion of the story is the main part of the lesson ideas.

What grades are the ballads geared towards?

The way the ballads and curriculum are structured, most ballads can be used for most grades. Each ballad is presented with a several different concepts that can be pulled from the song for educational purposes, including rhythm, solfege, and other musical concepts. They are

designed in such a way that the ballads can be used to fit a teacher's own sequence. The songs are divided into larger units and weekly lessons, but that does not mean they can't be used out of order.

How is the ballad being used?

Old Joe Clark – MusicPlay recommends teaching this song by rote. There is a short historical context of the song given about the real Old Joe Clark and recommendations to do further research into his life, the time that he lived, and his murder. It includes a simple double circle dance that can accompany the song. One of the concepts of this ballad that is highlighted is singing in two parts. The arrangement adds the second part after each verse. Adding a wooden spoon accompaniment to the song is a fun suggestion that is given. The accompaniment of the song includes an introduction, this ballad provides an opportunity to discuss introductions. There are also cross curriculum ideas for Physical Education, Art, Language Art, History, and Drama.

Old Blue – This song uses a drum s tone set and features the dotted quarter note and single eighth note rhythm. Singing with expression and working with tempo. There are several interactive games and activities provided with this song. An Orff arrangement is also included. As part of the discussion, it is suggested to ask students about pets that they have lost. There are a few ideas given to help facilitate this sensitive discussion. In the recording provided, the last verse about how the boy wanted to be reunited with his dog in heaven is sung at a slower tempo. A question can be asked as to how the story of a song can change the performance of it.

The Titanic – It is recommended to teach this song by rote. Ideas for discussions about the history of the Titanic are given in the lesson. A brief history of the Titanic is also provided. There are echoes in the chorus on the recording provided and the lesson says that students can try to sing the echoes if they want. There is a cross curriculum idea for Science added in the lesson.

Home on the Range – The learning objective for this song is that students will be able to sing a song about cowboys. It is suggested that this song is taught by rote.

Cockles and Mussels – The main concept for this song is expressive singing and how the tempo can help to create additional meaning for the text. This song is suggested to be taught by rote. A discussion can be had about the recording of the performance of this song and why the performer chose to change the tempo when the character in the song died. Other questions can be asked in regard to how changing the tempo can change the meaning of the song. There are several printable worksheets that can accompany this song.

Scarborough Fair – If this is being taught at a sixth-grade level, then students should be able to read the notation for this song. It is a good opportunity to teach or review the tie if the students are reading it. The learning objective for this ballad is “Students will sing a Renaissance folk song”. There is a three-part recorder arrangement for this song that students would be able to perform. It is also suggested that students listen to Simon and Garfunkel’s recording of this

song. A worksheet that deals with note naming and accidentals is provided in the materials of this song.

Greensleeves – Similar to Scarborough Fair, the learning objective for this ballad is that “Students will sing a Renaissance folk song”. This song is meant to be taught by rote. This song provides an opportunity to introduce students to the Renaissance period. There is a two-part recorder arrangement that of this ballad. There is a note naming worksheet that can be used during this lesson.

Wild Mountain Thyme – This ballad is mainly set up as a listening lesson that focuses on the mood of a song. The accompanying worksheet asks students to describe how the different elements of music affect the mood of the song. There is a guitar or ukulele arrangement of this song that can be played with the ballad. It is suggested that the song be taught by rote.

Boll Weevil – The song can be taught by rote. The simple harmonic progression of the song lends it well to create a bass line or to play the chords on Boomwhackers®, barred instruments, or ukuleles. Students could create new verses to the song. If the students have learned the solfege used in the tone set (s,l,tdrm), this song could be used to write the notation. There is a worksheet included in the lesson to do this. As a listening activity, one could have students listen to the provided recording of the song and have a discussion why mariachi music is used in the part of the song where it says, “came from Mexico”. This could include explaining what mariachi music is and why the arranger would have included it at that specific part in the song.

As a cross-curricular activity one could use this song to learn about boll weevils and the boll weevil infestation of 1892-1915.

Clementine – This song can be taught by rote. The background and time period of the song can be discussed as a popular miner’s song during the California gold rush. The two-chord harmony makes it easy to accompany with Boomwhackers®, barred instruments, guitar, or ukulele. This lesson can be used to highlight the dotted quarter note eighth note rhythm using the provided worksheet.

Banks of the Don – It is suggested that one teaches the song by rote. This song is a clear example of a verse-chorus song. It is also a Canadian folk song. It gives the option of teaching about Toronto, Canada and the Ontario province, where the song originated. The recording that comes with this song can be used to introduce or explain different types of voices (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass). The ballad used the chords I, IV, and V and an instrumental accompaniment can be taught and played by whichever pitched instruments are available. One line in the second verse has been changed to make the song school appropriate.

Waltzing Matilda – This being the unofficial national anthem of Australia makes it ideal to introduce students to Australia. This song can be taught by rote. Have student read the lyrics in order to better help them understand many of the words and terms that would be unfamiliar to them.

First Steps in Music/Conversational Solfege

What are the goals of the curriculum?

“First Steps in Music (FSM) is an 8-part curriculum designed to maximize the music aptitude of young children; offer opportunities for young children to develop into tuneful, beatful, and artful adults; and to foster musical independence” (Feierabend, 2019). The eight steps are Pitch Exploration, Fragment Singing, Simple Songs, Arioso, SongTales, Movement Exploration, Movement for Form and Expression, and Beat Motion Activities.

Which ballads are being used?

- *The Fox Went Out*
- *Frog Went a-Courtin’*
- *The Boll Weevil*
- *Cockles and Mussels*
- *Old Blue*
- *Old Joe Clark*
- *The Riddle Song*
- *Risseldy, Rosseldy*
- *Waltzing Matilda*
- Many more included in the books *Book of Children’s SongTales*, and *The Book of SongTales for Upper Grades*

How much of the ballad is used?

All verses in the majority of ballads.

Is the story relevant to the curriculum/lesson/activity?

In First Steps, one could relate the story from one ballad to another song used in a different part of the lesson, but it is not necessary. The song is its own feature and is not related to anything else.

What grades are the ballads geared towards?

Teachers should sing the ballads for K-1, by 2nd grade and beyond it is up to the teacher's discretion whether to have students sing part or all of a ballad.

How is the ballad being used?

One of the primary purposes of ballads or "songtales" is for the teacher to model expressive singing so that the students will gain the ability to sing expressively themselves. It is noted that these songs can be learned by upper elementary students but should only be sung to the lower grades. Another reason for using songtales is that it creates an atmosphere in which a bond can be formed between the teacher, the students, and the song itself. John Feierabend saw that story songs fit with the goal of teaching children to be "artful". "The purpose of SongTales is to develop expressive sensitivity through listening [...] Modeling artistic behavior is the most effective means of teaching artistic behavior" (Feierabend, 2018).

To accompany the curriculum books, Feierabend included audio recordings of the songtales sung by Jill Trinka to help teachers better learn the songs themselves.

Students should hear the ballad several times before being invited or asked to sing it themselves. Many of the songtales have been made into books in partnership with art students from the University of Hartford in Connecticut. These books include large illustrations, notation, and a link to a recording of the song. It is recommended that teachers wait to use these picture books with students until they have simply listened to the teacher sing them a few times first.

Feierabend suggests using the SongTales at the end of a lesson because it creates an environment that can be calming for many students – “a mood of hushed wonder” (Feierabend, 2019).

Tips for singing SongTales:

- Memorize and practice them before sharing them
- Be an expert, engaging storyteller
- Do not sing with rhythmic precision
- Sing unaccompanied
- It is okay if students begin singing the refrain after a while, but don't sing with them
- Present each SongTale in at least four lessons

QuaverEd

What are the goals of the curriculum?

Quaver Music was founded in 2009. Their main goal is to “enrich the lives of children”. The curriculum is designed to help children gain the skills, knowledge, and mindset for them to be successful citizens in and out of the classroom. The curriculum contains “over 6,500 culturally diverse, interactive resources” (Mastran, 2022). The songs use practices from various methodologies including Orff, Kodaly, and M.L.T.. There are recorder and ukulele lessons. There are interactive scores and videos on a large variety of musical topics (Mastran, 2022).

This is a fully web-based curriculum. Each song contains multiple interactive slides and pages. These include a page with the lyrics of the song, an interactive notation page that provides a visual to follow along with a recorded arrangement, and several other activities and supplemental materials.

Which ballads are being used?

- *Down in the Valley*
- *Erie Canal*
- *Home on the Range*
- *Old Joe Clark*
- *Old Blue*
- *Clementine*
- *Risseldy, Rosseldy*
- *Waltzing Matilda*
- *Red River Valley*
- *Frog Went a Courtin’*

How much of the ballad is used?

The ballads used include most if not all verses with only minor changes to make the text more age appropriate.

Is the story relevant to the curriculum/lesson/activity?

The story of the ballad is briefly touched on in a few of the ballads. The background or contextual information are included more often in each lesson.

What grades are the ballads geared towards?

The recommended grades range from kindergarten to the fifth grade.

How is the ballad being used?

Down in the Valley – It is recommended to use this song with third to fifth grade. The key concepts are to teach the dotted half note, a full major scale, and the AB/strophic form. Along with the lyrics and notation, this song includes a visual map of the song, and a rhythm and solfege activity. There is a discussion question provided about this song and other folk songs are used in media (TV, movies, etc.).

Erie Canal – This song is found in the third to fifth grade curriculum. The main concepts for this song are single eighth notes, ties, a “swing feel”, chromaticism, home tone Ia, and options for cross-curriculum lessons. There is one activity that compares different versions of this song and

asks students to compare the versions using different elements of music. There is a page in this lesson that teaches what a folk song is and how oral tradition kept folk songs alive. This song also includes a formal assessment with questions concerning the musical topics taught within this lesson.

Home on the Range – The key concept of this song is the dotted half note. There is an activity page to help teach the concept of the dotted half note. There is a page which discusses the historical background of this song.

Old Joe Clark - The key concept is the dotted eighth sixteenth note. There is a page where students are able to select different instruments that are used in the provided recording and then select the correct rhythm that matches what the selected instrument plays. There are two other activities that relate to the dotted eighth sixteenth note, one of which allows the students to create a new song using select rhythms. The song *Going Down to Boston* is paired with this lesson.

Old Blue – The main teaching concepts in this lesson are the quarter note, paired eighth notes, and the half note. It also includes the solfege syllables dmsd'. The recommended grades for this song are second through fourth grade. This lesson includes the same page about folk songs and oral tradition that was used in the *Erie Canal* lesson.

Clementine – The key concepts for this song are octaves, quarter notes, dotted quarter notes, and eighth notes, and a meter of three. This song is in the third-grade curriculum. There is a discussion question about nicknames that first explains the use of the word “Darling” in the song, and then asks if anyone else has a nickname. The folk song and oral tradition page is once again used in this lesson.

Risseldy, Rosseldy – This song is used in the fifth and sixth grade curriculum. The key concepts are the 6/8 meter, low la and low sol, and the dotted quarter note and eighth notes. There is a rhythmic dictation page for this ballad.

Waltzing Matilda – The recommended grade for this song is kindergarten. The key teaching elements are the octave, melodic motion by steps and skips, quarter note, dotted quarter note and eighth note, a swing feel, and the form of an intro-AA-outro. There is a page in this lesson that teaches about Australia since this is an Australian folk song. The swing feel of the song invites the students to sway with the music. This swaying feel is connected to *The Blue Danube* and the page has information about Johann Strauss II. An activity is included that allows students to hear the song performed in different musical styles.

Red River Valley – The main concepts to be taught are the quarter note, half note, and dotted half note. The melodic concept is the low sol. This song is found in the fourth-grade curriculum. The page on folk songs and oral traditions is included again in this lesson. A cross-curricular

activity is included asking students to paint their own landscape inspired by the valley landscape described in the song.

Frog Went a Courtin' – The grades recommended for this song are kindergarten through the fourth grade. Main concepts that are focused on are eighth and sixteenth note combinations, the tone set of s,l, drm sl, and the concept of song stories. Apart from the folk song and oral tradition page there is also a page that includes an instrumental orchestration based around the song. This activity uses words and phrases from the song to help teach the three-part barred instrument arrangement.

Comparisons

When comparing the different curriculums, one will notice that there are many shared songs. Nine of the twenty-six ballads that I included were found in more than one curriculum. This only takes into account the ballads that I have reviewed in this paper and does not include all of the ballads that are included in the two SongTale books from the First Steps in Music series. *Old Joe Clark* was the only ballad that is found in all four curriculums, with *Waltzing Matilda* and variations of *Old Blue* included in three of the four series.

The lesson ideas for the songs found in GamePlan are mostly focused on Orff-related extensions. They often use improvisation and creation techniques such as creating ostinatos and improvising new words to create a new section. GamePlan and MusicPlay Online were the only curriculums that included multi-part Orff arrangements. Quaver Music does include a three-part barred instrument arrangement for *Froggy Went a Courtin'*, but that was the only

one in that curriculum. MusicPlay Online had the most amount of lesson extensions for the recorder; most of which are multi-part recorder arrangements.

MusicPlay Online featured the most amount of discussion questions. Nearly every ballad used has a prompt for a discussion about the context of the song. Quaver music also includes a number of discussion ideas, but several resources are repeated in multiple songs. One example of this is the webpage about the definition of folk music and oral tradition. That page is used in at least three different ballads.

With the exception of *Follow the Drinking Gourd* found in the GamePlan curriculum, the ballads in First Steps in Music are the only ones that are accompanied by an illustrated children's book.

GamePlan is the only curriculum that does not include audio examples of the songs it uses. A speculation of the reason why is that since it does not use more than a single verse of any song, listening to recordings is not one of the main focuses of how the songs are used.

In how the curriculums focus on rhythmic elements, Quaver Music has the most resources on rhythmic practice whereas in terms of solfege practice, both MusicPlay Online and Quaver Music are nearly tied.

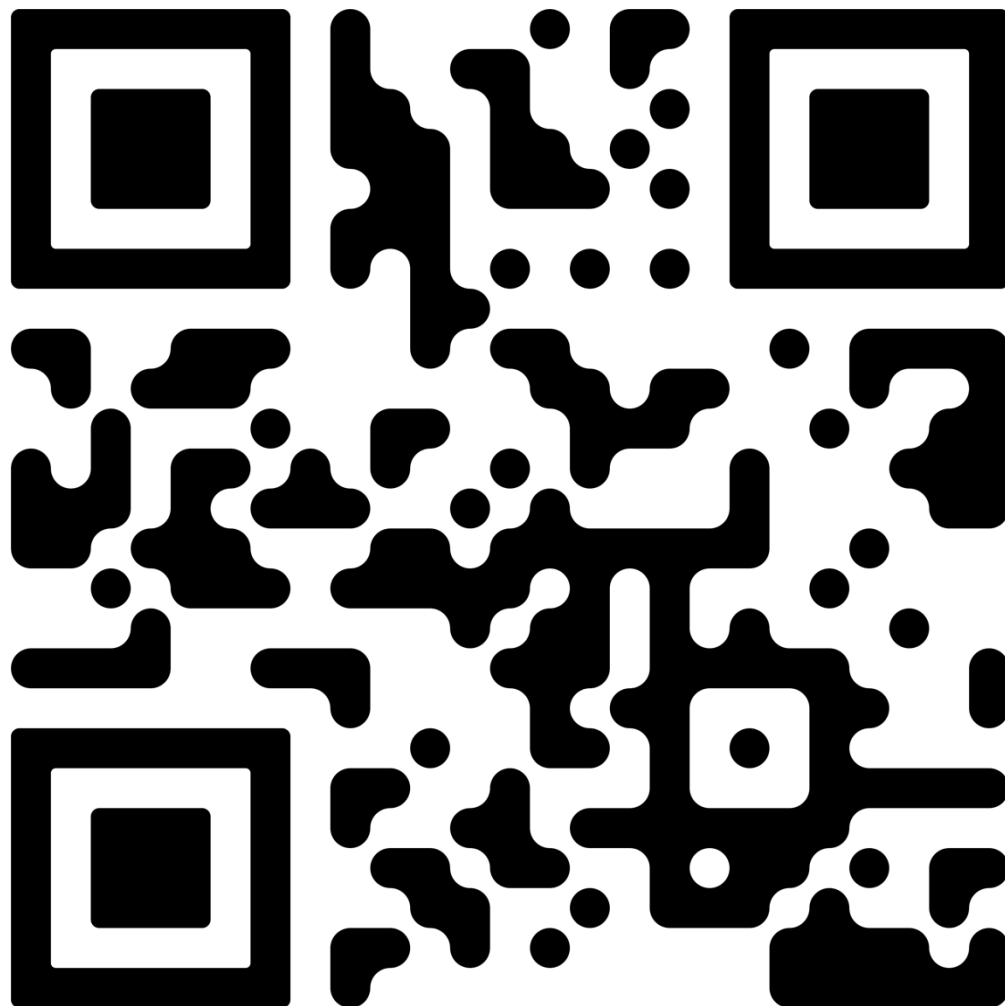
Conclusion

Before I began this study, I had thought that these curriculums would offer very little ideas on how a ballad could be utilized in the elementary. I could not have been more wrong. After closely examining each of these curriculums, each one has proven to be of worth for any music teacher in any style of music training they follow. There are examples of how to use

ballads to help teach rhythm, solfege, form, and various other musical concepts. There are many opportunities for students to play instruments along with the ballads, and to provide students with a variety of listening lessons with diverse learning outcomes. Not only do ballads and their stories help build stronger neural networks and retention, but they also can be used to teach many of the standard musical concepts that we seek to teach.

Appendixes

The attached QR code leads to a chart that compares the findings of the curriculums covered in this paper and the ballads used. It also includes ballads that I have used in another portion of this thesis.



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