



Spiritual Songs

MUSIC THAT BUILT
A NATION

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**Spiritual Songs Educational Curriculum
A Six Part Lesson Plan**

**The Creation and History of the Negro Spiritual
An Original American Musical Art Form
Lesson Excerpts**

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* Teacher's Note – All lectures and lessons contain basic information on slavery and the slave trade that are important in regard to the creation of the Negro Spiritual as an original American art form. Please review all lesson plans beforehand and teach, modify and adapt the information that you believe is appropriate for your student's age range and educational development.

Lesson One Excerpt: Introduction of Spiritual Songs

Objective: To gain a basic understanding of the Mid Atlantic Slave Trade and an overview of the history of slavery in America.

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this lesson students will:

- **Have a clear understanding of slavery and its impact on America**
- **Gain knowledge on Slave Castles, their locations and historical purpose**
- **Articulate the significance of The Door of No Return**
- **Utilize research skills in determining the number of slaves who perished on The Middle Passage while being able to define and describe The Middle Passage**
- **Demonstrate and be able to apply lesson vocabulary words that pertain to slavery and its origins in America**

Learning Exercise Excerpts from Lesson One

Questions to Ponder! Ask the students these questions at the close of the lecture:

(From the Section on The Door of No Return and The Middle Passage)

Why do you think scholars have so many different numbers on how many slaves died making the trip across the Atlantic?

How many slaves do you think were taken from Africa? What do you think it was like making the trip from Africa to the Americas?

Learning Exercise Geography Lessons

Pull up a map of Africa. What countries make up the Western part of the continent? What major cities are in these countries? What languages are spoken there and what cultural traditions do the people practices there? Who lives there? What is the weather like? What is the geography like? What is the history and current status of these nations today?

Ideas for Younger Learners

The lecture can be adapted for younger learners allowing the teacher to select which parts of history to emphasize. Young learners can be encouraged to do research on: animals native to the Western coast of Africa, what schools, music or dance are like in this region of the world or the various cultures and ethnic groups that live there.

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Lesson Two Excerpt: The Birth of the Negro Spiritual

Objective: To understand how the Negro Spiritual was created based on traditional African music and communication methods.

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this lesson students will:

- Understand the importance of music in the daily lives of Africans
- Experience the significance of African Drums in communication
- Know how African music was reshaped to create the Negro Spiritual
- Explore poetry while engaging in creative writing skills
- Gain knowledge on vocabulary words that pertain to African music and other African cultural art forms

Learning Exercise Excerpts From Lesson Two

(From the Section on The Creation and Development of the Negro Spiritual)

West African Sorrow Scale

As time passed Corn Ditties became known as Slaves Songs or Negro Spirituals. Almost all Negro Spirituals can be played on the piano using only the black piano keys. In music, this is called the Pentatonic Scale which has five notes per octave, but in Africa this scale was called something different, it was called the West African Sorrow Scale.

West Africans created their music using the Sorrow Scale. They brought this style of singing to America when they came and the scale became known musically as the slave scale. Negro Spirituals were created using the West African Sorrow Scale, songs such as *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*, *Every Time I Feel The Spirit* and even *Amazing Grace* can all be played using only the black keys on the piano.

Learning Exercise

Kum Ba Yah

Instructions: Listen to the song and have the students answer the questions below:

Go to the I-Tunes online store, and search for the song *Kum Ba Yah*. Listen to the various samples that are offered. How are the renditions the same? How are they different? Have you ever sung Kum Ba Yah? If so where and when? What do you think the song really means?

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Lesson Three Excerpts: The Different Uses of the Negro Spiritual

Objective: To gain a basic understanding of the different uses of the Negro Spiritual during slavery in daily life.

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this lesson students will:

- **Have a clear understanding of the different uses of the Negro Spiritual in daily life**
- **Gain a basic knowledge of slavery as an economic institution**
- **Identify and articulate Call and Response Singing and the use of it in modern music and society**
- **Utilize research and writing skills to explore various aspects of slavery, African American music and slavery's impact on slave families**
- **Gain knowledge on vocabulary words that pertain to various aspects of slavery and the Negro Spiritual**

Learning Exercise Excerpts From Lesson Three

(From the Section on The Uses of the Negro Spiritual in Everyday Life)

Lecture Two – Negro Spiritual in Every Day Life

Long before TV, video games, MP3 players and the internet, there were very few choices for entertainment. There were laws in place prohibiting slaves from learning to read and write, so they could not pass the time reading. There were also many laws that prohibited gatherings of slaves and restricting their travel, so there were very few gatherings of various groups of slaves unless special permission could be obtained from their Masters.

Slaves spent a good deal of time (after their work was done for the day) sitting together with other slaves on their plantations, talking, telling stories, passing along news that they had overheard in the Master's house or from slaves who could travel (such as the slave who drove the Master's wagon) and singing.

The Negro Spirituals developed into creative expressions of stories, jokes, life and happenings around the plantation. Here's an example:

Scandalize My Name - Paul Roberson - <https://youtu.be/z0X0uw9RzUo>

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Remember!

Slaves could not come and go as they pleased. They could never sleep in, or choose what they ate or where they went. When slaves had children, their children were also slaves, so every baby born became the property of the Master.

Webster's Definition of Property

Something owned or possessed, such as a piece of real estate

The exclusive right to possess, enjoy, and dispose of a thing

Ownership, something to which a person or business has a legal title

Because slaves were not seen as humans but as property, they could be killed, beaten, brutalized, bought and sold whenever the Master decided to. Slaves were sold for many reasons including: economic hardship, to settle debt, death of owners, as punishment or sometimes for no reason at all. As property, a slave owner could name his slaves in his will so that other family members could inherit them. Slaves could be given as gifts from one member of the family to another. The number of slaves owned by a family often determined the amount of wealth a family had. The more slaves you owned, the more money you had.

Imagine what it would be like if you were a child, and someone took you away from home and sold you far away from your family. The majority of slaves that were sold never saw their loved ones again, and those remaining were not given any information about where their loved ones were taken.

The separation of families was a constant source of fear and left lasting anguish in many lives. Songs such as, *Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child*, were born from this unbearable pain. Yet the slaves did survive and kept going with hope in their hearts that one day they would be free and find their loved ones again.

Learning Exercise**Personal Reflection Essay Instructions:**

Have the students write a personal essay or journal entry on the question, "What would it be like to be sold away from your family and friends?" Creative writing should be encouraged and students should write an essay that truly expresses their thoughts and feelings on what it would be like to be a slave and what it would mean to be sold away from family. Teachers should gauge if this exercise is appropriate for their students based on their emotional, personal and spiritual well being.

Lesson Four Excerpt: Escape and Freedom

Objective: To gain a basic understanding of methods the slaves used to escape bondage, hide directions in Negro Spiritual Songs and the Underground Railroad.

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this lesson students will:

- **Have a clear understanding of various methods slaves used for escape**
- **Define and describe Code Songs**
- **Articulate the significance of songs such as, *Follow The Drinking Gourd***
- **Develop research skills to explore subjects such as Astronomy and Geography**
- **Utilize vocabulary words that pertain to slavery, escape and freedom**

Learning Exercise Excerpts From Lesson Four

(From the Section on Escape and Freedom)

Lecture Two – Conductors of the Underground Railroad

Harriet Tubman, an escaped slave is one of the most famous Conductors of the Underground Railroad. She returned to the South several times, with a pistol, to assist slaves in their flight for freedom. But Harriet Tubman was more than just a Conductor of the Underground Railroad. Harriet served as a spy for the Union Army, a nurse, an advocate and activist for free slaves.

There were many other Conductors of the Underground Railroad, of both African and European descent that did great works to end slavery and to assist in their flight to freedom. Have the students use Google or some other search engine to discover these unsung heroes. Have them start by using the search term, Conductors of the Underground Railroad and have them share the stories they have read about and learned with others.

Field Trips

Students should be taken or encouraged to visit the library, speak with the research or reference librarian to discover new ways to use the library and its resources to conduct research and educational projects. If near Cincinnati, Ohio a trip to the Freedom Center makes a great field trip. <http://www.freedomcenter.org/>

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There are many other museums and organizations that you can take your students to visit as well. Listed below are a few ideas, but there are African American Historical

Societies, living history museums and other plantations not listed below that can be visited by doing a search for such organizations or places by state.

Carnton Plantation or The Hermitage
Nashville, TN

Kingsley Plantation
Jacksonville, FL

Schomburg Library and Museum
Harlem, New York

Civil Rights Museum
Memphis, TN

African American History Museum
Wilberforce, Ohio

Smithsonian Museum on African American History and Culture
Washington, DC

Learning Exercise Another Option

Another great project would be to study the use of quilts as maps for the Underground Railroad and as a method of escape.

Learning Exercise Modern Slavery

Most people forget that slavery still exists today. If you have older students, you can have them do a research project on the various types of slavery that is occurring today, how people are becoming slaves, and how they can help combat it. One of the most prominent issues is Sex Trafficking and although a very intense and disturbing crime, if the students are old enough to understand and grasp its implications they should be educated on the issues.

Have the students compare and contrast modern slavery with pre Civil War Slavery. How are they similar? How are they different? How can they get involved and become “Virtual Conductors” to help bring an end to this issue? Furthermore, how can students protect themselves from becoming victims of such a crime.

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Have the students plan an awareness event, do a fundraiser for a reputable group or volunteer at an event to end Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery.

For More Information Visit:

<https://traffickingresourcecenter.org/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_organizations_that_combat_human_trafficking

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Lesson Five Excerpt: Rebellion and Redemption

Objective: To gain a basic understanding of how the slaves used music to rebel against and reject slavery as well as explore unusual and little known stories of slave life.

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this lesson students will:

- Have a clear understanding of how music was used to fuel rebellion
- Articulate the concept of “freedom” and how it applies to us today
- Use critical thinking skills and explore journal writing
- Gain knowledge of unknown stories of slave rebellion and defiance
- Use vocabulary words that pertain to slavery, freedom and rebellion

Learning Exercise Excerpts From Lesson Five

(From the Section on Rebellion and Redemption)

Opening Learning Exercise:

Have the students write a journal entry and if willing share what they write about their concept of freedom. Questions to guide this exercise can include: what does it mean to be free? What would life look like if that freedom was taken? The slaves often used music to express their desire for freedom and as a symbol of rebellion, what would the student use to express their desires? What would they use to express, encourage or discourage others to rebel? What actions would they be willing to take to obtain their freedom?

Have the students review the Oxford definition of freedom, and then write a second journal entry using the definition of freedom to further enhance or inform their thought process about the concept of freedom.

Oxford Definition of Freedom – Noun

The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint

Absence of subjection to foreign domination or despotic government

The state of not being imprisoned or enslaved

The state of being physically unrestricted and able to move easily

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The state of not being subject to or affected by a particular undesirable thing

The power of self determination attributed to the will; the quality of being independent of fate or necessity

Unrestricted use of something, familiarity or openness in speech or behavior

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The Drums

Instructions: Read the poem, *The Drums* and answer the discussion questions.

The Drums

Rhythmic patterns
Match the beating
In the tasteless heat

Bodies pliable
Move in time to the vibrations
Writhing in the expressions of life

Beauty unforeseen
In agony that awaits
Messages transmitted on wind
Giving life to letters in the air

Words disguised
As thumping feet mask
Messages of warning

Celebrations of life and death
Worship of the One who Is
Dancing as loud as spoken words
Players skillfully convey
That which needed to be known

The pounding fails, all is silent
At the wailing for the vanished

Gone across the big waters
Deaf to the music that speaks
Brutalized when found talking
In the ancient tongue

There are no drums
Across the sea

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