

STUDY GUIDE



SONGS FROM THE PLAYGROUND

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WRITTEN BY

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JAZZY ASH ALBUMS

Ready!
Home
Bon Voyage
Swing Set
Good Foot
Sing Together w/ Red Yarn

MUSICALS

NORTH: The Musical
Ordinary Folks **coming soon**

MYSTERIES ON AUDIBLE

Viva Durant & The Secret of the Silver Buttons - *National Best Seller*

Viva Durant & The Madness of Madame Bouchard

Viva Durant & The Mystery at the Masquerade Ball

REBEL GIRLS: AUDIO STORIES

Maya Angelou: Maya's First Job
Leah Chase: Creating With What You've Got

MEET THE ARTIST

HEY THERE! I'M ASHLI ST. ARMANT

I'm a vocalist, a songwriter, an author and a playwright. I like to make music & experiences that families can share together.

I'm a big history & culture nerd and I love learning about the traditions of children, especially their songs and games - also known as playground songs! Come with me to take a look at the global history of this style of music making. We'll discover what music traditions we all share, and maybe make up some playground songs of our own!



LISTEN UP!

You can find many of the songs from this study guide on my album, Songs from the Playground, made exclusively for Yoto Play



• THE LANGUAGE OF PLAY

Folk music is a term we use to describe music created by ordinary folks – regular people, just like you and me – to reflect on the personal experiences of a community or culture.

Folk music is important because it tells the story of our past, like a musical history book. While textbooks often tell a limited and sometimes skewed version of history, children's songs, rhymes and games give us some of the most honest accounts of times past.

Does your family or community have traditional songs that they sing during special events like weddings or birthdays? Those are folk songs. Or have you ever made up a song while you were cleaning, walking the dog, or hanging out with your friends? That's folk music too!

Children's songs fit comfortably in the definition of folk music. **Children's songs** – songs created by children for children – have been recorded as far back as the 16th century and find origins in every corner of the world and in every language.

For centuries, maybe even millennia, children huddled together on sidewalks, playgrounds and open fields have been using songs, rhymes games to express themselves and create community.

Do you know a folk song or a children's song? Do you remember how or where you learned it?



Edwin Rosskam - 1941

OUR HISTORY

WHY WE SING

and clap!

THE FIRST GENERATIONS OF BLACK PEOPLE IN AMERICA came by force from several countries in West Africa. They were required to leave their families, communities, and physical belongings behind. But their cultures were not forgotten.

Even though they found themselves in a dangerous, new world, these West Africans still found ways to share language, culture, and traditions from their heritage through music and song, even without musical instruments.

Through singing, powerful stories, and intricate hand-clapping rhythms, the new Americans were able to keep their traditions alive – and create new ones.

SINGING WITH PURPOSE

Over the last 400 years, hand-clapping rhythms have been an important part of the Black American folk music tradition, from lullabies to love songs, from spirituals in the church to the choruses of field workers.

For example, “I’ve Been Working On The Railroad” is a traditional worker song, and its rhythm is meant to encourage steady working. If you know it, sing and clap along.



I'VE BEEN WORKING ON THE RAILROAD

*I've been workin' on the railroad,
All the live long day.
I've been workin' on the railroad,
Just to pass the time away.
Can't you hear the whistle
blowing?
Rise up so early in the morn.
Can't you hear the captain shoutin'
"Dinah, blow your horn?"*

*Dinah, won't you blow,
Dinah, won't you blow,
Dinah, won't you blow your horn?
Dinah, won't you blow,
Dinah, won't you blow,
Dinah, won't you blow your horn?*

PATTIN' JUBA

Juba - also known as "**Hambone**" - is a uniquely African-American rhythmic dance style where the dancer/musician uses the hands, feet and body as a percussion instrument. Juba can trace its origins to West African musical clapping traditions and is said to be the foundation of tap-dancing.

ACTIVITY:

Use your hands and body to make up a rhythm. Body sounds can include clapping, snapping, tapping your cheeks or chest, slapping your thighs and and even stomping.



DID YOU KNOW?

Congo Square is an open-air space in New Orleans, Louisiana. For centuries, enslaved and free people of color gathered here every Sunday to make music and dance. It is considered to be the birthplace of jazz. To this day, Congo Square remains a sacred place to share culture and build community.



THE TRADITION CONTINUES...

ON THE PLAYGROUND

Oral tradition is a practice of sharing art, culture and knowledge by word of mouth (saying it out loud), not writing it down. Songs, stories and traditions can be passed down through generations and across cultures, without the requirement of the ability to read, write or play an instrument.

In this way, America's playgrounds have long been a rich environment for the invention of these kinds of songs and games. Over the last century especially, school children of all backgrounds commonly combine clapping with singing for storytelling and sharing knowledge. Here is a list of some of our favorites:

- Miss Mary Mack
- Down, Down Baby
- Sevens
- Concentration 64
- Little Sally Walker
- Draw Me A Bucket of Water
- Shoo Turkey, Shoo
- Pizza, Pizza Daddy-O
- Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear
- Little Johnny Brown
- She'll Be Comin' Round The Mountain

How many of these songs or games do you know? Can you teach one to a friend?

VARIATIONS

Sharing songs and rhythms in the oral tradition almost always leads to lots of variations of any one particular song. These songs and their lyrics often evolve according to region, industry, and even climate. It's like playing a giant game of telephone!

CASE STUDY

Let's take a look at the playground song "**Miss Mary Mack**", for example.

Fill in the blanks with the lyrics that you learned for this song.

Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack
All dressed in black, black, black
With _____
_____ down her back
She asked her mother, mother, mother
For _____ cents, cents, cents

To see the _____
_____ the fence, fence, fence
They jumped so high, high, high
They touched the sky, sky, sky

And they _____ came back, back, back
_____ July, -ly, -ly

Compare your lyrics to your neighbor's. Are they the same? My guess is... not exactly!

• LET'S GET THE RHYTHM

DO IT YOURSELF

The best part about playground songs is that anyone can create them! So why not make up your own? Here are some ideas to keep in mind:

- Use the lyrics to express your feelings about something, or to tell the story of an experience you've had
- Make it fun, or better yet ... funny!
- Add some clapping rhythms or dance moves
- Try it out with a friend



ADD JUMP ROPE!

Jumping rope is a fun and challenging way to get the rhythm in your body. Some playground songs were created specifically as jump rope games. Try it!

What you'll need:

- 3 people
- 1 long jump rope **or** 2 two long jump ropes of equal length for "double dutch"
- A jump rope song!

Instructions: Two friends hold the end(s) of the rope and turn them in rhythm. The third friend stands between them, jumping every time the rope hits the ground and performing the movements in the lyrics.

Example: "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear"

Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch the ground Teddy bear, teddy bear, wave up high Teddy bear, teddy bear, wink one eye Teddy bear, teddy bear, bend your knees Teddy bear, teddy bear, flap in the breeze

Teddy bear, teddy bear, climb up to bed Teddy bear, teddy bear, rest your head