

## **Lesson I: Sea Chanteys**

“A good song was worth ten men on a rope.”

Note to teachers: You can purchase a copy of this CD by calling the Education Office at (415) 292-6664 or listen online at [www.maritime.org](http://www.maritime.org)

### **Purpose:**

We encourage your class to learn several of the sea chanteys in this section before your voyage. Over the course of the voyage you will have the opportunity to sing chanteys as you are doing work. If you learn only one sea chantey, please learn “Leave Her Johnny Leave Her,” which your class will sing as you leave the ship.

In addition to learning and singing chanteys, you might map the places mentioned in the lyrics and talk about the distances that sailors traveled, or you might try to write your own modern-day chantey (for cleaning your room? Doing the dishes? Taking care of your baby sister?).

### **CA State Standards:**

Gr. 4: VPA 2.1, 3.1, 3.3.

Gr. 5: VPA 2.1, 3.1, 3.3.

### **Materials:**

CD and CD player or computer with speakers and Internet access,  
Copies of the chantey lyrics you will be learning (see lyrics at the end of this lesson).

### **Introduction: (10 minutes)**

Before you introduce the lesson, let students hear one or more of the chanteys you’ll be learning together. Perhaps it will be playing as the students walk into the room or transition from another activity. You can either play a chantey from the CD (see note above) or from the Internet.

Once the students have heard the chantey/s, ask them what they noticed about the music they just heard. Brainstorm a list on the board. If students haven’t already guessed, you can add the title “Sea Chanteys” to the list they have brainstormed.

### **Background: (10 minutes)**

Using the following background information, give your class some context for the traditional songs they will be learning.

To the sailor, a chantey was as much a part of the tools used on a ship as a capstan, heaving line, or a block and tackle. Just a century ago, the hard and heavy work was done by people, not by machines. Chanteys were used to make these jobs easier. Jobs like raising sail or weighing anchor were too hard for one person to do. The only way to accomplish the job was for many sailors to work together. Chanteys helped the sailors to do just that. Chanteys coordinated the work by getting 10 or 20 sailors, or the entire crew to work together rhythmically. This made the work more efficient and easier for everyone. Having the best voice did not always make you the best chantey man (lead singer). The most popular chantey men were those who knew the most songs and who could improvise, changing the words and rhythms to fit the task or the crew.

And what did the sailors sing about? They sang about things they knew. They sang about their homes and loved ones, past experiences, their ship and crew, the ports they visited and what they would rather be doing than hauling on a line!

There are four main types of chanteys. Each is suited to a different type of shipboard task. You can tell the types apart by their rhythms. The rhythm for each type of chantey fits the purpose for which the chantey was used.

- **The Halyard chanteys** were used to haul up the heavy yards and sails. The crew would haul only on the chorus and then only on one or two specific words. This gave them a chance to rest in between hauls.
- **A Short Haul chantey** was sung when only a few short pulls on a line were needed. The sailors usually pulled only on the last word in the line.
- **The Capstan chanteys** were sung during continuous activities, such as weighing anchor (raising the anchor) or loading and unloading cargo. They sounded like marching songs, because that is what the sailors were doing: marching around a capstan. \*
- **Fo’c’sle chanteys** were sung in the forecastle (Fo’c’sle) during the sailors’ leisure time. These songs usually told stories. They were rarely used for work because they did not have a strong enough rhythm.

\*A capstan is a barrel shaped device. Long oak bars, known as capstan bars, were fitted into slots around the capstan, like spokes of a wheel. Men would walk around the capstan, pushing against the bars. This would make the capstan turn. As the capstan turned, the line attached to it would wind around the center, thus raising whatever was attached to the end of the line.

Learning the Chanteys: (10-20 minutes each day, until you learn them!)

Some teachers have asked each crew to learn a chantey and then to teach that chantey to the class. Others learn the chanteys together. Either way, repetition is the key.

Closing: (3 minutes)

Ask students to grade themselves as a group each day on their performance—you might even assess several categories such as volume, memorization, and melody. Keep practicing until everybody agrees that the class has deserves an “A” in each category!

Extension:

Have each crew make up a new verse to one of the chanteys. You can have them all make up verses to the same one, or let them pick which chantey they want to make up a verse to. The verse should be something that they can sing on the trip, so make sure that it is time-period appropriate! Students can perform for the class and teach other crews their verse as well.

**Away for Rio** -This song was used as a capstan or windlass chantey, usually for taking in the anchor. It was often the first song sung as the ship was getting underway, which is reflected in the lyrics. You can picture the sailors' lady friends standing on the pier listening as the sailors sing "Goodbye to all of you ladies of town..." The Rio Grande they are singing about was not the river in Mexico, but the "Rio Grande do Sul" in Brazil.

### **1. Away for Rio**

Well a ship went to sailing over the bar  
Away for Rio She's pointing her bow towards the  
Southern star and we're bound for the Rio Grande

**CHORUS (And it's) Away, boys, away, Away for Rio Sing fare-thee-well my Frisco girl and we're bound for the Rio Grande**

Well now, heave with a will boys heave with a song  
Away for Rio And we'll sing the chorus for  
it is a good song

**CHORUS (And it's) Away, boys, away, Away for Rio Sing fare-thee-well my Frisco girl and we're bound for the Rio Grande**

Now the anchor's on board and the sails are all set  
Away for Rio The girls we are leaving, we'll  
never forget And we're bound for the Rio Grande

**CHORUS (And it's) Away, boys, away, Away for Rio Sing fare-thee-well my Frisco girl and we're bound for the Rio Grande**

We're a jolly good ship with a jolly good crew  
Away for Rio We can stick to the coast though  
we're danged/lost if we do And we're bound for the Rio Grande

**CHORUS (And it's) Away, boys, away, Away for Rio Sing fare-thee-well my Frisco girl and we're bound for the Rio Grande**

Well it's good by to Sally and good by to Sue  
Away for Rio And It's good by to all of you flash  
packets\*, too And we're bound for the Rio Grande

**CHORUS (And it's) Away, boys, away, Away for Rio Sing fare-thee-well my Frisco girl and we're bound for the Rio Grande**

And it's good by to all of you ladies of town  
Away for Rio  
**We've left you enough for to buy a silk gown**  
And we're bound for the Rio Grande

**CHORUS (And it's) Away, boys, away, Away for Rio Sing fare-thee-well my Frisco girl and we're bound for the Rio Grande**

\*Packet – very fast type of sailing ship used to carry mail.

**John Kanaka** -This was a “long haul” chantey, used at the halyards for hoisting up the sails. Many Hawaiians worked aboard ships that sailed the Pacific, and were renowned for their excellent seamanship. English-speaking sailors often had difficulty pronouncing their names, however and so called them by the Hawaiian name "Kanaka," which means "Hawaiian Man." The lyrics "tu lai-e" also come from the Hawaiian language, and are a remnant of the chantey singing tradition of combining the music and language of different seafaring cultures.

## **2. John Kanaka**

I thought I heard the First Mate say **John Kanaka naka, tulai e** You’ll work tomorrow, but not today **John Kanaka naka, tulai e**

**CHORUS tulai e, oh, tulai e, oh John Kanaka naka, tulai e,**

I thought I heard the old man say **John Kanaka naka, tulai e** Today, today is a sailing day **John Kanaka naka, tulai e**

**CHORUS tulai e, oh, tulai e, oh John Kanaka naka, tulai e,**

We’re outward bound from Frisco Bay **John Kanaka naka, tulai e** We’re outward bound at the break of day **John Kanaka naka, tulai e**

**CHORUS tulai e, oh, tulai e, oh John Kanaka naka, tulai e,**

It’s rotten meat and weevily bread **John Kanaka naka, tulai e** In two months out you wish you were dead **John Kanaka naka, tulai e**

**CHORUS tulai e, oh, tulai e, oh John Kanaka naka, tulai e,**

I thought I heard the Bosun say **John Kanaka naka, tulai e** It’s one more pull and then belay **John Kanaka naka, tulai e**

(Make up your own verses...)

**Paddy Lay Back** -This call-and -response chantey was usually sung at the capstan. A skilled chantey man could make up lyrics on the spot, altering the song to be about the crew and the adventures of their particular ship. The lyric "Take a turn around the capstan, heave a pawl refers to the "pawls' that were hinged metal pieces at the base of a capstan. They would prevent the capstan from spinning backwards by settling into a series of holes around the capstan's base.

### **3. Paddy, Lay Back**

It was a cold and dreary morning in December (**December**) and all of me money it was spent (**spent, spent**) Where it went to, I can't remember (**remember**) so down to the shipping office I went (**off I went**)

**CHORUS Paddy lay back, (Paddy lay back) take in your slack (take in your slack) take a turn around your capstan heave a pawl. About ship's stations, boys be handy (Handy!) We're bound for Valparaiso 'round the horn**

Well it seems there was a great demand for sailors (**for sailors**) For the colonies, and for Frisco and for France (**France, France**) Well, I shipped aboard the limey barque the Hotspur (**the Hotspur**) and got paralytic drunk on my advance (**my ad-vance**)

**CHORUS Paddy lay back, (Paddy lay back) take in your slack (take in your slack) take a turn around your capstan heave a pawl. About ship's stations, boys be handy (Handy!) We're bound for Valparaiso 'round the horn**

Well, I joined her on a cold December morning (**morning**) a-flapping of me flippers to keep me warm (**keep me warm**) With the south cone hoisted as a warning (**a warning**) to stand by the coming of a storm

**CHORUS Paddy lay back, (Paddy lay back) take in your slack (take in your slack) take a turn around your capstan heave a pawl. About ship's stations, boys be handy (Handy!) We're bound for Valparaiso 'round the horn**

Well, I woke up in the morning stiff and sore (**sore**) and I knew that I was outward bound again (**bound again**) and a voice come a-bawling at the door (**door**) Lay aft men, and answer to your name (**to your name**)

**CHORUS Paddy lay back, (Paddy lay back) take in your slack (take in your slack) take a turn around your capstan heave a pawl. About ship's stations, boys be handy (Handy!) We're bound for Valparaiso 'round the horn**

Now it was on the quarter deck when first I seen 'em (**seen 'em**) such an ugly bunch I never seen before (**seen before**) cause there was a bum and stiff from every quarter (**quarter**) and it made my poor old heart feel sick and sore (**sore, sore**)

**CHORUS Paddy lay back, (Paddy lay back) take in your slack (take in your slack) take a turn around your capstan heave a pawl. About ship's stations, boys be handy (Handy!) We're bound for Valparaiso 'round the horn**

**(Alabama) John Cherokee** -This is another halyard chantey. The type of rhythm and the lyrical content indicate that slaves in the West Indies or in the Gulf states originally sang this song. In fact, when John Cherokee is referred to as an "Indian man," it probably means he was from the West Indies. Sailors might have learned the song from freed slaves who joined the ship's crew or from black waterfront workers in the Southern states. It depicts the brutal treatment that many men faced at the hands of the captains and mates.

#### **4. Alabama John Cherokee**

Well, this is a story of John Cherokee **Alabama John Cherokee** He was an Indian man from Miramashi **Alabama John Cherokee**

**CHORUS waayy haay oh Alabama John Cherokee**

Now John Cherokee was an Indian man **Alabama John Cherokee** They made him a slave down in Alabam' **Alabama John Cherokee**

**CHORUS waayy haay oh Alabama John Cherokee**

Well, they put him aboard a whaling ship **Alabama John Cherokee** And again and again he gave them the slip **Alabama John Cherokee**

**CHORUS waayy haay oh Alabama John Cherokee**

Well, they caught him again and they chained him tight **Alabama John Cherokee** And they put him in the hold without any light **Alabama John Cherokee**

**CHORUS waayy haay oh Alabama John Cherokee**

He had nothing to eat and nothing to drink **Alabama John Cherokee** Until his bones began to clink **Alabama John Cherokee**

**CHORUS waayy haay oh Alabama John Cherokee**

Gave him nothing to eat and nothing to drink **Alabama John Cherokee** Until he dropped dead at the Captain's feet **Alabama John Cherokee**

**CHORUS waayy haay oh Alabama John Cherokee**

And now his ghost, it can be seen **Alabama John Cherokee** Sitting on the main truck, all slimy and green **Alabama John Cherokee**

**CHORUS waayy haay oh Alabama John Cherokee**

At the break of dawn he goes below **Alabama John Cherokee** And that is when the rooster crows **Alabama John Cherokee**

**CHORUS waayy haay oh Alabama John Cherokee**

**Roll the Old Chariot** -This is another chantey that originated as an African -American spiritual. It was often used as a "stamp-and-go" or a "walk away" chantey, meaning the sailors would hold on to the line and walk with it, creating a steady pull. This was used on the ship's braces, which swing the yards around. It was also used at the Downtown Pumps, the giant flywheels which resemble the wheels of a chariot. The song was also popular on shore, and has been used as a Salvation Army hymn and a "pep song" at baseball games.

## **6. Roll the Old Chariot Along**

And a drop of Nelson's blood wouldn't do us any harm, a drop of Nelson's blood wouldn't do us any harm, a drop of Nelson's blood wouldn't do us any harm, **and we'll all hang on behind**

**CHORUS And, we'll roll the old chariot along, we'll roll the old chariot along, we'll roll the old chariot along and we'll all hang on behind**

And a plate of Irish stew wouldn't do us any harm, And a plate of Irish stew wouldn't do us any harm, And a plate of Irish stew wouldn't do us any harm, **and we'll all hang on behind**

**CHORUS And, we'll roll the old chariot along, we'll roll the old chariot along, we'll roll the old chariot along and we'll all hang on behind**

Oh, a nice fat cook wouldn't do us any harm...

**CHORUS And, we'll roll the old chariot along, we'll roll the old chariot along, we'll roll the old chariot along and we'll all hang on behind**

Oh, a nice watch below wouldn't do us any harm...

**CHORUS And, we'll roll the old chariot along, we'll roll the old chariot along, we'll roll the old chariot along and we'll all hang on behind**

Oh, a good night ashore wouldn't do us any harm...

**CHORUS And, we'll roll the old chariot along, we'll roll the old chariot along, we'll roll the old chariot along and we'll all hang on behind**

Make up your own verses!

**Strike the Bell** -The lyrics of this tune refer to the practice of keeping "Bell Time." The sailor's workday was divided into shifts of 4 hours on duty and 4 hours off. Every half-hour the mate would mark the time by ringing the ship's bell, adding one more strike with each half hour. This culminated after four hours with eight bells being rung, signaling the shift change, a moment the sailors waited for enthusiastically. This was the sailor's version of a 19th century music hall song called "Ring the Bell Watchman," by Henry C. Work, a popular song writer of the time.

## **9. Strike the Bell**

Up on the poop deck, walking all about there stands the 2nd mate, so sturdy and so stout what he is a'thinking, he don't know himself and we wish that he would hurry up and strike, strike the bell

**CHORUS strike the bell 2nd mate and let us go below look well to windward, you can see its going to blow looking at the glass, you can see that it fell and we wish that you would hurry up and strike, strike the bell**

Down on the main deck, working on the pumps is the poor larboard watch wishing for their bunk looking out to windward you can see a mighty swell and we wish that you would hurry up and strike, strike the bell

**CHORUS strike the bell 2nd mate and let us go below look well to windward, you can see its going to blow looking at the glass, you can see that it fell and we wish that you would hurry up and strike, strike the bell**

Down in the wheelhouse, Old Anderson stands grasping at the helm with his frost bitten hands looking cockeyed at the compass, but the course is clear as, ...well.. and we wish that you would hurry up and strike, strike the bell

**CHORUS strike the bell 2nd mate and let us go below look well to windward, you can see its going to blow looking at the glass, you can see that it fell and we wish that you would hurry up and strike, strike the bell**

Well, down in his cabin, our gallant captain stands looking out the transom with a spyglass in his hands what he is a-thinking, we all know very well he's thinking more to shorten sail then striking the bell

**CHORUS strike the bell 2nd mate and let us go below look well to windward, you can see its going to blow looking at the glass, you can see that it fell and we wish that you would hurry up and strike, strike the bell**



**Sally Rackett (Haul 'er Away)** -This is a short haul chantey, meaning the crew would pull one time on the chorus. The pull came on the word "Haul." The song is said to be from Jamaica or Barbados.

**10. Sally Rackett**

oh, little Sally Rackett **haul 'er away**  
she shipped aboard a packet **haul 'er away**  
and she never did regret it **haul 'er away**  
oh, holly -hi-o **haul 'er away**

Oh, little Patty Baker **haul 'er away**  
She ran off with the Quaker **haul 'er away**  
cause her mom couldn't shake her **haul 'er away**  
oh, holly -hi-o **haul 'er away**

Oh, little Fluffanana **haul 'er away**  
she slept on a banana **haul 'er away**  
now she can't play the piana **haul 'er away**  
oh, holly -hi-o **haul 'er away**

Oh, little Kitty Carson **haul 'er away**  
she ran off with the parson **haul 'er away**  
oh, so says our old bosun **haul 'er away**  
oh, holly -hi-o **haul 'er away**

**Leave Her Johnny** -This was, traditionally, the last chantey the crew would sing before disembarking. It was used when warping (pulling) the ship into the pier, or when pumping the bilges for the last time. Although it at first sounds like the crew is sentimental about leaving the ship, the lyrics describe the horrible conditions that they suffered through during the voyage. Since it was the last song of the journey, the sailors took the opportunity to vent their feelings about how they were treated without fear of reprisal.

## **12. Leave Her, Johnny**

Oh, the times were hard and the wages low, leave her, Johnny, leave her.  
And now ashore we must go, and it's time for us to leave her

**CHORUS Oh! Leave her, Johnny, leave her, Oh, leave her, Johnny, leave her, for the voyage is done and the winds don't blow, and it's time for us to leave her**

Well there's no more voyages around cape horn, Leave her, Johnny, leave her,  
Where you know the weather's never warm, and it's time for us to leave her

**CHORUS Oh! Leave her, Johnny, leave her, Oh, leave her, Johnny, leave her, for the voyage is done and the winds don't blow, and it's time for us to leave her**

We ate rotten meat and weevily bread, leave her, Johnny, leave her,  
And it was pump or drown the old man said, and its time for us to leave her

**CHORUS Oh! Leave her, Johnny, leave her, Oh, leave her, Johnny, leave her, for the voyage is done and the winds don't blow, and it's time for us to leave her**

I thought I heard the first mate say, leave her, Johnny, leave her,  
Tomorrow you will get your pay, and its time for us to leave her

**CHORUS Oh! Leave her, Johnny, leave her, Oh, leave her, Johnny, leave her, for the voyage is done and the winds don't blow, and it's time for us to leave her**

Now the rats have gone and we the crew, leave her, Johnny, leave her,  
Why now ashore we'll go, too, and its time for us to leave her

**CHORUS Leave her, Johnny, leave her, Oh, leave her, Johnny, leave her, for the voyage is done and the winds don't blow, and it's time for us to leave her**

**CHORUS Leave her, Johnny, leave her, Oh, leave her, Johnny, leave her, for the voyage is done and the winds don't blow, and it's time for us to leave her**