

Classroom Activity—Wisconsin & the Fur Trade

Voyageur Song & Canoe Activity

Objective: Students will learn about voyageur songs and practice singing and rowing in a canoe. Students will work together to make sure their ‘canoe’ doesn’t tip over! Then students will discuss the challenges of rowing together.

Materials:

“Alouette” Song Sheet

Alouette song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2gw6V1adkc>

Backstory:

The word “voyageur” means “traveler” in French. The voyageurs were an important part of the Fur Trade because they transported the furs and trade goods by canoes. Voyageurs were known for their strength, endurance, and incredible speed. They worked long hours at a very dangerous job and were expected to paddle 14 or more hours a day at a furious pace (45-55 strokes per minute). At that rate, a crew could cover about 100 miles a day! To keep a rhythm for their paddling, voyageurs sang a variety of songs. Singing also helped to pass the time and made the work seem lighter.

Voyageurs sang of simple things and events. They were fond of songs about wind, weather, spring, and love. Many of the songs favored by the voyageurs have been passed down to our era. And perhaps you may know the song below! *Alouette* is the French word for “lark” and it informs the lark that it will be plucked by the singer!

Activity:

- Review the backstory with your students.
- Split the students into two groups. One group will sit in a row in the ‘canoe’ (their chairs or a defined space on the floor). The other group will sing along with the song to help keep pace.
- Play the song *Alouette* once through so the students can feel the beat.
- Have students figure out what side they are rowing and inform them that if they are off beat and not rowing in unison, they could tip the ‘canoe’ over!
- Play the song again and have the students in the canoe row to the beat of the song.
- Have the groups switch so everyone gets a chance to sing and row.
- When everyone has had a turn, discuss the challenges of ‘rowing’ as a group
 - Was it difficult to find the beat of the song? How did singing help you row?
 - Do you think you could do this all day, like the voyageurs?
 - What songs would help you keep the beat to row 100 miles a day?
- You can try with other songs, too!

ALOUETTE

Voyageur Song

Alouette, gentille alouette,
Alouette, je t'y plumerai.
Alouette, gentille alouette,
Alouette, je t'y plumerai.

Je t'y plumerai la tete (x2)
Et la tete, et la tete
Alouette, alouette, oh!

Alouette, gentille alouette,
Alouette, je t'y plumerai.
Alouette, gentille alouette,
Alouette, je t'y plumerai.

Je t'y plumerai le bec (x2)
Et le bec, et le bec,
Et la tete, et la tete
Alouette, alouette, oh!

Alouette, gentille alouette,
Alouette, je t'y plumerai.
Alouette, gentille alouette,
Alouette, je t'y plumerai.

Je t'y plumerai le cou (x2)
Et le cou, et les cou,
Et le bec, et le bec
Et la tete, et la tete.
Alouette, alouette, oh!

Alouette, gentille alouette,
Alouette, je t'y plumerai.
Alouette, gentille alouette,

Alouette, je t'y plumerai.

Je t'y plumerai le dos (x2)

Et le dos, et le dos,

Et le cou, et le cou

Et le bec, et le bec

Et la tete, et la tete

Alouette, Alouette, oh!

Alouette, gentille alouette,

Alouette, je t'y plumerai.

Alouette, gentille alouette,

Alouette, je t'y plumerai.

Je t'y plumerai lq queue, et la queue(x2)

Et le dos, et le dos

Et le cou, et le cou,

Et le bec, et le bec

Et la tete, et la tete

Alouette, Alouette, oh!

Alouette, gentille alouette,

Alouette, je t'y plumerai.

Alouette, gentille alouette,

Alouette, je t'y plumerai.