Folk music relies heavily on oral tradition but this often results in the natural evolution of the original music over time. This can cause a melody to absorb different characteristics because of the oral tradition but the geography of the United States also contributes regional elements that can greatly change American music traditions. As students explore the material it will be clear how this tradition has shaped the direction and resulting styles by providing historical background and settings of the original hymn tune *Will The Circle Be Unbroken*.

**OUTCOMES**

After studying this material, students will be able to:

- Describe the history of the song and its roots.
- Compare and contrast the different music traditions used in the arrangement by Moore.
- Understand the oral tradition and its effect on music.
- Identify the musical form of this arrangement and how the sections interact.
- Compare and contrast the lyrics and literary meaning of the text.

**Wisconsin’s Model Academic Standards for Music**

This curriculum guide corresponds with the following Model Academic Standards for Music:

**Music Performance:**
- Singing - A.4.1-2, A.4.5
- Instrumental - B.4.1-2, B.4.4-6

**Music Creativity:**
- Improvisation - C.4.1, C.4.4
- Composition - D.4.1-3

**Music Literacy:**
- Reading and Notating - E.4.3, E.4.4

**Music Response:**
- Analysis - F.4.1-6
- Evaluation - G.4.1-3
Music Connections:
The Arts - H.4.1-2
History and Culture - I.4.1-5

BACKGROUND
The American hymn tune Will the Circle Be Unbroken first appeared in a 1908 Gospel song collection. In 1935 it was reworked by the Carter Family and then experienced a renaissance in 1972 when the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band released it on an album. The 2011 arrangement for choir by J. David Moore combines the bluegrass and gospel traditions utilized in the earlier settings.

GETTING STARTED
Before exploring the historical settings of the hymn tune Will the Circle Be Unbroken it is necessary to first become familiar with J. David Moore’s arrangement as performed by the 2012 WSMA High School State Honors Treble Choir. Students should view the video and complete the following activities.

I. The Musical Recipe: Just like a recipe to make cookies requires several ingredients, the same is true of music. Watch the video of the full performance and then describe the musical recipe by doing the activities as listed:
   A. Melody: Students should draw the contour of the melody with his/her finger in the air.
   B. Harmony: Students should describe the character of the harmony in terms of major or minor by using comparable descriptive words.
   C. Rhythm: Students should keep the beat with the music.
   D. Tone Color: Describe the tone colors heard and how they are different and how they are the same.
   E. Form: Assign a shape (circle, square, triangle for ex.) to each section to visually recognize sections.
   F. Expression: Draw the contour of the volume on paper and assign different colors to each volume level.

II. Folk Music and the Oral Tradition
   A. Have the class sit in a circle.
   B. The leader should whisper a phrase to a student in the circle.
   C. Each student should then whisper the phrase to the next student.
   D. When the phrase arrives at the last student in the circle, have that student say the phrase.
   E. Compare the final phrase to the original phrase. What did you discover?
   F. Discuss how the same thing happens in folk music and think of examples where this has occurred.

III. Musical Shape
   A. Draw the contour of the song on the board or poster as performed by the treble choir. Identify the highest point and the lowest point and identify where in the song these occur.
   B. Listen to just the opening of the three performers and draw the contour of each line.
   C. How does the shape of the music affect you as the listener?

IV. The Same But Different: Throughout the last hundred years this song has been performed by several different
performers each one having its own personality.

A. Find different pictures of the same subject of something that the class is familiar such as the town/city, principal or teacher. Compare how the different pictures are the same and different. Consider how the person that took the picture captured different ideas in the same subject.

B. Now listen to other performances of the same song as listed here and describe how the music is the same but different.

1. Nitty Gritty Dirt Band Setting (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcIMeqX6pXM)
2. Carter Family Setting (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjHjm5sRqSA)
3. Ralph Stanley Setting (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U06gfP8Si9s)

C. Now take a contemporary song that is familiar to students (such as The Star Spangled Banner or other well known song) and listen to different settings. Talk about how the same song can sound different and the same.

V. The heartbeat of the music: Music has a pulse just like people. While listening to Will the Circle Be Unbroken or other rhythmic song use the following activities:

A. Determine if the song is in duple or triple meter by keeping the beat. Try to use the opposite meter and discuss the feeling of going against the pulse.

B. Walk, dance or tap the pulse with the music. Use any movement possible.

C. Using rhythm instruments develop an accompaniment to the song. Incorporate as many different lines as possible.

GOING DEEPER

Using information gathered from previous activities it is possible to synthesize choices made by the conductor, composer, lyricist and arranger.

VI. Choose a folk song from another country and compare different settings from different times and geographical areas of that country. Compare the resulting contrasts between the folk song from the other country and an American folk song examined earlier. Answer the following questions:

A. How does geography and regional culture impact the folk songs selected?

B. How do the two folk songs from the two countries differ? How are they the same? Does the geography and demographics of the country affect the evolution of folk songs?

VII. The conductor of the treble choir staged the song in a very specific way to achieve a specific musical effect. Discuss the staging used in the performance and then view the video clip Forming the Circle. Answer the following questions:

A. How does the staging enhance the performance?

B. How would a different staging affect the performance?
C. Why do the performers hold hands?

D. Sometimes the smallest change can impact the feel of a song greatly. An example of this is the use of clapping with the beat in this arrangement of *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*. Sing a song that is rhythmic in nature first without clapping and then with clapping. What is the effect when the clapping is added? Now try clapping in the middle of the song. When is the best time to start clapping in a song? The beginning or the end and why?

VIII. Using rhythm instruments or student made drums complete the following musical activities using the hymn tune *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*.

A. Accompany the melody in as many ways as possible using as many devices as possible.

B. Try setting a melody utilizing three different tempos and/or meters.

C. Use different timbres to orchestrate the melodic material as synthesized in the above activities.

D. Compare and contrast the results by considering how changing the elements of the music can change the style of the music. Also discuss why a composer or arranger might choose one compositional technique rather than another.

MAKING CONNECTIONS - CROSS CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:
Music is often a reflection of the times and the region of origin. The following activities are intended to make connections with other curricular areas and broaden the understanding of the life and times of the people that created and/or sang it.

IX. Social Studies/History/Geography - Research the list of people/musical styles and place them on a map of the United States and also on a linear historical timeline. Be sure to include historical events occurring in the United States, the world and the region of each person.

A. Composer – Charles H. Gabriel
   1. Where was he born?
   2. Where did he live?
   3. What were his occupations?

B. Lyricist – Ada R. Habershon
   1. Where was she born?
   2. Where did she live?
   3. What were her occupations?

C. Arranger – J. David Moore
   1. Where was he born?
   2. Where does he live now?

D. The origin of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band or the Carter Family
   1. What is the geographical origin of the group?
   2. Where in the United States did the group perform?
   3. What era was the group most popular?

E. Musical Genres
   1. Where does Bluegrass predominantly exist?
   2. Where does Gospel predominantly exist?
   3. Where does Country predominantly exist?
   4. What is a hymn tune and how is the genre used?

F. Compare and contrast the geographical data with the historical data and answer the following questions:
1. Is one part of the U.S. represented more than another?
2. Are the historical events evident in the musical styles?
3. What conclusions can be drawn from the information?

G. Compare and contrast the people living in the areas identified on the map and discuss the following:
   1. What were the social and economic issues of the time?
   2. What issues faced each region?
   3. What changes with each version of Will the Circle Be Unbroken?

X. Literature – Research the lyrics as poetry and consider how the words reflect the time of writer. Discuss the following as a group.
   A. How does the music bring the words to life?
   B. What connections must a lyricist make with the music?
   C. How do words affect rhythm, meter and time?

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS:

XI. Exams and Questioning
   A. Utilize traditional exams and quizzes
   B. Engage in knowledge-based games

C. Engage in teacher/student discussion

XII. Utilize aural exams discerning the different musical styles
   A. Writing Exercises
      1. Write a descriptive essay
      2. Complete answer based essays
      3. Write a narrative based on activities
      4. Engage in a written dialogue with the arranger
      5. Write a biography based on the composer, lyricist or arranger

B. Retelling the Story/Discussion
   1. Engaging in role-playing activities
   2. Sharing observations to people outside of the class
   3. Connecting with other students studying the same material

C. Projects/Products
   1. Create a poster, video, presentation or portfolio
   2. Create a comparison chart of the different settings of the same song
   3. Create a comparison chart of a song from the United States and another country
   4. Arrange a simple melody into three variations