

# Square Dancing: The State Folk Dance of Virginia Lesson Plan

**Curriculum:** Music

**Grade:** K-5

**Virginia Standards of Learning:** Music: K.3, K.4, 1.3, 2.3, 3.4, 4.4, 5.4

**Objectives:** Students will be able to:

- *move body to order of steps and rhythms*
- *identify square dancing as the state folk dance of Virginia*
- *describe the history of square dancing in American culture*
- *take part in performing a square dance*

**Time Required:** 60 minutes

**Background Information:** Square dancing is a folk dance with four couples (eight dancers) arranged in a square. It has been around in various forms for centuries. It began in England and France and came to America early in the history of the New World. As the population spread westward so also did square dancing, taking different forms as it went. The unique American contribution to square dancing is the “caller”, sometimes called the “prompter” because he prompted the dancers’ memory of patterns they had learned. Modern square dancing began with the development of public address equipment.

**Materials and Resources:** emblem picture of square dancing; computer with Internet access, sound card and speakers, and a media player; square dance video, [http://www.archive.org/details/square\\_dancing](http://www.archive.org/details/square_dancing); masking or colored tape; costumes (optional).

Windows Media Player

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows/downloads/windows-media-player>

QuickTime Media Player

<http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/>

## Procedure:

1. Have students show off dance steps they know. Discuss these questions: Where did they learn to dance? Is there a special order to the dances? Why do they like to dance?
2. Explain that square dancing is the state folk dance of Virginia and show the emblem picture.
3. Review **Background Information** with students.
4. Go to the website [http://www.archive.org/details/square\\_dancing](http://www.archive.org/details/square_dancing) and have students watch the online video of square dancing. Play or download the video from the above website.
5. Explain to students they are going to practice and perform a square dance. Review and implement video as needed. Draw diagrams and/or hand out information sheets with the steps (#9), or create your own.
6. Square dancing’s name comes from the square formation used while dancing. Students may learn new moves more easily if a square is drawn or taped on the floor.
7. Select eight students per square (four boys and four girls). A pair (one girl and one boy) of



dancers stands in the middle of each side of the large square. Everyone stands with their arms outstretched so that the couples can touch fingertips at the square's corners.

8. If necessary, mark the following positions with tape: the couple with their backs to the music are the head couple or in Position 1, the dancers across the square from this couple are also a head couple, but they are in Position 3, the side couples are in Position 2 and Position 4.
9. Now they are ready to dance. Have them stand in the starting positions. A caller, usually the teacher (or use the video or your own recording), calls out the steps for the dancers to perform. Dancers continue to perform each called movement until the caller gives another direction. Here are a few basic moves to try:

- Honor your partner by facing each other and bowing if you are a boy and curtsying if you are a girl. Now honor your corner by turning to the person on the other side and bow or curtsey again. Circle to the left and circle to the right by joining hands and moving in either direction in a circle. Walk, skip, or do the shuffle step (lift your heels and slide forward on the balls of your feet).

- To perform the *do-si-do*, stand face to face with your partner. Walk forward past your partner's right shoulder. Then step to the right and walk backward past your neighbor's left shoulder. You should end up face to face.

- An *allemande left* is executed by stepping forward and grasping your corner's left arm with your hand. Keep walking forward in a half circle until you are in your corner's starting position. Now pull gently with your left arm and move past your corner's left shoulder. When you face your partner, you may drop hands.

- The *right and left grand* is a circular movement. Partners start by facing each other. Give your partner your right hand and gently pull forward past your partner. Drop your hand and give your left hand to the next dancer in line. Move by each dancer alternating with your right and left hand until you meet your partner again.

### Assessment:

1. Students can practice, learn, and perform square dance steps from memory and follow verbal instructions with little or no difficulty.
2. Discuss these questions: Why is square dancing still popular? Why would square dancing be important to families and communities? (Social events to bring families and community together, etc.) Why is square dancing easy or difficult compared to other types of dancing?

### Extension:

1. Students can research and perform other square dance steps.
2. Students can research other line or circle dances.
3. Students can create and perform their own square dance steps and calls.

### Sources:

Country Dance and Song Society. *Square Dance Styles*. 8 August 2012  
<<http://www.cdss.org/sd-styles.html>>

United Square Dancers of America. *Square Dance Attire*. 8 August 2012  
<<http://www.usda.org/booklet/B01803.pdf>>.





