**EXTENSION** **LESSON: Historical Connections**

Objectives

Students will make interdisciplinary connections between history and language arts.

Students will explore the ways different songwriters recount historical events.

Students will gain experience identifying and writing from different points of view.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 - Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 - Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7 - Conduct short, as well as more sustained, research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Vocabulary

current event, point of view

Preparation

Make copies of **“The Battle of New Orleans”** and **“Do Re Mi” Lyric Sheets**.

Locate audio or video versions of “The Battle of New Orleans” performed by Johnny Horton, and “Do Re Mi” performed by Woody Guthrie.

**Note:** A list at the end of this lesson contains alternate songs that may correspond to what students are learning about in their history or social studies lessons. You may wish to choose two different songs from the list for this lesson. If so, be sure to choose songs from two of the three different points of view: first-person (Participant), second-person (Advisor), or third-person (Narrator).

Free Write

5 minutes

Discuss Homework

If applicable, discuss the previous day’s homework.

Brainstorm

3 minutes

Spend one minute on each of the following tasks:

* Ask students to write down the first three historical events that come to their minds.
* Ask students to write down the first three current events that come to their minds. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a **current event** is an “event of political or social importance that is happening now” or has happened recently.
* Ask students to choose a partner, compare their lists, and explore whether or not common theme emerges. Ask the teams to report whether or not their lists shared a common theme and identify what the theme is. (**Note:** Conflict will probably emerge as a common theme.)

Activity

35 minutes

1. Students will listen to two songs recounting historical events. They will compare and contrast the styles and points of view in each song. **Point of view** is the perspective of the words being sung or spoken. If students are not yet familiar with first, second, and third person points of view, share the following information:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Point of View** | **Example** |
| First Person (Participant) | I/We did something |
| Second Person (Advisor) | You should do something |
| Third Person (Storyteller) | He/She/It did something |

Distribute the lyric sheet for “The Battle of New Orleans” written by Jimmy Driftwood. Read the historical overview on the top of the page, and then play Johnny Horton’s recording of the song. Repeat these steps for “Do Re Mi” by Woody Guthrie.

2. In groups of three or four, ask students to examine the following questions:

* What are the similarities in the way each of the two songs is written? (As you monitor discussions, listen for some of the following answers: The songs use specific details about the events; the songs are descriptive; the songs tell a story.
* What are some specific historical details used in each of the two songs? (Ask each group to share at least one answer to the class.)
* What are the differences in the way the two songs are written? (As you monitor discussions, listen for some of the following answers: “The Battle of New Orleans” tells a story with humor while “Do Re Mi” is more serious; each song takes a different point of view, with Guthrie speaking as an Advisor and Horton speaking as a Participant.)

Teacher Tip

Remind students that the three points of view – Participant, Advisor, Storyteller – correspond to the pronouns they have learned in their writing lessons: first-person singular (I), first-person plural (we), second-person singular and plural (you/you), third-person singular (he/she/it), and third-person plural (they).

3. Assign students the following prompt:

Pick a historical event to write a song about. This could be an event you have studied in class or it could be a current event. Try to choose one that captures your imagination or one that you have a strong opinion about. You may use one of the events from your brainstorm or you may think of a new event. Write using one of the two songs’ points of view as your inspiration:

The Participant (first-person). Example: “The Battle of New Orleans”

The Advisor (second-person). Example: “Do Re Mi”

**Note:** Students will likely need to finish this song as homework or in a second class period. The assignment can be shortened to writing a single verse or the chorus instead of an entire song.

4. As an interdisciplinary learning project in conjunction with a history teacher, choose a song that corresponds with what students are learning in history or social studies.

Listen to the song as a class, then ask students (either individually or in small groups) to:

* Highlight parts of the song that mention specific facts from the historical event.
* Research the historical event to which the song refers.
* Create a visual depiction (poster, PowerPoint presentation, hyperlink document, etc.) to display their findings about the specific details mentioned in the song.

Homework

Students who have not completed their lyrics can do so as a homework assignment. For students who have finished, offer the following prompt:

Write a new verse or chorus of the song you wrote in class using a different point of view. For example, if you wrote as the Narrator in class, write as the Participant in your homework assignment.

Historical Song Alternates (point of view in parentheses)

The following is a list of songs by country, folk, rock, and blues artists and songwriters about historical events. The songs on this list contain enough concrete details about the historical events to be useful for the activities in this lesson. Numerous songwriters have tackled historical events, so links to websites containing more comprehensive lists have been included at the end of the lesson.

**Civil War**

“The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down” by Robbie Robertson (Participant)

**Great Depression/Okie Migration**

“California Cotton Fields” by Dallas Frazier (Participant)

**9/11 Terrorist Attacks**

“Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)” by Alan Jackson (Advisor)

**Civil Rights**

“My Name is Emmett Till” by Emmylou Harris (Participant)

**Mexican Revolution**

“Mercenary Song” by Steve Earle (Participant)

**Kent State Shootings**

“Ohio” by Neil Young (Participant)

**Boston Tea Party**

“Boston Tea Party” by Alex Harvey and Hugh McKenna (Narrator)

**The life and times of Jesus**

“Jesus Christ” by Woody Guthrie (Narrator)

**The Great Flood of 1913**

“Backwater Blues” by Big Bill Broonzy (Participant)

**Spanish Conquest**

“Cortez the Killer” by Neil Young (Narrator)

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The following songs were written in response to historical events, but do not include specific facts about those events. Instead, they can be used to illustrate to students how songwriters respond to the times in which they live.

**Economic Depression**

“How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?” by Blind Alfred Reed

**Vietnam War Era/Youth Movement**

“What is Truth” by Johnny Cash

“The Fightin’ Side of Me” by Merle Haggard

**Soldier returning from war**

“Mama Bake a Pie, Daddy Kill a Chicken” by Tom T. Hall (Participant)

“Dress Blues” by Jason Isbell (Zac Brown Band also performs a version of this song)

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These websites contain lists of songs that refer to historical events:

Smithsonian Folkways website – Type a historical event (example: Civil War) into the search bar on the top lefthand side of the page. The search will yield a playlist of songs related to that event: <http://www.folkways.si.edu/>

NPR Music – This site features a list of songs about the Civil Rights Movement: <http://www.npr.org/2013/07/09/199105070/the-mix-songs-inspired-by-the-civil-rights-movement>

Songfacts – This site features a list of songs about historical events, a brief description of different events, and links to lyrics: <http://www.songfacts.com/category-songs_about_historical_events.php>

Lyric Sheet

The Battle of New Orleans was the final major battle in the War of 1812, a two-and-a-half year war between Great Britain and America. Andrew Jackson, nicknamed “Old Hickory,” commanded the American soldiers, who were mostly volunteers. Although the Americans were outnumbered two to one, they held their ground for days, eventually defeating the invading British army. Their actions prevented the British from taking control of New Orleans.

The Treaty of Ghent effectively ended the War of 1812. It was signed on December 24, 1814.  But news was slow to cross the Atlantic, without radio, much less TV, or even telegraph connections. News had to travel by ship. The Battle of New Orleans was fought on January 8, 1815. Andrew Jackson had assembled a force of militiamen, volunteers (many from Tennessee), slaves, Indians, and even pirates, who converged on New Orleans in the latter part of 1814. (Thus, the beginning line of the song, “In 1814 we took a little trip…)

The British planned to seize New Orleans and thereby control the Mississippi River, on which much of U.S. trade depended. The American victory put an end to the British plan and was essential to America’s continued prosperity and expansion. The battle also made Jackson a national hero and eventually led to his winning the presidency in 1828 and 1832. [1]

**THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS**

*Jimmy Driftwood*

In 1814 we took a little trip  
Along with Colonel Jackson down the mighty Mississip  
We took a little bacon and we took a little beans  
And we caught the bloody British in a town in New Orleans

We fired our guns and the British kept a-comin’  
There wasn’t nigh as many as there was a while ago  
We fired once more and they begin to runnin’  
On down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico

We looked down the river and we see’d the British come  
And there must have been a hundred of ’em beatin’ on the drums  
  
They stepped so high and they made their bugles ring  
We stood beside our cotton bales and didn’t say a thing

We fired our guns and the British kept a-comin’  
There wasn’t nigh as many as there was a while ago  
We fired once more and they begin to runnin’  
On down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico

Old Hickory said we could take ’em by surprise  
If we didn’t fire our muskets till we looked ’em in the eyes  
We held our fire till we see’d their faces well  
Then we opened up our squirrel guns and really gave ’em - well ...

We fired our guns and the British kept a-comin’  
There wasn’t nigh as many as there was a while ago  
We fired once more and they begin to runnin’  
On down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico

Yeah, they ran through the briars and they ran through the brambles  
And they ran through the bushes where a rabbit couldn’t go  
They ran so fast that the hounds couldn’t catch ’em  
On down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico

We fired our cannon till the barrel melted down  
So we grabbed an alligator and we fought another round  
We filled his head with cannonballs, and powdered his behind  
And when we touched the powder off the gator lost his mind

We fired our guns and the British kept a-comin’  
There wasn’t nigh as many as there was a while ago  
We fired once more and they begin to runnin’  
On down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico

Yeah, they ran through the briars and they ran through the brambles  
And they ran through the bushes where a rabbit couldn’t go  
They ran so fast that the hounds couldn’t catch ’em  
On down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico

[1] Adapted from http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/jackson/aa\_jackson\_icon\_1.html

Lyric Sheet

In the 1930s, the southwestern Great Plains region of the United States suffered a severe drought, and the over-farmed and over-grazed top soil began to blow away. Winds whipped across the plains, raising billowing clouds of dust, and more than 150,000 square miles in the nation’s heartland became known as the “Dust Bowl.” Farm workers in southern states also were hard hit during this period as modern machinery began replacing them in the fields. Scrambling to make a living, farm families abandoned their homes in droves and migrated west seeking work. Eventually, millions joined the greatest migration in American history, many settling in California. Woody Guthrie’s song describes the experience of many of these migrants, who often found there weren’t enough jobs to go around at their destinations. The term “Do Re Mi” is a system of learning music, but here, Woody Guthrie’s use of “Do” plays on “dough,” slang for money. [2]

**DO RE MI**

*Woody Guthrie*

Lots of folks back East, they say, is leavin’ home every day,

Beatin’ the hot old dusty way to the California line.

’Cross the desert sands they roll, gettin’ out of that old dust bowl,

They think they’re goin’ to a sugar bowl, but here’s what they find

Now, the police at the port of entry say,

“You're number fourteen thousand for today.”

Oh, if you ain’t got the do re mi, folks, you ain’t got the do re mi,

Why, you better go back to beautiful Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, Tennessee.

California is a garden of Eden, a paradise to live in or see,

But believe it or not, you won’t find it so hot

If you ain’t got the do re mi.

You want to buy you a home or farm, that can’t deal nobody harm,

Or take your vacation by the mountains or sea.

Don’t swap your old cow for a car, you better stay right where you are,

You better take this little tip from me.

’Cause I look through the want ads every day

But the headlines on the papers always say:

If you ain’t got the do re mi, boys, you ain’t got the do re mi,

Why, you better go back to beautiful Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, Tennessee.

California is a garden of Eden, a paradise to live in or see,

But believe it or not, you won’t find it so hot

If you ain’t got the do re mi.

[2] Adapted from woodyguthrie.com and historical information on songfacts.com