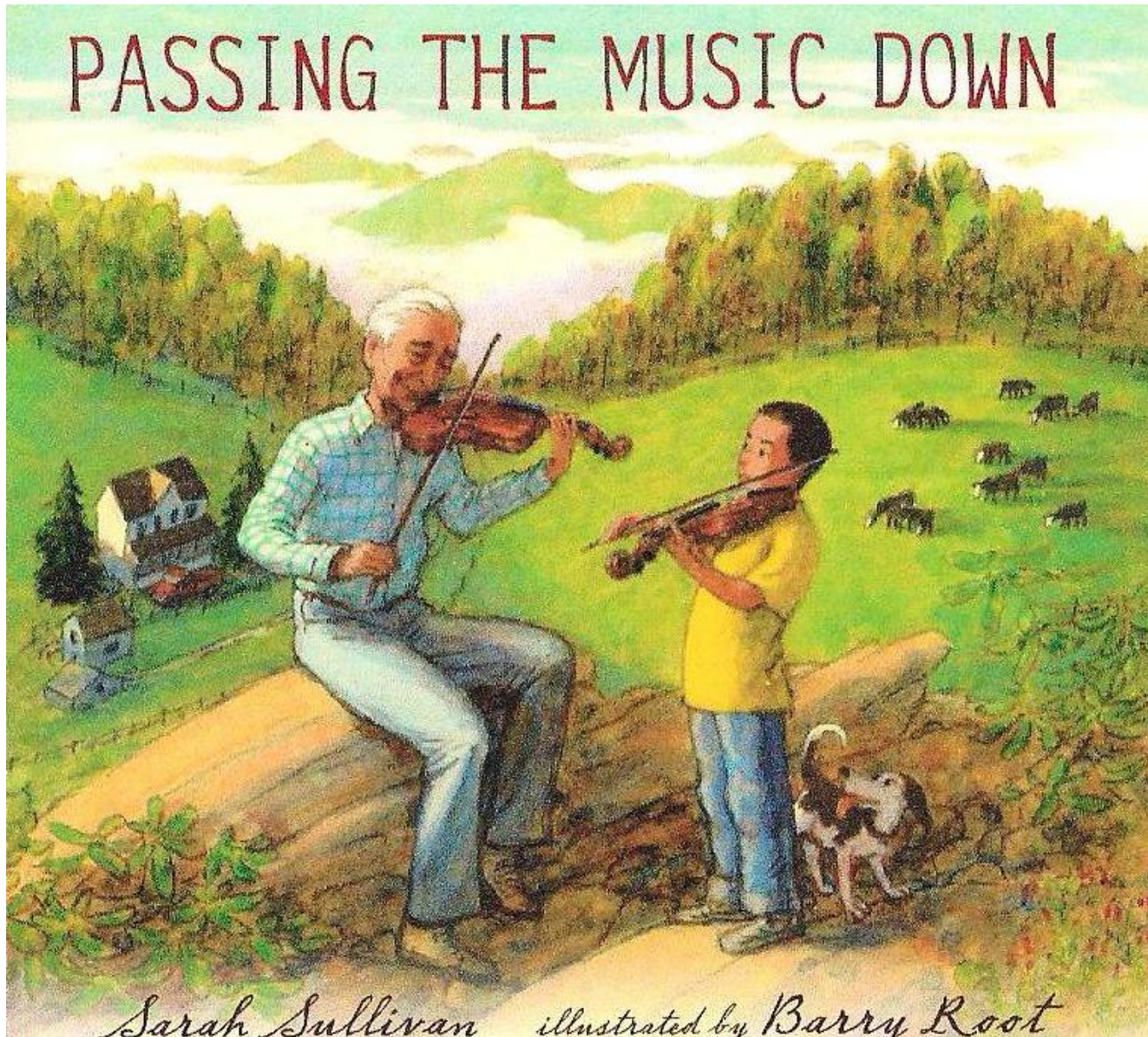


A Teacher's Guide to
PASSING THE MUSIC DOWN

Written by Sarah Sullivan

Illustrated By Barry Root



Passing the Music Down © 2010 by Sarah Sullivan; Art by Barry Root; Candlewick Press

**NOMINATED FOR WEST VIRGINIA
CHILDREN'S CHOICE BOOK AWARD**

PRAISE FOR PASSING THE MUSIC DOWN

"a lovely introduction to traditional music." ~ Horn Book



"evocative descriptive detail . . . brings the scenes to vivid life." ~ Bulletin of the
Center for Children's Books



*"with a fiddler's rhythm . . . this celebratory picture book honors the lives of two
famous folk musicians and the bond between them."* ~ Booklist



"music-making builds bridges across generations." ~ Chicago Tribune



"part of musical history." ~ New York Times



"lilting text." ~ Cleveland Plain Dealer



"a lovely, resonant offering." ~ Kirkus



"It is lovely, and a wonderful tribute to a southern tradition." ~ Wanda Jewell,
Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance (SIBA)



*"Told in free verse, this picture book would be a good accompaniment to music-
appreciation lessons focused on American roots music."* ~ School Library Journal



*"Sullivan captures the sound of the 'old time' music in her rhythmic verse, which
just cries out to be read aloud... A beautifully crafted picture book"* ~ NSW
Association for Gifted and Talented Children.

STORY SUMMARY

A young boy travels to the hills of Appalachia to meet the old-time fiddle player whose music he admires. “Will you teach me all your tunes?” the boy asks, and thus begins a friendship that will forge a bond between generations as the boy assumes the mantle of tradition, learning music that came before him and promising to pass it on.

Inspired by the lives of two renowned fiddlers, this lyrical story is told to the beat of the changing seasons. Just as seedlings grow with spring rain and summer sun, the boy develops into a fine musician under the man’s care and instruction. From playing on the front porch to performing this uniquely American music at folk festivals, the two carry on the tradition of passing the music down.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SARAH SULLIVAN is the author of *Dear Baby: Letters from Your Big Brother* and *Once Upon a Baby Brother*. *Passing the Music Down* began with her admiration for an old-time fiddle player named Melvin Wine. “When I watched him play, his gentle spirit shone through the music. There was something timeless about him, like the ancient sage who passes on essential knowledge to a chosen apprentice, not for pay but out of an abundant reverence for his art and an abiding love for the world.” Sarah Sullivan has an MFA in writing for children from Vermont College and lives in West Virginia, where old-time fiddlers play throughout the seasons.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

BARRY ROOT has illustrated many books, including *The Cat Who Like Potato Soup*, *The Birthday Tree*, and *Bag in the Wind*. He is also a musician who appreciates traditional folk styles. He says that before he started sketching the book, he borrowed a violin from a friend whose grandfather brought it over from Ireland. He used the instrument as a prop for his models to hold, and he even learned to play some simple tunes and scales on it while the book was progressing. Barry Root lives in Pennsylvania.

PRE-READING

Tuning Up

Open the book to see the full illustration spread across the front and back covers. Where is the setting of this story? What type of community is this (urban, suburban or rural)? Explain what the boy and the man are doing. Who are they? What might the title mean?

- *Preview the selection by using pictures and titles.*
- *Make predictions about content.*

Pass It Around

Give each student a strip of paper and ask them to write one sentence that summarizes something that someone has passed down to them—a skill, recipe, story, etc. Put the strips of paper in a box. Each morning, have the students sit in a circle. Play a recording of music from a past era (the 1950's, 1920's 19th century, etc.) as students pass the box around the circle. Stop the music and have the child who is holding the box pull out a strip of paper and read it. Let the child who wrote the sentence elaborate on what he or she has written.

- *Make connections between previous experiences and reading selections.*

Preview

Share this article with your students about Sarah Sullivan and watch the clip of her speaking about her book *Passing the Music Down*:

<http://wvgazette.com/Entertainment/201104220727> How long did it take the author to write the story? Discuss how the idea for the story developed over time.

Encourage your students to start idea journals for their own writing.

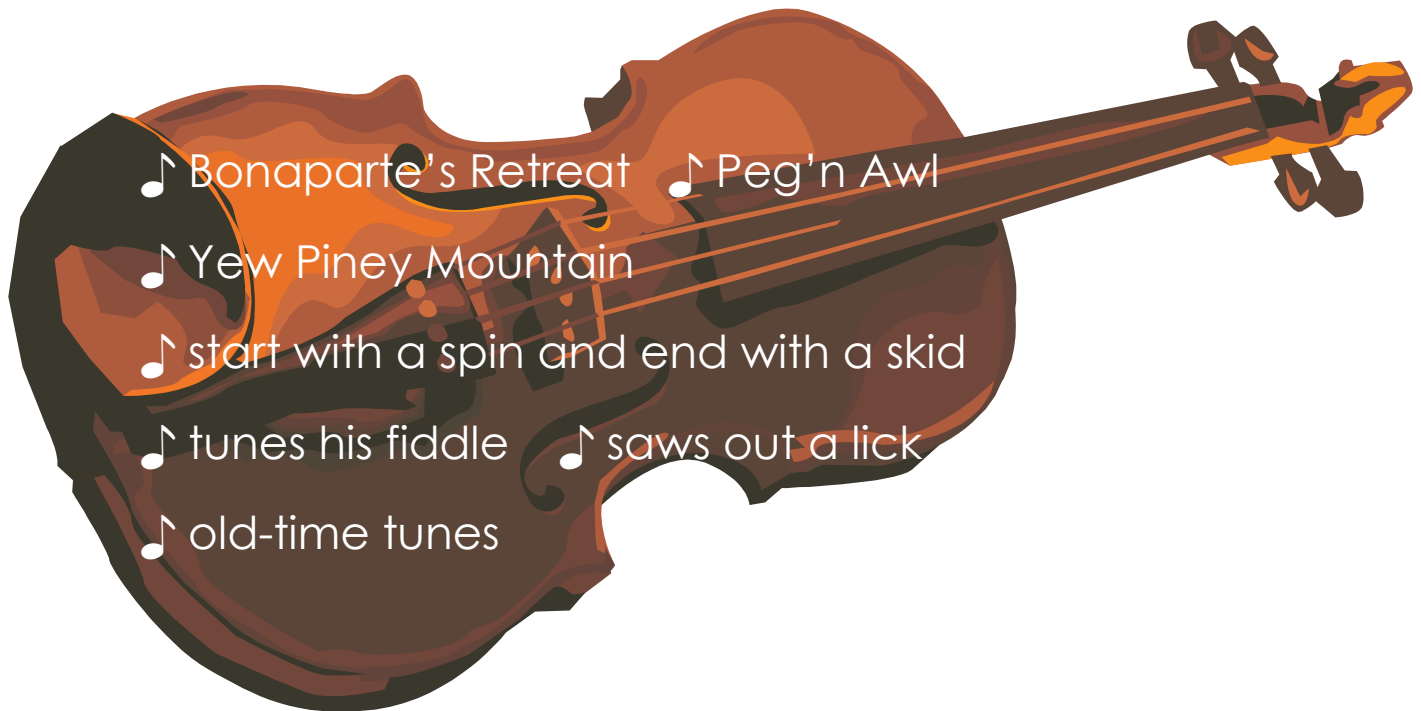
- *Identify what an author does and what an illustrator does.*
- *Apply knowledge of prewriting strategies.*

Vocabulary

Your students may be unfamiliar with the following words. Encourage them to use picture and context clues to infer meanings.

strutting	slumbering	mines	bow	gnarled	strides
katydid	brow	hollow	ginseng	runners	fiddleheads
mend	seedlings	nuzzle	jam	hay bales	scots

The musical words and phrases on the fiddle will likely be new for your students. To hear a recording of Jack Krack playing *Yew Piney Mountain*, visit the author's site: <http://www.sarahsullivanbooks.com/passingthemusicdown.html>.



- Use meaning clues, picture, and language structure to expand vocabulary when reading.
- Use context to read unfamiliar words.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

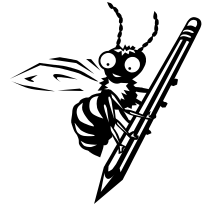
1. Besides playing music, what kinds of things do the boy and the man enjoy doing? (*knowledge*)
2. Why does the boy visit the old man at home? When the boy arrives at the man's house, what do they do before playing music? (*comprehension*)
3. What are some stories or skills that an older person has passed down to you? What would you like to pass down one day to someone younger? (*application*)
4. How does the boy feel when he first meets the old man? How does he feel while he's playing for him? How does he feel immediately afterwards? Which words from the text help you to know how the boy felt? (*analysis*)
5. What did the boy and his family do that helped nurture his musical talent? What could you do to develop one of your talents? (*synthesis*)
6. Do you think the man was a good teacher? Why or why not? What are the qualities of a good teacher? (*evaluation*)

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Author Study

Compare *Passing the Music Down* with Sarah Sullivan's other picture books (<http://www.sarahsullivanbooks.com/books.html>). How are her books alike? How are they different? Have students create a book buzz card for their favorite picks.

BOOK BUZZ



Name: _____

The book by Sarah Sullivan that I liked best was: _____

because _____.

My favorite character was _____

because _____.

This book made me think of _____

I would recommend this book for people who _____

Go to <http://www.sarahsullivanbooks.com/activities.html> to download bookmarks for each child. Let them build a bar graph by placing a bookmark of their favorite book on a wall graph. Analyze the results. Discuss the factors that affected students' choices. How many chose their favorite books based on connections they made with the characters or the situations? How many chose their favorites for other reasons, such as the illustrations? How does the illustrator contribute to the stories?

- *Identify what an author does and what an illustrator does.*
- *Gather data relating to familiar experiences.*
- *Investigate, identify, and describe various forms of data collection using graphs.*
- *Participate in discussions about books.*

Quilt

“Their lives are stitched together in a quilt of old-time tunes.”

~Sarah Sullivan, *Passing the Music Down*

“Each of my mentors gave me different styles, but what they gave me that’s most important is their life experiences. They taught me fiddle tunes and they taught me a way of life.”

~Jack Krack

Have students brainstorm skills that have been handed down to them from older relatives or friends. Let them use a planner like the one below.

My name: _____

My mentor’s name: _____

My mentor taught me how to _____

I learned by _____

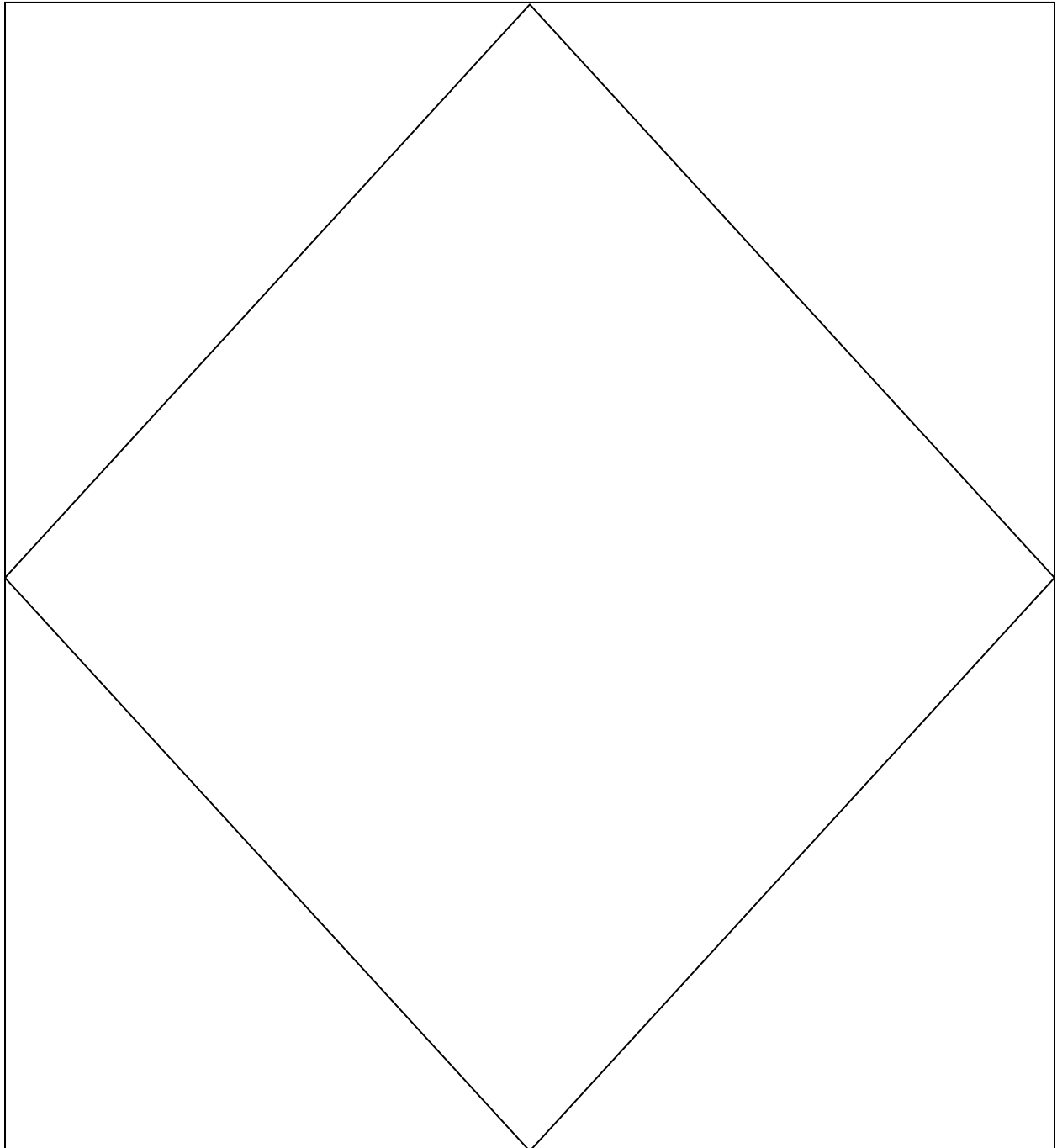
My mentor is a good teacher because _____

Give each student a quilt square template like the one on the following page or have them design their own. Have them decorate their quilt squares with something that represents what they’ve learned from their mentors. Piece the squares together and make a class wall quilt. Take a photo of each child next to the squares they made and have students send them to their mentors along with a thank you note.

- *Make connections between previous experiences and reading selections.*
- *Apply knowledge of prewriting strategies.*
- *Understand the elements of art and the principles of design as they relate to artistic expression and communication.*

Name: _____

In the quilt square below, write and draw about a time when you learned something from an older family member or friend.



Setting: Time and Place

Use the chart below to record words, phrases and sentences that reflect elements of the story's setting.

Clues that show <u>seasons</u>:	Clues that show the <u>passage of time</u>:	Clues that give a sense of <u>place</u>:

For students who need more support, use the following cards with the t-chart on the previous page. Cut up the cards, mix them up, and have students sort the phrases by time and place.

Time (Seasonal)

...corn strutting high in the field and tomatoes plumping out on the vine...	Snow settles deep against the fence...
When the creek swells in the spring and the rooster cock-a-doodles...	Seedlings dot the garden when they fiddle down in Charleston.
Bees nuzzle honeysuckle when they jam up at Glenville.	Frost stiffens hay bales when they teach out at Elkins.

Passage of Time

Life scoots along.	The boy's back grows straight and tall.
The old man's knees turn wobbly.	He turned ninety a few years past.

Place

twisty mountain roads	heartland
cold factories and drifty towns	old, old mountains slumbering east of Tennessee
rolling up the hollow	They hunt ginseng in the woods.
They pick runners from the garden.	...they play...tunes older than the towns the boy traveled through, tunes old as the mist and twisty as the roads.

- *Identify the elements of narrative structure, including setting.*

Passing the Music Down

Have students sit in a circle. With a percussion instrument (a triangle or wood block and mallet), tap out a rhythm. Hand the instrument to a child and see if they can repeat the pattern. Once they have, let the student make up his or her own pattern and pass the instrument to another child to do the same.

Variation: Give each child an instrument. When one child taps out a pattern, have students repeat that pattern together on their instruments.

- *Notate and perform rhythmic patterns.*

Character

Sarah Sullivan uses action and description to give readers a sense of the characters. What do the following phrases show about the man and the boy?

“A man bent by stooping in the mines, his hands gnarled from work...”

“The fiddler wipes his brow, takes a long, slow look. ‘You ought to bring that boy to see me,’ he tells the young man’s folks.”

“Then he strides up front...”

“...his chest near to bursting with all that hope inside.”

“Like a katydid in spring, the boy’s heart dances.”

Create a chart to record students’ ideas. Possible answers might include the following:

This phrase...	shows that:
“A man bent by stooping in the mines, his hands gnarled from work...”	The man is old and has worked hard his whole life.
“The fiddler wipes his brow, takes a long, slow look. ‘You ought to bring that boy to see me,’ he tells the young man’s folks.”	Fiddling is hard work! The man thinks the boy is a good fiddler.
“Then he strides up front...”	The boy is excited to play for the man.
“...his chest near to bursting with all that hope inside.”	The boy might be nervous to play. He hopes he remembers all the notes!
“Like a katydid in spring, the boy’s heart dances.”	The boy is happy that he played so well.

- Identify the elements of narrative structure, including character.

A Photo is Worth 1,000 Words

Author Sarah Sullivan talks about revision in this article from *Hunger Mountain*, journal of the arts from the Vermont College of Fine Arts:

<http://www.hungermtn.org/songlines/>. The article includes a photo of Melvin Wine, the elderly man in the story. This photo is what first inspired Ms. Sullivan to write his story.

Have students find photos in books, magazines, or online databases that pose a question in their minds. What is the subject of the photo doing? Who is he or she? Where was the photo taken? What might have happened before and after the photo was shot?

- *Generate ideas before writing.*
- *Use a variety of planning strategies.*

Word Choice

In the *Hunger Mountain* article referenced above, the author explains that part of revision involves “shaping” and “polishing” the text. Have students take a look at the following lines from the story, paying particular attention to the underlined words.

Why does the author describe the short distance from the kitchen to the porch as a journey? What does this say about the man's health?

“Can't make the journey from his kitchen to the porch.”

What might the echo in the young man's heart represent?

“There's an echo in his heart as he saws out a *rrrrrip!*”

How does the author use personification and sensory words to enhance the imagery of the text?

“...corn strutting high in the fields and tomatoes plumping out on the vine...”

Why did the author use the word “folks” instead of people? How does language choice contribute to the setting?

“...folks get to talking about tuning up and heading over twisty mountain roads to hear fiddle players and banjo pickers make music under the stars.”

How does the use of incomplete sentences contribute to the voice of the narrative?

“Come to hear a man bent by stooping in the mines,
come to hear him lift his bow and set his spirit free.”

How does the use of incomplete sentences contribute to the voice of the character?

“Been wondering when you’d get here,” the old man tells the boy.
“Got a lot of things to show you. I hope you’ll spend some time.”

- Describe the images created by language.
- Describe how the choice of language, setting, and information contributes to the author’s purpose.

Learn more...

Visit author Sarah Sullivan’s website to hear her talk about *Passing the Music Down*: <http://www.sarahsullivanbooks.com/passingthemusicdown.html>. She speaks about how Jake Krack and Melvin Wine got started with their music, her process in researching the story and writing the book, and the way in which the illustrations came about.

Watch a documentary called Outlook (produced for West Virginia Public Broadcasting) about the Clifftop String Band Festival where Jake met Melvin for the first time here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03lusDmD_v4. This footage shows the 2008 festival after Melvin Wine, the elderly man in the story, had passed away, but Jake Krack is featured throughout. The following chart marks sections of the video that will introduce your students to Jake, his mentors, and one of Jake’s young students, who all explain the importance of passing the music down.

Minutes : Seconds	Features
6:26	Lester McCumbers, another one of Jake's musical mentors
6:52	Jake and Lester interviewed
8:00	Yew Piney Mountain played by Lester McCumbers and friends
11:35	Jake playing the fiddle
12:00	an interview with Tessa Dillon, one of Jake's young fiddle students
13:05	Jake playing with a group of musicians, including Tessa (followed by short interview with Tessa)
13:37	Tessa talks about how music is passed down
14:04	a short interview with Jake

- *Listen and respond to a variety of media, including books, audiotapes, videos, and other age-appropriate materials.*

AN INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR SARAH SULLIVAN

How did you get the idea for *Passing the Music Down*?

Passing the Music Down was inspired by the lives of two real people, Melvin Wine and Jake Krack. Melvin was an old-time fiddle player from Braxton County, West Virginia. Jake was his student. Melvin had won multiple awards, including a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Meanwhile, Jake was a 9-year-old fiddle student in Indiana. His teacher, Brad Leftwich, gave him a recording of Melvin Wine playing fiddle music and suggested to Jake that he ought to talk his parents into taking him to the String Band Festival at Clifftop in West Virginia so he could hear the old-time fiddle players, people like Melvin Wine and Lester McCumbers, because their music had been passed down by oral tradition and, when they died, their music would die with them. So, Jake did just that. At Clifftop, he met Melvin Wine who was, by that time, in his mid-eighties. They soon became friends and, after a number of trips from Indiana to West Virginia, Jake's family ended up moving to West Virginia so that Jake could study with Melvin and Lester McCumbers and a younger man named Bobby Taylor.

For several years I heard Melvin and Jake play at the Vandalia Gathering in Charleston and even once at my local independent bookstore, Taylor Books. When I read an article in the *New York Times* about Jake being formally apprenticed to old-time musicians, I realized it was not just me who was fascinated by this story. There was something universal about it. It seemed like a story that needed to be told, particularly after 9/11 when many of us were wondering about the future and what endures.

There was something otherworldly about Melvin Wine. Even though, by most people's standards, he had very little, his life was all about giving back. Watching Jake Krack learn from Melvin was like watching a story as old as time, an elder passing down knowledge and wisdom to the younger generation. Being reminded that such traditions continue, despite all the horrors in the world, gave me hope for the future. It was a story I wanted and needed to tell.

Once the idea came to you, what happened next? Did you jot it down right away? Let it simmer?

At first, I told the story up to the point where Melvin and Jake meet and become friends, focusing more on Melvin than on Jake. When I submitted that manuscript to my editor, she was interested by it, but she suggested that I focus on Jake's story, on what happened after he met Melvin. And she was right, of course. That was the way to tell it. So, I lopped off the first half of the story and moved forward from there.

Looking back, I suspect I needed to tell Melvin's story first anyway. It was, after all, a part of Jake's story. Distilling the story of Melvin's life to picture book length helped me find the way to tell Jake and Melvin's story.

What did you find the most challenging about writing this book?

The most challenging part was matching what was occurring in nature with the times and places where Melvin and Jake played together. For example, they always played at the Vandalia Gathering on the grounds of the State Capitol over Memorial Day weekend, so I needed to think of what would be happening with native flora and fauna at that time because I wanted to tie the story to the natural world as much as I could. I wrote "seedlings dot the garden when they fiddle down in Charleston," because late May is a time when plants are getting their start in annual gardens. Similarly, to reflect what was going on when they played at the Augusta Heritage Folklife Center in the mountains in late October I wrote, "Frost stiffens hay bales when they teach out at Elkins." It was important to me to get those details right because one of the themes of the book is the circle of life.

How did the illustrations come about?

People are often surprised to learn that writers do not select their own illustrators. The publisher selects an artist to illustrate the book. However, Candlewick is wonderful about including writers in the process.

I was thrilled when Barry Root agreed to illustrate *Passing the Music Down*. Once we knew he was going to illustrate the book, I sent photographs to my editor to share with him. And Jake's mother and father, Dara and Reed Krack, sent photographs as well. I also shared a link to a wonderful documentary about Clifftop that was produced by John Yakashima for the West Virginia Public Broadcasting series *Outlook*. You can watch it [here](#).

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03lusDmD_v4&playnext=1&list=PLC26F51E7981AD516

I have to admit a particular fondness for the illustration which accompanies the sentence, "They planted runners in the garden." That painting is luminous. All that light! I love it.

I also love the fact that, according to the note on the jacket copy of the book, a friend loaned Barry Root a real Irish fiddle which he used as a model for the fiddles in the illustrations. Many of the fiddle players in Appalachia are descended from Scotch-Irish settlers, so this seems singularly appropriate.

This is the first book you've written that was inspired by the lives of real people. How did your process differ from writing your other books?

I have to confess that it was lovely not to have to worry about constructing a plot. I already knew what happened. My job was to select which parts of the story to include. That was very different, but it was also very liberating.

I have a book I picked up at an independent bookstore entitled *101 Things I Learned in Architecture School*. Number 97 in the book is "**Limitations encourage creativity.**" Writing this book was an example of the truth of that statement. The "limitations" of the facts of Melvin and Jake's lives provided a defined "space" within which I was free to create.

How did you know you wanted to become a writer?

I decided I wanted to be a writer when I read *Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown* in the third grade. It is one of the series of books about girls growing up in a town modeled after Mankato, Minnesota in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Betsy dreams of becoming a writer when she grows up. She writes her own version of "dime" novels on paper tablets from her father's shoe store until the librarian in the "new" Carnegie Library introduces her to Greek myths and the classics and then Betsy starts patterning her stories after those works of literature. She even sends a story to a magazine.

I wanted to do the same thing, write stories at home and send them off to publishers in distant places. It seemed like the perfect life. It still does.

What is the best piece of writing advice you have ever received?

Anne LaMott's advice in *Bird by Bird* is pretty hard to beat. Give yourself permission to write terrible first drafts. (I'm afraid she didn't use the word *terrible*. Full disclosure.)

What advice do you have for young writers who are interested in learning more about the life of an historical figure?

Go to the library! And seek out a knowledgeable children's librarian who can recommend good books. Of course, you can always start by doing a Google search on-line. There are amazing resources available to young people. When I was young, I was fascinated by Nellie Bly. At the time I think there was one book about her for young people. Today, I know of at least three.

When you aren't writing, what are some of your favorite things to do?

Long walks, reading, canoeing, theater (both from the audience and backstage), travel and now I have a new passion, playing the mountain dulcimer. It's great fun and the instrument is easily portable. I hope to share a bit of traditional music with students when I go into schools to talk about *Passing the Music Down*.

Do you play any other musical instruments?

I took piano lessons for five years from the third grade through the eighth grade. I was never very good at it, but I enjoyed it and I always loved singing in school choruses and church choirs, and, as an adult, in a couple of community theater productions. In high school, I returned to taking piano lessons, more seriously this time and even continued to play a bit in college, strictly for my own enjoyment, of course. I was always terrible at it, but I love music and I cannot imagine life without it.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ILLUSTRATOR BARRY ROOT

When did you begin to think of yourself as an artist?

From pre-school years, it was sort of in the family, I drew constantly with my brothers and at school.

How did you become an illustrator?

I always liked stories and reading in general just about as much as I liked to draw. When I was growing up, I illustrated my own comic book and story ideas... the pictures always came from the stories, or ideas... I wasn't one to go out doing nature studies (that came later). So I naturally tended toward illustration. Also I had friends who were becoming successful illustrators... that helped.

What type of media do you like working with the most, and why?

Water color & gouache... you can get ideas down quickly without a lot of fuss... not that it is easy.

How long did it take to illustrate *Passing the Music Down*?

Three or four months total. The sketching and drawing process, and breaking up the story, doing the research ...these things take time. Doing the final paintings is relatively quick, probably about 4 or 5 weeks.

How did you prepare for this project?

I collected reference material from various sources, including the family of Jake Krack... I realized I needed a violin to draw from after trying to draw from photographs... just couldn't get all the angles right. I put out an appeal to my Facebook friends, in case someone had an old violin they wouldn't mind lending out for a while... heard back immediately from some friends from church who had a rather nice violin not being used, and they graciously allowed me to borrow it for several months... I couldn't help picking it up and trying to play, and after a few attempts started to make progress... the one I worked hardest on was a melody from Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (in the wrong key no doubt)... I can't point to any way that it

directly helped the book, but it helped me get in the mood and build enthusiasm... things like this really do help, but it's hard to say exactly how.

Did you collaborate with the author as you did the illustrations?

I had no contact with the author until the book was finished. That is how it usually works. I worked with an editor and a designer to develop the sketches and shape the final book.

Are any of the characters or aspects of the setting modeled on real-life people and places?

All of the characters are based on real people and I made an effort to get good likenesses where possible. The setting is as true to life as I could make it. I got photographic references for the setting and the characters from Jake's father, who sent me a big pile of photos via e-mail. That was a tremendous help. I would have liked to have traveled to see the area where the story took place, but was not able to do that.

It is very different, when I am illustrating fiction I make up the characters out of my head. It takes a lot less time!

Pablo Picasso once said, "All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up." Do you agree?

Hmmm, sort of. An artist needs to keep fresh and not close himself off from new ways of seeing things, I agree with that... I love children but they are not all good artists, and when in groups are just as prone to conformity as anyone else, most preferring to copy each other's work to coming up with something original.

Experience is valuable. Many artists did their best work in old age (ex. - Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Monet, Vuillard, etc.). Many others gave out early and spent their old age half-heartedly repeating themselves (especially Picasso, although his late work was intentionally "childlike" in a superficial way).

What advice do you have for young aspiring artists?

Do what you love and believe in, not what impresses the crowds. Then you will never get tired of doing it.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I play guitar, bass and drums in a variety of styles (rock, folk, etc.) but I generally prefer jazz and classical music to listen to. Also love to read but it's hard to work into the schedule these days. I like going to my sons' soccer games and wrestling matches, and just hanging out with my family and friends.