

**TEACHER GUIDE**

# 1840 DOC. #4: “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too” Song

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sing-alongs were used in the 19th century to build enthusiasm and support for a candidate. The 1840 Whig campaign published the first and largest campaign songbook in American history. The songs were part of an unprecedented mass campaign that included parades, banners, concerts, and mass meetings. During parades and rallies the Whigs would roll huge slogan-covered balls through towns, popularizing the expression, “keep the ball rolling.”

With nearly 2.5 million voters, twice as many as those who had voted in the election of 1828, the opportunity for truly massive gatherings appeared for the first time in the 1840 campaign. A report from an upstate New York rally that summer gives a sense of the spectacle of this campaign: “The hearts of 25,000 freemen have been overflowing with gladness and joy...The People...poured in from the Valleys and rushed in torrents down from the Mountains...vocal with Eloquence, with Music, and with Acclamations” (Melder 79). The popularity of these celebrations can be attributed, in part, to the desire for public entertainment in an era before TV, movies, NASCAR, and football.

Slogans became another great way to achieve name recognition in the century before radio and TV. Among the Whigs’ many slogans, their best-known one, and one of the most memorable of any campaign, was “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too.” Tippecanoe was Harrison’s nickname after his part in the Battle of Tippecanoe in Indiana where Tecumseh’s united Native American forces were defeated. John Tyler was Harrison’s running mate who became President when Harrison died of pneumonia one month after his inauguration.

The song that you will hear was perhaps the most popular of those included in The Log Cabin Songbook and sung along the campaign trail. Imagine ten thousand people singing along, hard cider in hand, as the Whig rolling balls were pushed along the streets for a wild celebration of a candidate who was unknown to most voters just one year earlier.

> **Play the song and project the lyrics and/or hand out the lyric sheets.**

QUESTION **What impression does the song give about the Harrison campaign?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The campaign is unstoppable.

EVIDENCE lyrics: “great commotion, motion, motion,” “ball a rolling on,” “rush of mighty waters”; the catchiness of the music and slogan

### 1840 DOC. #4

*TIPPECANOE AND TYLER TOO*  
 Words: Alexander Coffman Ross  
 Melody: “Little Pigs”

*Oh, who has heard the great commotion,  
 motion, motion, all the country through?  
 It is the ball a rolling on,*

*For Tippecanoe and Tyler too, For Tippecanoe and Tyler too  
 And with them we’ll beat little Van, Van,  
 Van is a used up man,  
 and with them we’ll beat little Van. (CHORUS)*

*Sure, let them talk about hard cider, cider, cider  
 And log cabins too,  
 It will only help to speed the ball  
 CHORUS  
 Like the rush of mighty waters, waters, waters  
 Onward it will go  
 And its course will bring you through  
 CHORUS*

## “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too” Song

### Audio Clip

Lyrics on PowerPoint slide and student handout

QUESTION **What qualifications for President are mentioned in this song?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER No qualifications are given.

EVIDENCE no mention of qualifications; tactics of persuasion are simply cheerleading and putting the opposition down

**FURTHER QUESTIONS**

What role might free alcohol have played at these mass rallies? How do today's candidates use mass celebrations to stimulate voter interest and participation? Should electoral politics be mixed with entertainment?

**ADDITIONAL INFO**

The person who wrote the lyrics to "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too" was a member of an Ohio Tippecanoe Club. He sang the song at a Whig rally in New York and it soon became popular nationwide. The *North American Review*, a widely-read magazine of the time, said it was to "the political canvas of 1840 what the 'Marseillaise' was to the French revolution" and claimed, "it sang Harrison into the presidency" (Silber 37).

**CONNECTIONS**

(see thematic listing)

**Music**  
**Reaching Voters** (song)