

Music: A Stepping-Stone to History and the Art of Writing

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INTRODUCTION

Music is at the core of heritage and culture. By studying musical lyrics we can place a human perspective on historical events. Through this type of learning experience we are able to become acquainted with the emotional and cultural feel of different historical periods. This curriculum unit will introduce the idea of studying history and the art of writing through music. The focus of the narrative will be on several different eras of American history. A brief historical background will be given for each era along with several songs which transmit the emotions and circumstances of that time. The lesson plans, for the most part, are aimed at improving writing skills. All aspects of our country's history will not be covered; a sampling will be offered. My hope is to provide an impetus towards a new way of learning; a stepping-stone towards a greater personal understanding of historical events.¹

BACKGROUND

Texas Revolution

I have always wanted to incorporate music into my history classes. This desire came about when I learned the history of a popular Texas tune. As a child growing up in California, I was very familiar with "The Yellow Rose of Texas." It was a favorite song of my grandmother, a native Texan. It would blare from the Hi-Fi (high fidelity stereo record player) as she sang and sashayed from room to room. I never really paid any attention to the words. I just knew that it seemed to make Texans proud.

As an adult, I became acquainted with the story behind the lyrics. The "Yellow Rose" was a mulatto woman, Emily Morgan. She immigrated, as a slave, to Mexican Texas from Philadelphia with her owner, James Morgan, in 1830 (Whitelaw, par. 12). James Morgan built a plantation and the settlement of New Washington at the mouth of the San Jacinto River. In 1836 the Texans declared their independence from Mexico. Supposedly the Texans were tired of the tyrannical and inconsistent rule of President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. Texas was not the only Mexican state to revolt. But the Mexican Army

¹ Due to copyright limitations, it is not possible to print songs used in this unit in their entirety. Several lines will be provided to give the reader the general idea and feeling which the song intends to relate about that particular period of history. The lyrics are available in numerous publications and websites, several of which are listed in the Bibliography.

squashed those in opposition quickly and brutally. These battles were usually preceded by the Mexican buglers playing “El Deguello,” an ancient song which meant there would be no quarter. No prisoners would be taken.

The Texans expected the same fate and decided a Declaration of Independence was justified. Of course there were other considerations. Most of the Texans who were in favor of independence were Anglo, recently arrived from the United States. With the exception of Texas, Mexico had outlawed slavery. The newcomers felt their status as slave owners was in danger. This, and the desire to become American citizens again, may have had more to do with their revolutionary feelings than complaints as to how the government was run. There was also the question of U.S. President Andrew Jackson’s influence. Jackson, like most Americans of the time, believed in Manifest Destiny. Texas stood in the pathway of the American march to the Pacific. Two of his cronies arrived in Texas just prior to the start of the revolution. It is possible that Jackson may have sent them to encourage a push for independence. Sam Houston became Commander of the Texas Army and Davey Crockett would die at the Alamo.

During the Texas Revolution, Morgan provided food for the Texas Army, which was under the command of General Sam Houston. In March of 1836 Morgan was appointed Colonel by Houston and asked to help guard the people who had escaped to Galveston Island (Whitelaw, par. 14). After the defeat of the Texans at the Alamo, Anglo families had run away from their homes as the Mexican Army, under the command of President Santa Anna, marched through Texas. This event is known as the runaway scrape. The fledgling revolutionary government had also run away to Galveston and was prepared to high tail it to New Orleans in the U.S.A if necessary.

Emily was left at New Washington to supervise the delivery of food and other supplies to the Texas Army which was headed towards a confrontation with the Mexicans at nearby San Jacinto. When Santa Anna arrived in the area he captured the attractive Emily and a young slave named Turner. The Mexican President wanted Turner to show him where Houston’s army was camped. Instead, with Emily’s help, Turner escaped and warned General Houston (Whitelaw, par. 16).

Santa Anna was quite the ladies man. He had a wife in Mexico and had taken a teenaged bride while in San Antonio. He hadn’t seen her in a couple of weeks and saw Emily as a good substitute (Whitelaw, par. 17). On April 21, 1836, Sam Houston climbed a tree to spy on the Mexican camp. He saw Emily preparing a champagne breakfast. Houston is reported to have said “I hope that slave girl makes him neglect his business and keeps him in bed all day” (Whitelaw, par. 19). Now, exactly what Santa Anna was doing in that tent is not known for sure. However, this distraction did help the Texas Army mount a surprise attack at San Jacinto. Since he was occupied in his tent, Santa Anna was unable to command his forces when the attack came. He ran away, leaving his soldiers to fend for themselves, and the Texans won the battle and the Revolution in

eighteen minutes. When James Morgan heard of Emily's heroism he spread the word of her deeds, gave her a passport to New York and her freedom (Whitelaw, par. 21).

It is unclear as to who originally wrote the "Yellow Rose of Texas." It has been attributed to a slave named J.K. (Whitelaw, par. 5). The original title was "Emily, the Maid of Morgan's Point." The song honored a woman, presumably Emily, and expressed the lament of a man who longed for his love. While the first version of the song relates nothing of the Battle at San Jacinto, its tune expressed the exuberance that was felt by the Texans at the time of their victory.

There's a yellow rose in Texas, that I am going to see...
She's the sweetest rose of color...
You may talk about your Dearest May, and sing of Rosa Lee,
But the Yellow Rose of Texas beats the belles of Tennessee.
(J.K., 1836)

The lyrics have changed several times over the years. Both the Union and Confederate soldiers of the American Civil War adjusted the words and used it as a popular marching tune. Cowboys on cattle trails of the late 1800s also changed the lyrics so they might sing of the women in their lives. It again became popular in the 1950s when band leader Mitch Miller wrote his own version.

Now, when I hear this song I envision the scene at the battlefield. These were real people with real human fallacies which may have changed the course of history. The song and the pride with which it is sung enable us to experience the feelings that the Texans must have had at the time of their victory. It is this type of interaction which I hope to incorporate into my history classes through the study of music.

The War of 1812

Our national anthem, "The Star Spangled Banner," was composed during the War of 1812. The War of 1812 was fought between the United States of America and Great Britain, lasting from 1812 to 1815. The impressment of American citizens into the British Navy and border disputes were the two biggest issues addressed by the war. During their attack on Washington, D.C. the British forces kidnapped a Maryland doctor. Francis Scott Key, a Washington lawyer, followed the British to Baltimore in the hope of securing the doctor's release. This he was able to do, but he and the doctor were not allowed to immediately leave the former captor's ship. It was from this vantage point that the two men watched the British bombardment of Baltimore's Fort McHenry.

Fort McHenry was under the command of American Major George Armistead. He felt certain that the British would attack Baltimore at some time during the war. He commissioned a local seamstress and flag maker, Mary Young Pickersgill, to make a large, 30' x 42' flag (Streufert, par. 7). He wanted the British to be able to see where he

was located. The battle raged on for 25 hours, starting on September 13, 1814 (Streufert, par. 8). Key had no way of knowing who was winning the battle. The next morning he was greatly relieved to see that the large flag was flying.

The fact that a United States flag was flying meant that the Americans had not lost the battle. The lawyer was so moved by the sight of the flag that he wrote his feelings down on the back of a letter. Several days later this poem was published as a broadside under the title of “The Defense of Fort McHenry” (Streufert, par. 11). It was to be read, or sung to the tune of “To Anacreon in Heaven,” a popular drinking song of the time (Lange). It was a common practice in the 1800s to borrow melodies or change words to popular folk songs. As mentioned above, “The Yellow Rose of Texas” went through several renditions. “In October [of 1814] a Baltimore actor sang Key’s new song in a public performance and called it “The Star Spangled Banner” (Streufert, par. 11). On March 3, 1931 Congress adopted the song as our national anthem (Streufert, par. 12). Today, both the song and the flag are called “The Star Spangled Banner” (Lesson Plan I).

The Underground Railroad

Slavery existed in the United States of America from 1619 to 1865. It was practiced in all thirteen states until around 1799 when New York and New Jersey (the last northern states to abolish slavery) outlawed it on a staggered schedule. From that date until 1865 it was found in the American south: Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Missouri, Louisiana, Texas and the New Mexico territory. Starting in the 1830s, a network of people and places worked to help slaves escape to freedom in the North. This network was known as the Underground Railroad. Of course, there were no trains involved in this endeavor. The guides who traveled south to assist the slaves were called conductors. Slaves knew the North Star pointed the way to freedom. But, they did not know what dangers might lie in their pathway. Around 1831 the Underground Railroad started sending conductors into the south to assist those running away. “By the beginning of the Civil War, in 1861, about 500 people a year were traveling in the South, teaching routes to slaves” (James, par. 3). It is estimated that from 60,000 to 100,000 slaves were able to successfully escape to freedom between 1831 and 1865 (James, par. 3).

The most famous of the conductors was Harriet Tubman, a former slave. She traveled south at least 19 times and helped approximately 300 people reach freedom (Harris, liner notes). This was done at considerable risk as there was a bounty offered for her recapture. Harriet Tubman loved the song “Swing Low Sweet Chariot.” The song mentions the River Jordan. Rivers were important. They provided safety. Dogs could not follow a runaway’s scent in the water. Crossing over Jordan (the Mississippi River) meant the possibility of reaching freedom from bondage. “As Harriet Tubman lay dying, she sang this spiritual with her relatives gathered at her side” (Harris).

Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home...
I looked over Jordon
And what did I see...
A band of angels
Coming after me.

(author unknown)

As a religious song, “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” spoke of being carried up to heaven. As a secret coded message it expressed the desire to be carried to a better place by the angels of the Underground Railroad.

Slaves wishing to run away learned of safe houses where they could hide in the daytime and find food and water. In preparation for the journey, the women who worked in the main plantation houses would hide supplies for the journey under their large skirts (Hubert). Many slaves made quilts with coded designs that gave directions for finding their way north. Quilts of a certain design were also hung outside abolitionist homes to let runaways know they had reached a stop on the Underground Railroad (Hubert). Another type of coded message was transmitted through music. When African slaves first came to North America they made and played drums as they had in their homelands (Jones, par. 3). The masters “thought the slaves were just making their African music. They knew those drum sounds carried far, even to the next plantation, but it didn’t occur to them that the drumbeats were a sort of ‘Morse Code’ that slaves used to make plans for revolts or escapes” (Jones, par. 3). When drumming was banned, the slaves turned to song. Singing while working was another tradition brought from Africa (Belafonte, 88). The masters actually thought the slaves were happy with their situation because they were always singing. In truth, the songs provided work rhythms so that a group could work at a common pace and stay on task (Epstein, 322). In Africa songs were also used to send factual information and relate histories (Jones, par. 6). It was through that singing tradition that African American slaves were able to communicate secret plans and messages. “The traditional spiritual “Let Us Break Bread Together” was a coded call for a secret meeting in the morning (at or before sunrise) to discuss issues of concern, plans for escape, or a time for prayer” (Harris).

Let us break bread together,
On our knees. On our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
Oh Lord, have mercy on me.

(author unknown)

Code words were used in slave songs to send messages which were interpreted by the masters as songs of faith. By singing these coded messages the slaves were able to pass on information to each other, to slaves in the neighboring fields of other plantations, and to persons who might be in hiding nearby as they attempted to escape (see Appendix). An

abolitionist named Peg Leg Joe spent his winters as an itinerant carpenter in the South. He would pass on escape route instructions to the slaves on the plantations where he worked (James, par. 7). His wooden peg leg left distinctive footprints for runaways to follow. A reference to “left foot, peg foot” would let slaves know that he was in the area and leaving a trail. The “drinking gourd” referred to the Big Dipper constellation which contained the North Star. That star guided runaway slaves to freedom in the North. “When the first quail calls” refers to early spring. The song “Follow the Drinking Gourd” gave instructions for escaping from Alabama and Mississippi (James, par. 7).

Follow the drinking gourd...
For the old man is waiting for to carry you to freedom...
When the sun comes back and the first quail calls...
The riverbank will make a very good road...
Left foot, peg foot traveling on,
Follow the drinking gourd.
(author unknown)

Slaves could not formally say goodbye to friends and family. That would have raised suspicions. Songs were used to let friends and family know of a person’s intent to leave. And once it was established that someone was leaving, songs were used to pass on advice for the journey. “Wade in the Water” gave practical advice. Travel near rivers and streams for cover, food, and direction (Harris) (Lesson Plan II).

Wade in the water
Wade in the water children...
Just follow me down to the Jordon’s stream
God’s a-going to trouble the water.
(author unknown)

Songs also echoed the fears of the journey ahead and retold the experience of the journey once freedom was obtained. Running away was a frightening proposition. Slaves were not familiar with the terrain away from their former homes. It was difficult to tell whom they might trust. For those who were caught, the punishment could be severe. But they were also filled with a hope that their lives were about to change in profound ways. One can feel the anticipation and fear experienced by a runaway in “Song of the Fugitive Slave.”

Shine on shine on my guiding star,
Hide not thy gentle light
By thee I fly to the lands a-far,
Where the Black is free as the White...
But hark! the dreaded hounds are near...
I’ll meet their fangs without a fear,
But never more go back.

(Locke, n.d.)

Upon reaching the North the slaves were still not free. Bounty hunters often captured African Americans and sold them back into slavery. Free Blacks were even kidnapped. The Fugitive Slave Law, passed in 1850, permitted masters to take their “property” back to the South if they could prove ownership. So the Underground Railroad extended into the northern states with the final destination being Canada. Not all northerners were sympathetic to the Abolitionist cause. Those operating stops, safe houses, along the way had to be wary of the prying eyes of neighbors. At one home in Ohio, a Quaker abolitionist family had an extra water well dug inside the walls of their house so that their neighbors would not be aware of times when extra water was needed for fugitives (*Homes*, HGTV). If it was known that a runaway slave was in the area, the owners of the safe houses would step outside and sing songs which indicated whether or not it was safe to approach the house (*Homes*, HGTV).

“One of the enduring lessons of the Freedom Train [Underground Railroad] is that true freedom came as a result of great sacrifice, tireless vigilance, spirited resistance, and cooperation. It was no accident that Martin Luther King closed his [1963] ‘I Have a Dream’ speech with the words of this spiritual” (Harris).

Free at last, free at last.
I thank God I'm free at last...
Cause I'm free, free at last...
And I ain't going back again.

(author unknown)

Cowboys and the Trail Rides

Ironically, some of the first cowboys in Texas were Indians. Spanish priests, who came in the 1600s, taught many of the Indians who lived at the missions how to rope, brand and care for the cows (PBS, *Lone Star*). As more settlers came into the area from Mexico, the Spanish vaqueros, or cowboys, continued the traditions on the rancheros of South Texas. Thus, much of our ranching vocabulary is of Spanish origin. The ranching terms rodeo, lasso, lariat, corral, chaps and bronco all date back to this time period. In the 1830s, Anglo settlers from the United States began moving to Mexican Texas. They would eventually win freedom from Mexican rule in 1836, become a separate nation, and, in 1846, join the United States. After the American Civil War the Texas economy would recover more quickly than that of the rest of the South, due in large part to the cattle industry. The large cities of the Northeast desired meat for their growing populations. The Texans had the cattle, but no way to get them to the markets of the east. It was decided to drive, or move, the cattle along trails to the rail towns of Kansas.

Between 1866 and 1887 almost 100 million head of cattle traversed these trails (Axelrod, 59). These were not the domestic herds we are familiar with. The tough and

semi-wild Texas longhorn had the stamina to walk the 800 to 1000 miles to the rail towns (railheads). With wary affection, the cowboys called these “half-ton monsters ‘little dogies’” (Axelrod, 44).

Git along, Little Dogies
It’s early spring that we round up the dogies...
We round up our horses, load up the chuck wagon,
And then throw the dogies out onto the trail.
Whoopee ti ye yo
Get along little dogie.
(author unknown)

Driving the cattle was hard, dangerous and lonely work. The pay was low, averaging about \$100 for three to four months time on the trail (Axelrod, 59). Yet it appealed to those people who had a sense of adventure or a need to be in the wide open spaces. The trail drives also offered a type of equality not found in other areas of American life at that time. Anglo and Hispanic cowboys from South Texas worked alongside former slaves who had been trained on the cattle and cotton plantations of central and east Texas. Approximately one out of every seven cowboys on the trail was African American (Axelrod, 8). On the trail the quality of a man’s work mattered, not the color of his skin (PBS, *Lone Star*). They chased after stray cows, watched for rustlers, and ate the dust stirred up by the herd all day. “The Old Chisholm Trail” is a song which was used to express the complaints of the cowboys. New verses were added every year.

Well come along boys and listen to my tale;
I’ll tell you of my troubles on the old Chisholm Trail.
Come a ti yi yippy, yippy yay yippy yay.
No chaps, no slicker, and it’s pourin’ down rain;
I swear I’ll never night herd again.
Come a ti yi yippy, yippy yay yippy yay.
(author unknown)

Night herding was difficult work. With the typical herd of 2,500 cattle tended by an average of ten cowhands, everyone took a shift while the cattle slept (Axelrod, 59). Unfortunately the cattle usually didn’t stay bedded down. They would wake and mill around in the middle of the night. The cowboys would sing lullabies to settle them down. This was a dangerous time. Thunder or the howl of a coyote could set off a stampede. Cattle and men often died during these stampedes. The cowboys could spend an entire night rounding up the cows and forcing them to run in circles to wear themselves out (Axelrod, 72). The worn out cowboys often went without sleep. “Night-Herding” was a lullaby meant to soothe the cows’ nerves.

I've circled...
But to keep you together, that's what I can't do...
My limbs are weary, my seat is sore;
Oh lay down, dogies, like you've laid down before.
Lay down little dogies, lay down.
Hi - yoo, he - yoo, woo - oo
(author unknown)

And, when the cowboys weren't singing to the cows, they sang to each other, usually without accompaniment. Guitars would have been a rare sight on the trail, although the smaller violin was not an uncommon sight (Smithers, 2). Their songs were usually about the loneliness of the trail, incidents along the way, and the exhausting and sometimes dangerous work of the cowboy (Lesson Plans III and IV).

Dust Bowl Era of the Great Depression

Songs can relay the feelings of a people and the experiences of the times. Probably some of the best examples are the songs of Woody Guthrie written during the years of the Great Depression. During the recession after World War I, the prices of farm products dropped. To be able to make ends meet the farmers of the Great Plains decided to increase their productivity through the use of advanced mechanization and the cultivation of more land. These formerly self-sufficient farmers became financially overextended. When the Stock Market crashed in 1929, the banks called in their notes. Independent farmers lost their homes. Tenant farmers were put off of the land by the large landowners who hoped to increase output through mechanization on a grand scale. The increased cultivation had a devastating affect on the land. The exposed earth now had no natural cover to protect it from erosion. A seven-year drought started in 1931, followed by huge dust storms in 1932 (Fanslow, par. 2).

The April 1, 1935 issue of *Time* magazine ran a description of what life was like in Kansas during a dust storm that lasted up to 12 days in some areas. People were hanging wet sheets over their windows in the hope of stopping the dust. It did little good. Food was always gritty. "People who ventured outside coughed and choked as the fields of Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, and Oklahoma rose and took flight through the windy air" (*Time*). Dust piled up like snowdrifts. Planes were grounded and highways were impassable. Schools and businesses were shut down. "Dust Bowl Blues" expresses the feelings of the people who lived through the eerie darkness created by the clouds of dust.

I just blowed in and I got them dust bowl blues...
I guess you've heard about ev'ry kind of blues,
But when the dust gets high, you can't even see the sky...
I've seen the dust so black that I couldn't see a thing.
(Guthrie, 1940)

Woody Guthrie was born in Okemah, Oklahoma in 1912. Because of several family misfortunes, he was left to fend for himself at an early age (Jackson, par. 1, 2). Music had always been a part of his life. So he earned a living for himself by dancing and singing on street corners. Woody spent time riding the rails and was reunited with his father and siblings in the Texas panhandle town of Pampa when he was seventeen years old (Jackson, par. 5, 6). An uncle there taught him how to play the guitar. Woody had first hand experience of what he wrote and sang about. He recalled, “There on the Texas plains right in the dead center of the dust bowl, with the oil boom over and the wheat blowed out and the hard-working people just stumbling about, bothered with mortgages, debts, bills, sickness, worries of every blowing kind, I seen there was plenty to make songs about” (Jackson, par. 8).

Woody, along with other displaced persons of the Great Plains decided to head west. Woody pursued a musical career. But the farmers were enticed to move by flyers promising jobs for agricultural workers in California and other western states. Wages would be fair, and clean and safe housing would be provided. Between 1931 and the beginning of World War II approximately 400,000 Okies (as everyone from the Great Plains came to be called) set out for California (Jackson, par. 9).²

Most of these migrants were Anglo, with little education. They were not used to modern conveniences such as electricity and indoor plumbing (Fanslow, par. 4). The reality of California was quite different from the life which had been promised on the flyers. With such large numbers of migrants entering the state the wages began to drop as people competed for jobs. Most of the work camps were full and the sanitation was very bad. Many pickers lived in cars, tents, or shacks they built themselves (Jackson, par. 12). The workers lacked a feeling of permanence. They did not see themselves as belonging to the larger community, as expressed in the following lyrics.

Pastures of Plenty

Out of your Dust Bowl and westward we rolled...
I slept on the ground in the light of the moon
On the edge of the city you'll see us and then
We come with the dust and go with the wind.

(Guthrie, date unknown)

This type of lifestyle left little time for schooling and no opportunity for starting a new home. “Even with an entire family working, migrants could not support themselves on these low wages” (Fanslow, par. 6). Woody Guthrie was angered by the conditions

² This would be an excellent place to introduce an interdisciplinary unit on *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (Lesson Plan V).

that the workers and their families were forced to endure. “I heard these people sing in their jungle camps and in their Federal Work Camps and [I] sang songs I made up for them over the air waves [radio]” (Guthrie, *My Life*, par. 6). “I Ain’t Got No Home” recounts the hardships Guthrie witnessed among the families who moved from place to place.

I ain’t got no home, I’m just a-roamin’ ‘round,
Just a wandrin’ worker, I go from town to town...
Rich man took my home and drove me from my door.
And I ain’t got no home in this world anymore.
(Guthrie, 1938)

In spite of the fact that California farmers needed pickers, they were not happy to see the Okies. California was also suffering from the Depression and was not prepared to cope with the large numbers of homeless. In his novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck relates the feelings he encountered while traveling through California’s agricultural valleys:

In the west there was panic when the migrants multiplied on the highways. Men of property were terrified for their property. Men who had never been hungry saw the eyes of the hungry. Men who had never wanted anything very much saw the flare of want in the eyes of the migrants. And the men of the towns and of the soft suburban country gathered to defend themselves; and they reassured themselves that they were good and the invaders bad... They said, These goddammed Okies are dirty and ignorant. They’re degenerate, sexual maniacs. These goddammed Okies are thieves. They’ll steal anything. They’ve got no sense of property rights (Steinbeck, 385-86).

The real life town of Brawley is located in California’s Imperial Valley. Three hundred families labored in the fields there and lived in a dry riverbed on the outskirts of town (Todd, 7). They had no sanitation. The town ignored the situation. So, in 1937, the Farm Security Administration bought land on the outskirts of town and built a worker’s camp. Tent platforms provided shelter. There were showers, toilets, a medical facility and a day care center. The campers took part in the governing of the camp (Todd, 7). While the local business people and farmers benefited from the labor and spending of the migrants, they were unhappy to have them in their midst. This new type of camp brought out suspicions. Most Americans at this time feared the spread of communism: the Red Scare. The Federal Work Camps and the efforts of unions to organize the migrant workers were seen by many Americans as the spread of communistic ideals. Leading citizens in Brawley formed the Associated Farmers Organization to “promote the prompt, orderly and efficient administration of justice” (Todd, 7). Anyone who seemed to be encouraging the workers to better their lot was seen as a menace. The vigilante like Farmers Organization would encourage these troublemakers to move on. Other

communities had similar groups. It was this type of activity that encouraged Woody Guthrie to write the following song.

Vigilante Man

Have you seen that vigilante man?
I been hearin' his name all over the land...
Oh, why does a vigilante man carry that sawed-off shotgun in his hand?
Would he shoot his brother and sister down?
(Guthrie, 1940)

During the 1930s many Americans saw the Red Scare as a real threat. Hugh Osborne, an Imperial County supervisor and member of the Brawley Associated Farmers Organization expressed the feelings of those who feared the spread of communism:

The whole proposition [of the worker camps] is communist through and through. It stinks of Russia. Our women won't be safe on the streets. We never wanted this camp in here. White men are not good in our business. We like our Mexicans. They don't complain; they live where we put them, and they aren't forever organizing. As for those bulletins [flyers] which they say we sent out to get those migrants here, they were the work of the Communist Party. We've spent \$400 to check on it. The Reds are burrowing from within...you know how they work!
(Todd, 8)

But these people were not Reds. They were fellow Americans who had hit hard times. In 1940, Woody Guthrie wrote "This Land Is Your Land" as a reminder to the country that all people were equal: "And some are grumblin' and some are wonderin' if this land's still made for you and me." This song reminds us of the bounty of the nation. It was the tragedy that was allowed in the face of that bounty that angered Guthrie. "Dust Can't Kill Me" speaks of the children and other loved ones who died during the times of hardship and how the families persevered:

That old dust storm killed my baby,
But it can't kill me, Lord...
That old landlord got my homestead...
That old dry spell killed my crops, boys...
That old tractor run my house down...
That old wind might blow this world down,
But it can't blow me down,
It can't kill me.
(Guthrie, 1938)

To help my students understand what motivates an artist, I have focused on the life and songs of Woody Guthrie. Guthrie, of course, was not the only person to sing of the plight of the dust bowl refugees. Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin traveled to the California work camps during the 1930s and recorded many of the songs written and sung by the residents. They are available through The American Memory Project at the Library of Congress (Todd).

Vietnam War

Vietnam was ruled by the French from 1857 until they were forced out in 1954. At that time the country was divided into North and South Vietnam. The North became communist; the South, non-communist. Both Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy believed in the domino effect, the idea that if one small nation fell to communism, the rest in the area would fall or topple just like standing dominoes.

Communism was seen as a threat to the economic stability of the western (free) world. This fear encouraged the United States to become involved in the defense of the South when North Vietnamese forces began crossing the border. The United States had successfully stemmed the tide of communism between North and South Korea in the 1950s. The U.S. government saw Vietnam as a similar action. During the Eisenhower administration, American military advisors were sent to aid the South Vietnamese starting in 1957. This eventually led to full military involvement under the subsequent administrations of Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon.

The Vietnam War was a civil war supported by outside sources (the U.S. and Communist China). It was not always possible to tell who the enemy was. "The Americans were not used to fighting a guerrilla type of jungle war" (*Vietnam, Echoes from the Wall*, 20). By 1973 a cease-fire agreement was signed and the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam. The South fell to the North in 1975 and today is still controlled by the communists. About fifty-eight thousand Americans died in Vietnam and another three hundred thousand were wounded ("Vietnam," 377).

It is not my intention to present an in depth study of the Vietnam War. To properly do that one would need to also teach the background of the Cold War. It was this international tug of war between the United States and the Soviet Union (along with Communist China) which allowed the U.S. to become involved in what appeared to be a small conflict so far away from our shores. A discussion of the American Civil Rights movement would also be necessary to fully understand American reactions to this war. Fighting a war that appeared, to many, to have no connection to our national security at a time when people were questioning our way of life and demanding changes at home would help lead to the war protests of the 1960s and early 1970s.

The music of the 1960s and 1970s reflected the country's emotional reactions to the Vietnam War. "The depth of feelings and opinions for and against continued U.S.

involvement in Vietnam were strong. Popular culture [song, movies, and print] would play a role in both reflecting and shaping public opinion” (*Vietnam, Echoes from the Wall*, 24). Protest marches, demonstrations, and love-ins were held by those opposed to the war. People at the love-ins asked why fighting was the only way to solve conflict. “Make Love Not War” was a popular slogan seen on bumper stickers. One of the most popular songs of this period was “Give Peace a Chance” by John Lennon and Paul McCartney written in 1969. The following chorus was sung at almost all peace demonstrations: “All we are saying is give peace a chance.” Unfortunately some of the lyrics to this song are not appropriate for school use. I would recommend listening to all songs from this time period before playing them for your classes.

Those who supported the war saw the peace demonstrators as cowards. Another popular bumper sticker reflected their view, “America, Love It or Leave It.” Many did leave. The Vietnam War was the most unpopular war in our nation’s history. People burned draft cards and refused to report for military duty. “In 1965 there were 380 draft evaders prosecuted; in 1969 there were 33,960. Over 100,000 fled the United States” (*Vietnam Links*, par. 3). The feelings of those who did not want to go were expressed in “I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag” by Country Joe & The Fish. This was another very popular song which also contains some lyrics not appropriate for the classroom.

And it’s 1,2,3 what are we fighting for?
Don’t ask me I don’t give a damn!
Next stop is Vietnam...
Whoopee
We’re all gonna die.
(McDonald, 1967)

Most of the songs, however, simply questioned the sensibility of war. The lyrics were intended to be thought provoking. “Blowin’ in the Wind” by Bob Dylan, asked simple questions about the human condition. This song addressed both the Civil Rights Movement and the question of fighting wars.

Yes, n’ how many times must the cannon balls fly
Before they’re forever banned?
Yes, n’ how many years must one man have
Before he can hear people cry?
The answer my friend, is blowin’ in the wind.
(Dylan, 1962)

Protesting against the war and for civil rights changed the way a whole generation viewed the world. Another song which reflected the thinking of the 1960s and 1970s was “People Got to Be Free.” Not only did it address the social change and subsequent unrest in the U.S., but also the need for change around the world.

All the world over, so easy to see.
People everywhere just wanna be free.
I can't understand it, so simple to me.
People everywhere just got to be free.
(Cavaliere, 1968)

Other songs addressed specific issues. During the Vietnam War eighteen-year-olds were not old enough to vote for the congressional members who would send them to war. But they were old enough to be drafted and die fighting in a war (Brownielocks, "Eve," verse 1). "The Eve of Destruction" sung by Barry McGuire addressed that issue.

The eastern world, it is explodin'!
Violence flarin'; Bullets loadin'!
You're old enough to kill,
But not for votin'!
You don't believe in war,
But what's that gun you're totin'?
(Sloan, 1965)

America's involvement in the Vietnam War was the longest in our nation's history. As the war dragged on, the protests increased and many times lead to confrontations. In 1970 four students at Kent State University in Ohio were shot and killed by the National Guard during an anti-war rally on the campus. Another ten students were wounded. The ROTC building at Kent State had been burned down the night before. The National Guard was called in to restore order and prevent further destruction. The guard was on watch during a protest rally the next day. They claimed that rocks were being thrown. Students who were there said the guard threw rocks back, but that activity soon ceased since the two sides were too far apart to hit each other (Hanson, par. 3). At one point the guardsmen kneeled and took aim and then retreated to the top of the hill. Alan Canfora was one of the students wounded at the demonstration. He recalls what happened after the retreat:

We were quite shocked when perhaps a dozen members of Troop G simultaneously stopped, turned and aimed their rifles. What followed was a 13 second barrage of gunfire, mostly M-1 rifles into our crowd of unarmed students...A total of 67 bullets were fired by the guardsmen...Most of the bullets were fired over 300 feet into the distant Prentice Hall parking lot.
(Hanson, par. 6)

Four people were killed. Two had been demonstrating and two were walking in the area. "Ohio" recalls the tragedy at Kent State. Listen to the lyrics before playing them for your students. Some versions contain obscenities.

Tin soldiers and Nixon's coming,
We're finally on our own.
This summer I hear the drumming
Four dead in Ohio
Gotta get down to it
Soldiers are gunning us down.

(Young, 1970)

Several investigations and trials followed but the soldiers were exonerated. "Two eyewitnesses, both ex-Marines who had served in Vietnam, said they saw a sergeant...give a signal to fire" (Hanson, par. 8). Perhaps the guard had aimed high and over the heads of the protestors. That would explain why the shots traveled so far. In reaction to this event over 100,000 demonstrators went to Washington, D.C. The Nixon Whitehouse was surrounded by barricades out of a fear that the demonstrations would get out of hand. On May 14, 1970 two more students were killed during a protest at Jackson State University in Mississippi.

Unlike soldiers from other wars, returning Vietnam veterans often received an unfriendly reception upon their return home. Sgt. Barry Sadler, a Green Beret, felt that the brave soldiers who risked their lives fighting for peoples' freedoms deserved a tribute. "The Ballad of the Green Berets" speaks of the bravery and honor of this elite special force.

Fighting soldiers from the sky,
Fearless men who jump and die...
Courage leaps from the green berets.

(Sadler, 1965)

Songs from this time period also dealt with issues of separation. In "Dear Uncle Sam" Loretta Lynn expresses feelings of patriotism along with misgivings about a loved one's call to duty. In a 1973 interview Ms. Lynn said "Dear Uncle Sam' I wrote when Vietnam was in real bad shape. I kind of put myself in the place of some woman or girl who lost her husband or boyfriend. Many have that I've known" (Hortsman, 271).

Dear Uncle Sam, I know you're a busy man...
You said you really need him, but you don't need him like I do...
I really love my country, but I also love my man...
Dear Uncle Sam, I just got your telegram...
For it said, "I'm sorry to inform you..."

(Lynn, 1965)

On the lighter side, Arlo Guthrie, son of Woody, wrote an epic song entitled "Alice's Restaurant." It recounted the tale of a youth (supposedly Arlo) who was deemed morally unfit for military service due to his criminal record as a litterbug. "I'm settin' here on the

Group W bench, ‘cause you want to know if I’m moral enough to join the army, burn women, kids, houses and villages after bein’ a litterbug” (A. Guthrie, 1966).

CONCLUSION

I am sure that in the course of reading this unit other details of the events discussed come to mind along with a multitude of songs. My purpose was to provide a stepping-stone to a new approach to learning. I found my own interest in the historical background of each era was heightened by the emotional impact of the lyrics. This unit illustrates how the study of the role of music in history can help place a more human perspective on events of the past, giving us a greater insight into our American culture and heritage.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan I – “Star Spangled Banner”

Objectives: Compare and contrast. Interdisciplinary writing assignment with English.

Ask the students to translate the meaning of the following verses. Key was writing about the emotions and pride that he felt upon seeing the flag still flying. His poetic verses were later set to music.

The Star Spangled Banner

O say, can you see, by the dawn’s early light
What so proudly we hail’d at the twilight’s last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, thro’ the perilous fight,
O’er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof thro’ the night that our flag was still there.
O say, does that Star-Spangled banner yet wave
O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

(Key, 1814)

History can repeat itself, as it did on September 11, 2001. Overnight, American flags were on display everywhere. People wore them; flags adorned buildings and cars. Why? What messages and feelings were people trying to exhibit? How did people feel about the flags that flew at the World Trade Center in New York?

Writing assignment:

1. What were your feelings every time you saw an American flag after 9/11?
2. What adjectives would best express those feelings?
3. Write your feelings in the form of a poem.

4. Compare what you have written to the feelings expressed by Francis Scott Key in “The Star Spangled Banner.”
5. Follow up with a discussion of the timelessness of our national anthem. In this way it is like our Constitution: flexible and capable of spanning the ages.

Lesson Plan II - Slavery

Objective: Inference.

After having studied the lifestyle of African American slaves, place the students into small groups. Ask them to discuss what the life of a slave must have been like. Give each group several scenarios from which to choose. They could be:

1. Field hands.
2. House servants.
3. Someone who has been punished for learning to read.
4. Someone who has just been sold away from their family.
5. Someone contemplating escape.

Ask them to write their feelings into a song. Next, tell them that they will be punished for singing such a song. The final step in this assignment will be to change the words of the song so that it has a double meaning; one which the other slaves will understand as a message of complaint, sorrow or anticipation of freedom. The master must only hear it as religious expression or as a song of entertainment.

Lesson Plan III - Cowboy Ballads

Objectives: Write in a narrative style. Compare and contrast.

Part I. After studying the cowboys and trail rides of the late 1800s ask the students to write about how they would feel on setting out on a trail ride:

1. What are their reasons for going: adventure, money, can't get any other kind of work, or running away from something?
2. How do they feel: anxious, happy, bored, or afraid?
3. What do they expect to encounter on the trail?
4. What do they think of the job? Describe it.
5. Are they lonely or do they appreciate the open spaces?

Once they have finished their narratives or poems, have the students listen to some old cowboy ballads. The students should then discuss if their papers relate the same feelings that were expressed by the cowboys in their songs.

Part II. NASA, the Johnson Space Center is not far from our school. A second option to this lesson would be to ask my students to imagine that they are astronauts and to answer the same questions. The possibility of fame would have to be added to question number one. They would first need to compare and contrast the job of a cowboy to that of an astronaut.

Lesson Plan IV - Publishing a Song

Objective: Research and learning to write a business letter.

This assignment could be for extra credit. It would involve an interdisciplinary project with the music and language arts departments. Several of these lesson plans involve writing feelings in the form of a poem or a song. Some of the musically inclined students may want to place these words to their own original music.

An extension to this assignment would be to research the process for obtaining a musical copyright and the process that one would follow to sell or produce a song. The English department could also become involved in this assignment by teaching the proper form for a business inquiry letter.

Lesson Plan V - *The Grapes of Wrath*

This novel (which was later made into a motion picture) gives an excellent portrait of what life was like for the dust bowl refugees. Language arts classes could study the novel while the history classes study the factual background and attendant socioeconomic effects. The economic consequences of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl Era could lead to a lesson in planning personal finances in the mathematics class.

Lesson Plan VI - Tracing the links between cultures, a world connections map

Objective: trace the origins of a particular musical tune, style or instrument.

This lesson can be adapted to whatever segment of history one is teaching. Using a map of the world, trace the musical origins of a particular musical tune, style or instrument.

For example: The guitar seems to have originated in the Middle East, traveled with the Muslims to Northern Africa, moved up into Spain when the Moors conquered Spain, and then traveled to the New World with the Spanish conquest (Shabbas, 220).

This progression can be placed on a large world map with color-coded arrows for each historical pathway being followed. I currently teach Texas History. We study a good deal of Mexican history since Texas was originally a part of Mexico. I would remind my students that we have already followed this historical pathway when studying the architecture of Mexico. The domed structures and tile that are so readily associated with

Mexico also came from the Middle East by way of Northern Africa and Spain before being introduced to the New World by the Spanish. This information might also be traced on the world map. In this case, different colors should be used for tracing musical styles, architecture, literature, etc. I particularly like this lesson because it allows me to involve the various cultures enrolled in my classes. Texas History places an emphasis on the Hispanic, Anglo and African American cultures. Our enrollment at Jane Long Middle School in Houston, Texas includes students from 51 nations. This year I have a large number of Muslim students. Using this multicultural lesson will allow me to focus attention on those student groups that may feel neglected during our course of study.

APPENDIX

Code words from songs of the Underground Railroad

Heaven - Canada.

Baggage - fugitive slave carried by underground worker.

Moses - Harriet Tubman: Moses had helped his people escape slavery in Egypt.

Drinking gourd - the Big Dipper constellation containing the North Star. The North Star guided slaves to freedom in the North.

Gospel train - the Underground Railroad.

River Jordan - the Mississippi River.

The wind blows from the south - let slaves and Underground Railroad workers know that there were fugitive slaves in the area.

When the sun comes back and the first quail calls - early spring.

The riverbank makes a mighty good road - go through the water, walk in the river, it leaves no scent for the dogs to follow.

Darkness - slavery.

Glory - freedom.

Shepherds - people escorting slaves.

Station - safe house.

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus - song used to alert other slaves that an escape attempt was coming up.

Left foot, peg foot - footprints left by a wooden-legged Underground Railroad worker as a guideline to follow on the path to freedom.

(Jones, *Codes*, par. 3)

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