

Name/Title: Rolling in My Sweet Baby's Arms Square Dance

Purpose of Event: Students will learn some brief history of square dancing, be exposed to some old fashioned "pickers" (fiddle, guitar, banjo and mandolin players) and a song from the 1930s, as well as perform some traditional square dance moves.

Suggested Grade Level: 7-12

Materials Needed: CD player and "Rolling in My Sweet Baby's Arms" by Earl Scruggs, Doc Watson, and Ricky Skaggs from the CD "The Three Pickers".

Beginning dance formation: Students are arranged in a traditional square dance formation as shown below:

square dance set

Image not found

<https://pecentral.com/images/lessonideas/squaredanceset.png>

Couple #1 has their backs to the music. If you do not have enough students to complete a square assign the extra students the job of teaching/assisting each square. Frequently rotate these students in and ask other students to be the "assistant teachers".

Description of Idea

Introduction: According to the book, Dance Awhile, 10th Edition, the early part of the 19th century was a time when Americans were dancing. They danced everywhere they could and on all occasions. In fact, dance was reported to be the main source of amusement and entertainment. Dancing occurred in taverns, town halls, barn raisings, husking bees and even in kitchens. While all of America loved to dance, the various regions of the country developed differently. Over time, the various regional characteristics blended together to form a truly American western square dance.

The music: The song, "Rolling in My Sweet Baby's Arms", was first released in 1931. It was recorded by the author, Preston Young. It has been a mainstay in the bluegrass repertoire. This version is played by 3 renowned "pickers", Earl Scruggs, Doc Watson, and Ricky Skaggs.

This song is divided into chorus (4 sets of 8 counts), verse (4 sets of 8 counts) and music (each music break is 4 sets of 8 counts).

Here are the movements and counts for each segment of the song. Words for the calls are underlined.

Chorus:

1-8 Do-sa-Do your partner: Partners face one another and pass R shoulders, back to back and L shoulders returning to their original positions.

1-8 Allemande left your corner: Corners use a forearm grasp and walk in a complete circle till they get back home

1-8: Grand Right and Left: Extend a R hand to the partner, pull past each other's R shoulder, drop hands and extend L hand to the next person. Pull past each other's L shoulder, drop hands and extend R hand to the next person. Repeat (total of 4x RLRL) until each dancer is back with his/her original partner.

1-8 Promenade home: In promenade position (partners stand side by side, joining R hand to R hand and L hand to L hand with the R hand on top). Walk counterclockwise, the lead will have his L shoulder toward the center of the square, until the couples are back in their starting or home spots.

Verse: Grand Square movement

This is a 16 count movement where head and side couples each make a square by moving in 4 count segments. Once they get back home they do a reverse square for another 16 counts. Begin the movement with the side couples facing one another and head couples facing into the center of the square. Head couples move forward 4 counts and side couples back 4 counts. Side and head couples move in 4 count segments to complete the square. (This is explained in the video.)

Music segments: There are 4 music segments. Each segment has its own set of movements.

These sets of combinations can be taught in any order.

MUSIC segment #1

1-8 Head ladies chain – Head ladies move to the center of the square, join R hands and pass R shoulders to face opposite man. They join L hands and do a courtesy turn. They do this by the man placing his R hand around the woman's waist and turning her forward while he backs up. (Ladies are now across from their starting spot.)

1-8 Side ladies chain: Side ladies do the same movement as described above.

1-8 Head ladies chain back: This movement will bring the head ladies back home.

1-8 Side ladies chain back: This movement will bring the side ladies back home.

MUSIC segment #2

1-8 Head couples right and left through: Head couples go to the center of the set and extend R hands to their opposite and pass R shoulders. Dropping R hands, the partners immediately join L hands and do a courtesy turn. The couples have now traded places.

1-8 Side couples right and left through: Side couples do the same movement described above. The side couples have now traded places.

1-8 Head couples right and left through: Head couples do the movement described above in order to get back to their starting or home positions.

1-8 Side couples right and left through: Side couples do the movement described above in order

to get back to their starting or home positions.

MUSIC segment #3

1-8 Gents to the center and form a R hand star: Leads move to the center of the square and join R hands and walk clockwise.

1-8 Gents make that start a L hand star: Leads turn around and put their L hands in to make a L hand star and walk counterclockwise.

1-8 Pick up that partner: Leads continue to “turn the star” and as they get to their partners place their R hand around their partner’s waist with partner placing L hand on his shoulder.

1-8 Continue to turn the star till you get back home: When the partners are at home the leads back out and take their partners home or to the starting spot.

MUSIC segment #4

1-8 Head couples lead to the R and circle L half way round: Couple 1 goes to couple 2 and couple 3 goes to couple 4. Each group circles half way round. They have now changed places.

1-8 Right and left through and get on home: This movement will get the couples back to their home spots.

1-8 Side couples lead to the R and circle L half way round: Couple 2 goes to couple 3 and couple 4 goes to couple 1. Each group circles half way round. They have now changed places.

1-8 Right and left through and get on home: This movement will get the couples back to their home spots.

Here is the order of the movements throughout the song. When the song begins hold for 32 counts:

CHORUS – DO SI DO ETC

MUSIC - LADIES CHAIN SEQUENCE

VERSE – GRAND SQUARE

CHORUS – DO SI DO ETC.

MUSIC – R AND L THROUGH SEQUENCE

VERSE – GRAND SQUARE

CHORUS – DO SI DO ETC

MUSIC – STAR COMBO SEQUENCE

VERSE – GRAND SQUARE

CHORUS – DO SI DO ETC

MUSIC – HEADS TO THE L AND R AND L THROUGH SEQUENCE

CHORUS – DO SI DO ETC

Video instructions of the dance are below. [Click here to see the dance with the music.](#)

Variations:

There are no partner changes in this dance, but a partner change could occur at the end of each grand right and left movement. Instead of promenading the partner home, the lead could promenade his corner home. This would challenge students to remember who was his/her corner and who was the partner during each segment.

Assessment Ideas:

Consider asking students to research their part of the country and the history of square dancing and music that is unique to the area. If this dance was part of a square dance unit the students could be asked to set up their own calls for the music breaks in the song.

Teaching Suggestions:

Consider having a video contest between squares. Have squares videotape one another to see who can perform the dance with the most precision.

Submitted by **Brenda Goodwin** who teaches at Missouri State University in Springfield, MO. Thanks for contributing to PE Central! **Posted on PEC: 3/5/2013.**

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