

Extension Activities for Australia Day and Waltzing Matilda

For use with the Australia Day/Waltzing Matilda lesson found in the January/February 2009 issue of Music Express (Volume 9, No. 4)

SCIENCE CONNECTIONS

Didgeridoo and Acoustics. Make a didgeridoo or experiment with Boomwhackers. If desired, plan a day for the class to make an elementary didgeridoo. Visit the website www.didjshop.com to see how an authentic didgeridoo is made. You can also experiment with Boomwhackers and other large tubular items to attempt to imitate the didgeridoo sound. The children may enjoy hearing and seeing some of the experimental instruments made by “PDQ Bach.” Of course, nothing substitutes for the real thing, but it can be fun trying! Explore the effect of length and diameter on pitch and the effect of material on timbre by making elementary didgeridoos using tubes of various lengths, widths and materials. Older students may enjoy the section on didgeridoo physics.

Marsupials and Biology. Ask students what makes an animal a marsupial? (One distinctive feature is the pouch in which they carry their young.) Find pictures and information on various kinds of marsupials, such as the koala and kangaroo. Coordinate this lesson with a field trip to the zoo, if possible.

Billabongs, Geography and Bernoulli’s Principle. Explore how oxbow lakes are created in nature. Simulate the actions of water current on soil in a bend by setting up a miniature example in the classroom using a bowl, water and sand. Find oxbow lakes around the world. Locate on the globe or world map the countries where these oxbow lakes are found. See the Wikipedia website regarding Bernoulli’s Principle for more information.

ABOUT THE SONG, WALTZING MATILDA

“Waltzing Matilda” is so well-known and important to Australians that it even has its own museum (the Waltzing Matilda Centre in Winton, Queensland)! Although “Advance Australia Fair” is the real national anthem of Australia, odds are that “Waltzing Matilda” is heard even more often. Some people even call it the second national anthem! It was written by Banjo Paterson in 1895 and has had slight changes and variations over the years. There are many opinions on its meaning, origins, etc. Anyone wanting the “full scoop” may refer to Matthew Richardson’s thorough research compiled in the book *Once a Jolly Swagman: The Ballad of “Waltzing Matilda,”* published by Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2006.

The general story is of an itinerant worker who camps by a lake, starts his water boiling and catches a sheep for dinner. Suddenly a man who claims to own the sheep comes with three troopers to arrest him. He overreacts by drowning himself. Legend has it that his ghost haunts that area.

Many of the key nouns in “Waltzing Matilda” are native to Australia. A few are used in other English speaking countries. Their meanings are as follows:

Swag — an old-time version of the modern backpack. A swagman would keep everything he traveled with wrapped in a thick blanket that also served as his bed. The swag was sometimes called a “Matilda.”

Swagman — a man who worked his way around the country or traveled to find work. He got this name because he carried a swag. The Australian swagman was similar to the American hobo.

Waltzing — possibly derived from the German phrase “auf der Walz” referring to the German custom of spending three years and one day traveling to learn a trade. The traveler would work with masters in his chosen profession, sometimes in many different villages. Some believe it means to dance with your matilda, or swag. If this is the case, a dance form in 4/4 would have been more accurate!

Matilda — three possible meanings:

- 1) a woman’s name. Since the swagman traveled alone, this may have been his imaginary companion.
- 2) Others say it was an early German soldier’s term for a coat.
- 3) a swag.

Billabong — a lake created when a bend in a meandering river is gradually closed off by the results of erosion. This is the same as oxbow lakes in other parts of the world, so named because of distinctive U shape, like the yoke placed on an ox’s neck.

Coolibah tree — a type of eucalyptus tree.

Billy — a small kettle or can for boiling water.

Jumbuck – a sheep. There is some speculation that since this was a wild sheep that would be difficult to shear and that it was unlikely that it actually belonged to the squatter. Sheep with owners are typically tame and regularly sheared. If that is the case, then the swagman was falsely accused.

Tucker — food. Thus a “tucker bag” is a food sack.

Squatter — someone who settled land. When Australia was settled by the British, it was similar to when America was settled. No one bought the land at first. They just started living on it, clearing it, farming it and raising animals on it. Gradually it came to be theirs.

Thoroughbred — a well-trained horse with an official pedigree or “papers.”

Troopers — police.

A FEW OTHER SONGS REPRESENTING AUSTRALIA

Depending on how in-depth you wish to go with your unit on Australia, and how much time you have available, you may enjoy singing or listening to these songs:

“Advance Australia Fair” — the official national anthem of Australia.

“Sing Australia” — a song by John Denver that does an excellent job of describing the variety of culture and history found in Australia. Words are available online. It is recorded on four of his albums.

“Kookaburra” — a well-known round about a bird native to Australia. It is a member of the kingfisher family and has a distinctive laugh.

“Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport” — a popular, somewhat humorous song by Rolf Harris, which mentions notable Australian animals such as kangaroo, wallaby, cockatoo, and koala. Various lyrics and renditions are available on online.