



## **WS15 HIGH SCHOOL Lesson Plan**

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**WoodSongs Classroom Project**

**Title: John Jacob Niles; Originality, Folk Music & Opera!**  
**Subject: Music, Language Arts, Art, History,**  
**Length of Lesson: Three Class Periods (May vary depending on class times)**  
**Grade Level: College Level**

### **Introduction:**

This episode of WoodSongs Old-Time Radio Hour is dedicated entirely to John Jacob Niles. Niles is a Louisville, Kentucky native with an incredibly unique sound. He had an opera style as well as folk. This is an incredibly unique combination. Many people are not familiar with him, but he was a major influence on folk artists such as Bob Dylan. His vocal style might be perceived as grating by some students.

Within this episode of WoodSongs, Dr. Ron Pen reflects upon the book he has written which is titled, "I Wonder As I Wander", which is an academic biography about John Jacob Niles. He was one of the leaders of the great folk boom of the 1950's and 60's. Dr. Ron Pen is a Professor and Director of The John Jacob Niles Center for American Music at the University of Kentucky. Dr. Ron Pen reads from his book within this episode and discusses the unique artistry and history of Niles. Niles began traveling around as a young man transcribing songs. This means that he actually write down the songs and kept record of them in sketch-books and preserving them for all time. In fact, much of Nile's transcribing work makes it possible for us to know many historic Appalachian folk songs. The nature of folk music is to be handed down from community to community. This episode features several artists. The Real World String Band performs the song in which Dr. Pen titled his book, "I Wonder As I Wander". They perform the song with Appalachian flavor. John Jacob Niles heard a young girl singing a couple of lines of the song, one small fragment, and wrote the song based upon those lines. He created his own songs and brought so much creativity and uniqueness to each. Niles also heard the dulcimer and created his own instrument based upon the sound of it. He was also a woodworker and so he designed and actually made larger instruments that resembled the dulcimer. The message of originality is very strong and to remain creative and true to one's artistry. John Jacob Niles certainly did so. Dr. Ron Pen portrays this in his book and also on stage while discussing the book and all of the encounters and research he conducted during the process of writing the book. Dr. Pen references that he had to learn a great deal about the history and life at the time in order to place Niles in it and really be able to write about his life.

### **Description of Lesson/Activities: .**

**Activity 1:** Within this episode of WoodSongs, Monica Dewey, an opera singer from the University of Kentucky, performs Nile's song, "Go Away From My Window". Encourage students to think of one song that has particular and significant meaning to them and explore what it may sound like performed in a different style and genre. Would the song

