

LESSON IDEAS

“Teaching with American Folk Music”

“SUNNY CALIFORNIA” LESSON IDEA

Preparation

1. Go to Lyrical Legacy and select the song “Sunny California” from the era, Great Depression/World War II, 1929-1945: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/songs/california.html>.
2. Under the title, click on “Analysis Tools” for the different steps of this lesson and what to do for each: Preparation, Initial Response, Analytical Response, and Discussion.
3. Also on the “Analysis Tools” page, click on the pdf file, [“Thinking about Songs as Historical Artifacts.”](#) Print out enough so each individual student or each group of students has one.

Introduction

4. Talk with your class about the Dust Bowl and its affects on America. Use the information on the “Sunny California” page, including the link to “The Migrant Experience” (at the bottom under “Learn More”).

Activity

5. Listen to the song by clicking on “Listen to Mary Sullivan singing her song, ‘Sunny California,’ in 1941” under the “Recorded Sound” icon.
Note: You will need, for Windows, either RealPlayer or Media Player, or for Mac, either RealPlayer or Quick Time. For more information, click [here](#).
6. After listening to the song, read the words to the song by clicking on “text transcription” (under the “listen” link). This brings up a pdf file that you can print out and photocopy for your students.

Analysis

7. Have individual students or groups of students fill out “Thinking about Songs as Historical Artifacts.” Let students discuss their answers with the class as a whole, individually or as group presentations. For a list of discussion questions, refer to the “Discussion” section of the “Analysis Tools” page.

Compare & Contrast: *further steps that incorporate other audio and visual primary sources*

1. Look for other primary sources to deepen student understanding of the Dust Bowl by visiting the American Memory Timeline (Great Depression and World War II) link under “Learn More” and clicking on “Dust Bowl.” Students can also browse thousands of photographs by going to *Photographs from the FSA-OWI 1935-1945* (also under “Learn More”) and doing a keyword search for terms such as “dust bowl.”
2. Compare “Sunny California” to “Sunny Cal,” also featured in Webcast and available [here](#) (with transcription available [here](#)). How are the two songs similar, and how are they different?
3. Compare “Sunny California” (and “Sunny Cal,” too, if you wish) to contemporary songs about California. Has the ideal vision of California changed since the 1930s and 40s? Has the reality changed?

“SONGS OF WORKING AMERICANS” LESSON IDEA

Preparation

1. Go to the Collection Connections page for *Southern Mosaic: The John and Roby Lomax 1939 Southern States Recording Trip*, at <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/connections/southern-mosaic/>. Read about the songs and images in this collection at the “U.S. History” link in Collection Connections, and at the collection home page (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/lohtml/lohome.html>).
2. Go to the “Critical Thinking” portion of Collection Connections, and select the link for the [“Historical Analysis and Interpretation”](#) section. Read the lesson ideas and discussion questions about work songs.

Introduction

3. Discuss the historical background of the rural South during the Depression with your students.

Activity #1

4. Click on “Steel Driving Song” (the example on the left) and have students pay close attention to the words and rhythm.

Note: You will need, for Windows, either RealPlayer or Media Player, or for Mac, either RealPlayer or Quick Time. For more information, click [here](#).

Analysis #1

5. Pose the suggested discussion questions, especially the following:
 - 1) What kinds of tasks are mentioned in this song?
 - 2) What attitudes toward work are reflected in this songs’ lyrics and tone?

Activity #2

6. Click on “New Buryin’ Ground” (the example on the right) and have students pay close attention to the words and rhythm. Ask students to compare the words of this spiritual with the words of the work song (“Steel Driving Song.”) How are they different?

Analysis #2

7. How do you know that “New Buryin’ Ground” is a work song, even though it is a spiritual? Point out the rhythm and show students the associated image of convicts working in South Carolina. You can also compare this version of “New Buryin’ Ground” to others that are not work songs by going to the collection home page and searching under the song title.

Further steps that incorporate other audio and visual primary sources

8. To find other work songs in the collection, follow the suggestions in the “Historical Analysis and Interpretation” section. Go to the collection home page (second link in #1 above) and search by “audio subject” for work songs.
9. To find primary sources that give different perspectives on the songs, search by “keyword (full text)” for related field notes, or by “photo subject” for related images.

EXTRA: "SONGS OF APPALACHIA" LESSON IDEA

This lesson idea comes straight from a the curriculum standards for fifth grade Music, Sample Performance Task 9.1-2:

The students will examine the music found in the Appalachian Mountains. In groups or individually, they will research (using the internet, books, or any other available resources) the music and culture of that location. Each group or individual will then display and discuss information discovered about the music and culture of the location. Assessment will be based on presentation and accuracy of information.

Preparation

1. Go to the collection homepage for *Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: The Henry Reed Collection*, at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/reed/>. (Note: Unfortunately, the "Collection Connections" resource for this collection is not yet operational.)

Introduction

2. Read or have students read, from the collection home page, the first essay under "Features" for background information on this musician and the kind of music he played.

Activity

3. Have students browse for songs by genre, and listen to songs that represent several different genres. (Note: You will need, for Windows, either RealPlayer or Media Player, or for Mac, either RealPlayer or Quick Time. For more information, click [here](#).)

Analysis

4. Students will discuss the differences and similarities of songs from different genres, as well as what settings (e.g., church, social dances, etc.) would be most appropriate for each genre. Use information from the essay and other researched information to discuss the different aspects of Appalachian life.

Other related collections you can use

- *Folk-Songs of America: The Robert Winslow Gordon Collection, 1922-1932*: <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/Gordon/index.html>. Access songs by clicking on "Sound Files." The Appalachian songs are listed under Bands A3, A5, A6, A7, and B5. You can click on "liner notes" for background information on the songs and singers.
- *Tending the Commons: Folklife and Landscape in Southern West Virginia*: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/tending/index.html>. This collection contains Appalachian music, along with audio interviews, photographs, and maps that tell the story of modern folklife from a number of different perspectives. To find songs, search the collection by the keyword "music" for songs as well as photographs of singers and musicians. (Note: Unfortunately, the "Collection Connections" resource for this collection is not yet operational.)
- *Quilts and Quiltmaking in America, 1978-1996*: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/qlthtml/qlthome.html>. While containing no music, this collection does contain audio interviews, photographs of people, as well as photographs of quilts and the quiltmaking process, all depicting another aspect of folklife in the Blue Ridge Mountains.