



**CMP General Music Plan**  
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**Title:** John Kanaka  
**Composer:** Unknown Sea Shanty  
**Instrumentation/Voicing:** Unison singers

**Source:** Making Music – Grade 3 – Silver Burdett 2005

**This plan was designed for Grade 3.**

## **ANALYSIS**

**Broad Description:** Traditional

**Type/Genre:** Sea Shanty

### **Background:**

This song is a 19<sup>th</sup> Century halyard sea shanty sung on ships sailing the Pacific Ocean. Shanties were work songs sung by sailors who needed to work in unison as they hauled lines.

There are several kinds of sea shanties each fitting a different type of task on the ship. John Kanaka is a halyard shanty, sung while sailors pulled on ropes to raise heavy sails. The shanties were often call and response songs. The leader would sing out a call and the sailors would sing the response in unison as they did their work. It took a long time to raise the sail so they paused to catch their breath, get a better grip, enabling the group to coordinate their efforts and make the most of their next pull. Often, this pause was incorporated into the song.

Unfortunately, in the 1700's and 1800's whaling ship owners convinced many desperately poor Polynesian Islanders to "rent" their young men as ship workers. Often, the young men never returned home and their life was closer to slavery than to being an employee. These young men traveled the world and often ended up in Canada, Australia or the northeastern states of the United States. "Kanaka" was a generic term referring to Hawaiian men or boys. The same word is found in New Zealand with only a slight change in the Maori language – tangata.

The earliest published version of **John Kanaka** in **Ministrelsy of Maine: Folksongs and Ballads of the Woods and the Coast** (1927) written by Fannie Hardy Eckstrom (1865-1946) and Mary Winslow Smyth (1873-1937). In the book the shanty is entitled TOO-LI-AYE. It was collected in August 1925 from a Captain Creighton, in Thomaston Maine. Captain James A. Creighton was born in 1821 in Maine and was a master mariner but later retired from the sea and returned to Thomaston to build ships in a shipyard. By the time of his death in 1893 two of his sons, John H. Creighton and Charles A. Creighton, had joined him as partners in the family ship building business. It is presumed that one of these descendants gave the song to Mary Winslow Smyth. It could also have been one of the Creighton grandsons, Charles William Creighton who followed in the family business.

### **Elements of Music**

Form: Strophic - Verse and Refrain. (AAB form) Call and Response song.

Although the children's version only shows one verse, this song typically had many verses. You can hear the variety of verses on different recordings. Possibly each crew had their favorite verses or the caller would sometimes make up verses to keep the crew listening and interested as they worked together on a boring task. The B section features the fermata where there is a forced slowing of the beat. Possibly this was to give the sailors time to pause and breathe or possibly to get everyone pulling again at the same rate.

Rhythm: The meter of this piece is 2/4. It includes eighth notes, quarter notes, dotted quarter notes and half notes. The main rhythmic patterns include dotted quarter and eighth note patterns, even quarter note patterns, and eighth notes in groups of four patterns. The song begins with an eighth note pickup. There is also a fermata in the second measure of the refrain.

The steady beat of the song is prominent in many work songs. It was a way of helping workers to move all on the same beat. This song seems to use the eighth note followed by a dotted quarter note to emphasize the importance of the downbeat. The use of this pick up note on the call section emphasizes the first beat of many measures and creates the impetus to move on the first beat of each measure. My guess is that if the song were all quarter notes it would be less interesting for the workers and the even rhythm of just quarter notes would have made it more difficult to pull together firmly on the first beat of each measure.

Melody: Most of the melody moves up or down by 3rds. The ends of phrases 1 and 3 move up by step. The ends of phrases 2 and 4 repeat the pitch and then move down by step. The first phrase of the refrain moves by 3rds with the exception of one interval of a 4<sup>th</sup>. The second phrase of the refrain moves up or down by steps except for a few repeated notes. The verse consists of 4 four bar phrases and the refrain consists of 2 four bar phrases.

All of the call phrases that are sung by the leader end on MI as if the caller is anticipating an answer to his call. The responding phrase ends on DO as if the crew is giving the answer to the leader's call. The melody is constructed so that it seems as if the caller is telling the crew that there is work to be done on the first line and the crew responds with the answer that they are doing what he has requested them to do. The third melody contains a fermata that is positioned over high DO. This stop in the beat and emphasis on the highest note of the song creates a sense of suspense and then anticipation for the next set of calls. It possibly had a functional purpose as well for the sailors to catch their breath or to readjust their grips as the work during a long and heavy task. It might have also been used for the crew to fasten down a rope or adjust a pulley in the process. Then the last phrase seems to settle into the same pattern as if to say "OK, we have had a tiny break but there is still work to be done."

Harmony: The harmony of the entire piece is based on I, V, I except for phrase 5. Phrases 1,2,3,4, and 6 all follow the I, V, I pattern. Phrase 5 stays on the I chord. Phrases 1 and 3 (question phrases) ends on MI. Phrases 2, 4, 6 ends on DO. Phrase 5 ends on SOL as it is part of the I chord.

This children's version has probably added the harmony chords that are listed in the song. The harmony may have been added also when this song was actually written down after years of being sung accapella. There were seldom any instruments to accompany sea shanties. On sailing ships, there are drawings of sailors playing concertinas but they probably were used mostly for songs that were sung in the evenings and not when they were hauling ropes.

The melody does outline some of the chords though. The entire song is based on triads that hint that if it were accompanied the harmony would be I, V, I. Another indication is on the MI-RE-DO pattern at the end of the response phrases that seems to indicate I, V, I.

Timbre: Unison Voice

Texture: The texture is monophonic in this version. The call section is for single voice. The response sung by many voices bringing a sense of teamwork. Shanties were originally sung a cappella. It is possible that this song could have been homophonic depending on the ability of the crew to sing in harmony.

In the school performance of this piece the students will experience additional texture by adding a percussion background.

Expression: When used as a work song, rhythmic accuracy and a strong feeling of the pulse are important. Emphasis should always be on the downbeat because it is the place where the workers would have moved together. The expression should be of strong singing with medium to loud dynamics.

**Heart Statement:**

The heart of “John Kanaka” is the strong steady downbeat and continuous rhythmic drive that is the driving force behind the team work of the sailors as they are hoisting the sails. Only the fermata breaks the rhythmic flow in order for the sailors to pause to catch their breath as a team and prepare for the next set of steady beats that accompanies their next pulls on the halyard ropes.

## **MUSIC SELECTION**

I sang this song as a child. Each year that I teach it to my students, I have watched the excitement and enthusiasm that students feel when they perform this song. Its emphasis on teamwork is especially appealing. The teamwork that is needed for the dance, the percussion accompaniment and the composing project creates the opportunity to connect to the larger world of work and the history of the teamwork needed on the sailing ships. The song is accessible in range and rhythmic complexity for third graders.

Reasons to Perform this Song:

- to perform a sea shanty that is part of our American heritage
- to perform the rhythmic patterns that are in simple duple meter.
- to perform a traditional children’s dance derived from a sea shanty

Things to teach in this song:

- History of sea shanties
- Identify a fermata
- Read duple rhythm patterns
- Read simple melodic patterns
- Call and response
- Composing opportunity
- Steady beat

## **TEACHING PLAN** **(Outcomes, Strategies, Assessment)**

**Introducing the Piece:**

1. Children come into the room hearing the song on a CD and looking at a picture of a sailor and a sailing ship on the screen. If you have a guest male singer who can perform this live that is even better. Have a pile of ropes on the floor.
2. Listen a second time and have them pat the first beat of each measure.
3. Show slides of history and background.

4. Pretend to actually be a sailor pulling a rope to raise a large sail into place. Possibly have students pull a heavy box across the room with ropes. Explain that this is a work song and that sailors used music to help them pull the ropes.
5. Imitate the call and response by having the students sing the response section with the teacher singing the call section.

### **Skill Outcome**

**The student will perform, audiate, and recognize the notation for patterns in duple meter containing dotted quarter notes, eighth notes and quarter notes.**

National Standard # 1 – Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

Revised National Standards – Performing – Anchor Statement #5: Develop and refine artistic practice for presentation.

#### **Skill Strategies:**

Dance strategy:

1. Warmups for dance – Use some of the actions from the dance in the warmups
2. Dance activity – learn children’s dance that is a tradition in children’s music

Percussion strategy

1. Warmups for percussion score - Echo warm ups of previously learned rhythm patterns using rhythm words and movements.
2. Warmups for percussion score - Echo warm ups of new rhythm pattern of dotted quarter notes and eighth note patterns.
3. Dotted Rhythms – Flashcard Smash – Have four children each hold a flashcard that has an eighth note on it. Have the first two students combine their eighth notes and give them a quarter note to hold jointly. The third child gets to smash up his flashcard until all you can see is the dot. Last child stays the same. Read rhythms.
4. Rhythm tray cards - rhythm cards to visually teach the patterns. Show previous cards with eighth note patterns and quarter note patterns. Use tray cards that illustrate how this dotted quarter note/eighth pattern is really the first note and last note of a group of 4 eighth notes. This visual tray card has the rhythm words listed below the notes. Repeat these using your voice with the rhythm words and clapping. Practice the new rhythm using other movements if necessary.
5. Percussion Score –
  - a. Read rhythms in the song as a class from the notation using rhythm syllables.
  - b. Play percussion score with accurate rhythms.

#### **Skill Assessments:**

1. Assessment during percussion score playing. Use class check off sheet to notate which students are playing rhythms correctly. I only notate those who are playing the new rhythms so that I can assess a few at a time. This works if you assign instruments and focus on only 4 or 5 students who are playing the dotted eighth-sixteenth patterns. I note this on the seating chart that has their pictures on it. Rotate your students so that everyone has a chance to play every instrument. This gives you the ability to assess every student in a small group.
  - a. + = proficient accuracy

- b. = emerging (minor mistakes)
  - c. - = needs improvement.
2. Dance – Use class check off sheet to notate which students are performing the dance movements with accuracy in the same manner as stated above.
  3. Student evaluation of rhythm accuracy with a fist to five assessment (5 being high and fist being low) for overall performance for both percussion score and dance.

### **Knowledge Outcome**

**The student will identify and define the functions of notational symbols that interrupt steady tempo (fermata, ritardando, accelerando etc), and explore their effects on the performance of a song.**

National Standard # 5: Reading and notating music.

Revised National Standards – Responding – Anchor Statement #7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

#### **Knowledge Outcome Strategies:**

1. Ask students to raise their hands when they hear the music hold for longer than usual. When does the steady beat stop for a moment?
2. Ask students why they think the sailors needed to stop there? (They needed to catch their breath, adjust their grip and concentrate on using their strength for the next pull)
3. Have the class sing the song with and without the fermata in order to discover its effect.
  - a. How does this change the work that is being done?
  - b. How does this change the way that the team works together?
  - c. Do you think that the sailors would like this change? Why?)
4. Have students choose another place to put the fermata in another place in the song.
  - a. Ending? How does this change the song? Would it help the work that they were doing?
  - b. Beginning? On the word “heard” – What does this placement of the fermata change the song? Would it help the work? Why would the caller have the fermata at the beginning? How does it change the work?
5. What’s the feeling if we just stopped and were silent before going on? Try it.
6. What’s the feeling of not stopping at all? Try it.
7. Look at the music score and identify what musical sign tells us to hold this note.
8. Why do we need a musical symbol to create this sound or absence of sound?
9. What would happen if we sang the song with a ritardando? (rit.) How does that feel? How would it affect the work?
10. What would happen if we sang the song with an accelerando? (accel.)How does that feel? How would it affect the work?
11. Show that there are also musical abbreviations for these two musical directions as well.

#### **Knowledge Outcome Assessment:**

1. Worksheet of a variety of music symbols (repeat signs, fermata, time signature, dynamic markings. Circle the fermata on another piece of music check point sheet.
2. Worksheet of another song that contains the symbols and students identify them.

## **Affective Outcome**

**The student will explore their own experiences with music that motivates them to work together as a community.**

National Standard #9 – Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Revised National Standard #10 – Connecting – Synthesize and relate personal experiences to make music.

### **Affective Outcome Strategies:**

1. The students will create a group song that will demonstrate how a steady beat can help groups of people work together to accomplish a common task.
2. Discussion of other instances at home when their family uses music to help them do a boring task. (music for exercising, music for raking or mowing the lawn,) Make a list of observations.
  - a. Why don't people sing work songs together anymore? What has changed in our lives? People used to sing songs like "Drill Ye Tarriers, Drill or I've Been working on the railroad, Day O! Banana Boat loaders song, Zum Gali Gali, etc.? Why don't we sing songs like these?
3. Discussion of other instances in their community where music helps a community to do things together. Make a list of observations. (school events, clean the school grounds day, parades for celebrations, Imagination Celebration, Waunafest)
4. Did we create a community of dancers at the beginning of our study? How did it feel? What parts of the music and the dancing created that feeling?

### **Affective Outcome Assessment:**

1. Performance of group songs.
2. Student description of their songs and what musical concepts they used and why.
3. Class discussion.

## **RESOURCES**

Sea Shanty History - [http://www.thepirateking.com/music/shanty\\_types.htm](http://www.thepirateking.com/music/shanty_types.htm)

John Kanaka History - [http://www.shanty.org.uk/archive\\_songs/john-kanaka.html](http://www.shanty.org.uk/archive_songs/john-kanaka.html)

John Kanaka history - <http://www.thepirateking.com/music/johnnykanaka.htm>

Youtubes (appropriate for kids)

picture of square sailing ship - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcxZm2WwipA>

dance – Grade 3 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vuwrk4bTxr8>

dance - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYHZFsFFQTc>

Sailors singing - [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qxXfh2mfQk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qxXfh2mfQk)

(note on this one – it does have the verse, you wish to Christ you'd never been born)