

LESSON PLAN: INDEX

Title: Music and Slavery: a lesson for Black History Month

Cycle: 2 or 3

Length: 1 Hour + extra class to present scenes

FOCUS OF THE LESSON:

The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to the use of music during the period of slavery, and then later, in the civil rights movement. At the end of the lesson, students role-play a scene using the song(s) that have been taught.

MUSIC COMPETENCIES:

1. Interpret song the African Americans might have sung
2. Create their own scenes and sounds
3. Appreciate the meaning and uses of the songs of that period.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

Sound Sources: Voice, Musical Instruments, Body, Sound producing objects.
Rules for Group Ensemble Work □ Responding to sound and visual cues.
Music Appreciation of Black American 19th C. music.

CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES:

Use information to create a dramatic scene.
Critical judgment of what should be included in their scene.
Creativity is required.
Explore aspects of their own identity by thinking about how they would react in such a situation.
Co-operate with their peers to create the scene.
Communicate their ideas with others.

BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING:

Citizenship and Community Life: Reflect on our society and how fortunate we are to live in better times. Do we have equality now? How can we make our world even better?
Media Literacy: encourage further research in the library and on the Internet.
Includes the social sciences: History and Geography
Includes drama as well as music.
The moral implications of slavery and the social consequences that we are still dealing with.

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

Look at competency #2: Creating their own scenes and sounds. Through observations of the students' scenes;
Are they committed to their scenes? Is the role they are playing believable?
Are they using the songs and sounds that have been explored?
Can the students sing the songs demonstrating the different intentions of each song (work, passing a message, maintaining hope etc.)?
How well do they work with their group?

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Music and Slavery: a lesson for Black History Month - Cycle 2 or 3

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Materials needed:

Books about slavery: See Bibliography
Overhead or paper copies of the lyrics of the songs.
A variety of percussion and/or other instruments.
World map or globe

Procedure:

Where did the slaves come from? Explore maps showing the journey the original slaves took from Africa. It is explained how they were kidnapped from their homes, endured harsh conditions aboard the ships, only to have to do hard labor in their new home. Look at how slaves aboard the ships could use their native drumming methods to communicate. What sounds might be heard aboard a slave ship?

Why did the south need slaves? The economic need for cheap labor to produce cotton and tobacco are explored. Students are asked to mime picking cotton to the song: "Jump Down Turn Around, Pick a Bale of Cotton".

What might it feel like to be a slave? Think about what it would mean to have no freedom, to face the possibility of being sold, or your family members being sold. Music could ease the pain of being a slave. It also served to keep their hopes during desperate times. These songs also served as a code to wish for better times ahead. In music, slaves could discuss things that were forbidden to speak of day to day. Look at the song "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot". What do the lyrics of this song mean?

Students are asked what the phrase "Underground Railroad" means to them. Then they are introduced to the possibility that a few slaves had to flee the southern United States for Canada. The routes of the Underground Railroad are shown. Slaves were often forbidden to talk, and writing messages was not possible since they were not allowed to go to school. Songs were used to relay messages. "This Train is Leavin' in the Morning"

Students are divided into 3 groups to create the following scenes. They may use instruments to create a soundscape, and/or the songs that they have learned:

Kidnapped Africans on a ship bound for the Americas.
Working in the fields and returning to their cabin at night.
Someone escapes and takes the Underground Railroad to Canada

Extension Activities:

References in song to the Israelites escaping from Egypt

The African Americans were not the only people to have been enslaved. Look at references in spiritual songs to the Biblical story of Moses and the escape from Egypt. Sample song: "Go Tell it on the Mountain"

The Civil Rights Movement

Students are then introduced to the plight of the black person in America after slavery ended. Segregation and what it meant in daily life (restaurants, buses, water fountains) are explored. How this peaked in the 1950's with Rosa Parks refusing to move to the back of the bus. How this led to students being escorted to school by the American Army, and the rise of people like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. What is civil disobedience, and how was it used in the 1950's and 60's to stimulate change? Who was Gandhi? Have we achieved true equality today? King's "I have a dream" speech is then read, and students are encouraged to improvise background music to this speech on recorder, or other instruments. Sample song: We Shall Overcome

Bibliography:

A Band of Angels , by Deborah Hopkinson, Amazing Grace, by Linda Granfield, Follow the Drinking Gourd, by Jeanette Winter, North Star to Freedom, by Gena Garrell The Last Safe House: a story of the underground railroad, by Barbara Greenwood Underground to Canada, by Barbara Smucker