



What's a Yankee Doodle?

Yankee Doodle went to town,
A-riding on a pony,
Stuck a feather in his cap,
And called it macaroni.
Yankee Doodle, keep it up,
Yankee Doodle dandy.
Mind the music and the step
and with the girls be handy.

Of course you know this famous song. Americans have been singing it for almost 250 years. But where does this song come from? What exactly is a Yankee Doodle? And what's this business about macaroni?

The song was written around 1750 by a British composer—nobody knows his name. But one thing is certain: the composer didn't like Americans very much. Like most British people, he thought that people living across the ocean in the American colonies were a bunch of unsophisticated slobs. The word *Yankee* was a nickname for the colonists. The word *doodle* was another word for fool. Get the picture?

Now for the macaroni part. Back in colonial days, fashionable men in London wore their hair long and tied up in a bun on top of their heads. They called this style the *macaroni* (aren't you dying to try it yourself?). The song jokes that Yankees were so uncool that they thought that wearing a feather in a cap was the same as having a fancy macaroni hairdo. How insulting!

During the Revolutionary War, British soldiers tried to infuriate American colonists by singing "Yankee Doodle." But their joke backfired like a broken cannon. The American soldiers thought the song was so funny they made it *their* song. They sang it when they marched. They sang it after they won battles. They sang it any time they felt like it.

After the Americans won the war, "Yankee Doodle" remained a big hit. It's still popular today. And nobody seems to mind that it started out as a big joke!

By Lauren Tarshis, Editor, *Storyworks*
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Dear Parents

You and your child will surely enjoy getting the background scoop on this familiar song. Please sing and discuss the words to "Yankee Doodle" before you read the article. See if your child knows what a "Yankee" is or what it means to "doodle." Does "macaroni" always mean something to eat? Remember to have your child read this passage out loud to you.

TIP OF THE WEEK

One of the hardest things we ask children to do is show they understand a nonfiction text. Knowing what questions will be asked before they begin reading helps children read for a purpose, which focuses their attention on the content. Try reading the comprehension questions below before you read the passage so that your child is alerted to specific things to look for during the reading.

The Questions

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1. What is a "macaroni"? _____

2. What was the original meaning of "doodle"? _____

3. Why did the American soldiers sing the song "Yankee Doodle"? _____

4. How do you think the British soldiers felt about the Americans' reaction? Why? _____

We have completed this assignment together.

Child's Signature

Parent's Signature