**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

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7

Vocabulary

current event, point of view (review from Lesson 4)

Preparation

Make copies of **“1913 Massacre,” “The Battle of New Orleans,” and “Ballad of Ira Hayes” Lyric Sheets**.

Locate audio or video versions of “1913 Massacre” performed by Woody Guthrie, “The Battle of New Orleans” performed by Johnny Horton, and “The Ballad of Ira Hayes” performed by Johnny Cash.

**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 three different songs from the list for this lesson. If so, be sure to choose songs from 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 three 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 English Dictionary, a **current event** is an “event of political or social importance that is happening now” or has happened recently.
* Ask students to compare their lists with a partner and explore whether or not a common theme emerges between their lists. Ask partner pairs to report whether or not their lists share a common theme. (**Note:** Conflict will probably emerge as a common theme.)

Activity

35 minutes

1. Students will listen to three 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 (see Lesson 4 for more on point of view).

Distribute the lyric sheet for “The Battle of New Orleans” written by Jimmy Driftwood. Read the historical overview at the top of the page, and then play the song performed by Johnny Horton. Repeat for “1913 Massacre” by Woody Guthrie and “Ballad of Ira Hayes” written by Peter LaFarge and performed by Johnny Cash.

2. Ask students, in groups of four or five, to discuss the following questions:

* What are the similarities among the ways these songs are written? (As you monitor discussions, listen for some of the following answers: The songs are about conflicts of some kind; the songs use specific details about the events; the songs are descriptive.)
* What are some specific historical details used in each of the three songs? (Ask each group to report at least one finding to the class.)
* What are the differences in the ways these 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 the other two songs are more serious; each song takes a different point of view, with Guthrie narrating, Horton speaking as a participant, and Cashreflecting on an event.)
* In your opinion, are the songwriters retelling a story in the form of a song or are they inserting their own views? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

3. Assign students the following prompt:

Pick a famous event to write a song about. This could be a historical 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 three points of view as your inspiration:

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

The Advisor (second-person). Example: “1913 Massacre”

The Storyteller (third-person). Example: “The Ballad of Ira Hayes”

**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.

Teacher Tip

Remind students that the three points of view – Participant, Advisor, Storyteller – correspond to the nominative-case pronouns they have learned in their English 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). For more on point of view, see Lesson 4 and/or the Spotlight on Point of View in the guide.

4. As an interdisciplinary learning project in conjunction with a history teacher, choose a song that corresponds with what students are learning about in history or social studies. A list of songs with historical content is provided.

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 the song references.
* Create a visual depiction (PowerPoint presentation, hyperlink document, website, etc.) to display their findings about the specific details mentioned in the song.

Historical Song Alternates (point of view noted 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 this interdisciplinary assignment. 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)

“Streets of Bakersfield” by Homer Joy (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 Great Flood of 1913**

“Backwater Blues” by Big Bill Broonzy (Participant)

**Presidential Politics**

“Watergate Blues” by Tom T. Hall (Narrator)

**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 offer a perspective on the events and 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 Era/Youth Movement**

“What is Truth?” by Johnny Cash

“The Fightin’ Side of Me” by Merle Haggard

**Note:** “What is Truth?” was written in response to sentiments in “The Fightin’ Side of Me.”

**Presidential Assassinations**

“Six White Horses” written by Larry Murray and performed by Tommy Cash

“Abraham, Martin, and John,” written by Dick Holler and performed by Dion

**Soldier returning from war**

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

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

**Inequality**

“Man in Black” by Johnny Cash

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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 playlists of songs related to that event: <http://www.folkways.si.edu/>

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

Homework

Give students the following prompt:

Write a different version of the song lyrics you wrote in class using one of the other points of view. For example, if you wrote as the Narrator in class, write as a Participant or Advisor in your homework assignment.

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



**1913 MASSACRE**

*Woody Guthrie*

Take a trip with me in 1913,
To Calumet, Michigan, in the copper country.
I’ll take you to a place called Italian Hall,
And the miners are having their big Christmas ball.

I’ll take you in a door and up a high stairs,
Singing and dancing is heard everywhere,
I’ll let you shake hands with the people you see,
And watch the kids dance around the big Christmas tree.

You ask about work and you ask about pay,
They’ll tell you they make less than a dollar a day,
Working their copper claim, risking their lives,
So it’s fun to spend Christmas with children and wives.

There’s talking and laughing and songs in the air,
And the spirit of Christmas is there everywhere,
Before you know it you’re friends with us all,
And you’re dancing around and around in the hall.

Well a little girl sits down by the Christmas tree lights,
To play the piano so you gotta keep quiet,
To hear all this fun you would not realize,
That the copper boss’ thug men are milling outside.

The copper boss’ thugs stuck their heads in the door,
One of them yelled and he screamed, “there’s a fire,”
A lady she hollered, “There’s no such a thing.
Keep on with your party, there’s no such a thing.”

A few people rushed and it was only a few,
“It’s just the thugs and the scabs fooling you,”
A man grabbed his daughter and he carried her down,
But the thugs held the door and he could not get out.

And then others followed, a hundred or more,
But most everybody remained on the floor,
The gun thugs they laughed at their murderous joke,
While the children were smothered on the stairs by the door.

Such a terrible sight I never did see,
We carried our children back up to their tree,
The scabs outside still laughed at their spree,
And the children that died there were seventy-three.

The piano played a slow funeral tune,
And the town was lit up by a cold Christmas moon,
The parents they cried and the miners they moaned,
“See what your greed for money has done.”

[2] Adapted from http://www.americanheritage.com/content/calumet-tragedy

Lyric Sheet

Ira Hamilton Hayes was a Native American who, along with five other servicemen, raised the U.S. flag during the 1945 battle of Iwo Jima, one of the fiercest and bloodiest engagements in the Pacific during World War II. A news photograph of the flag-raising became a national sensation, turning Hayes and the two other flag-raisers who survived the battle into celebrities. But Hayes felt no pride, believing instead that the real heroes were his buddies who lost their lives; only five of the forty-five members of his Marine platoon survived the battle. After the war, Hayes returned to the Pima tribe’s reservation in Arizona and tried to escape his fame by abusing alcohol. He died in 1955, at age 32, of alcohol poisoning and exposure; his body was found lying in a small creek.

**THE BALLAD OF IRA HAYES**

*Peter LaFarge*

Ira Hayes,

Ira Hayes

Call him drunken Ira Hayes

He won’t answer anymore

Not the whiskey drinkin’ Indian

Nor the Marine that went to war

Gather round me people there’s a story I would tell

About a brave young Indian you should remember well

From the land of the Pima Indian

A proud and noble band

Who farmed the Phoenix valley in Arizona land

Down the ditches for a thousand years

The water grew Ira’s people’s crops

Till the white man stole the water rights

And the sparklin’ water stopped

Now Ira’s folks were hungry

And their land grew crops of weeds

When war came, Ira volunteered

And forgot the white man’s greed

Call him drunken Ira Hayes

He won’t answer anymore

Not the whiskey drinkin’ Indian

Nor the Marine that went to war

There they battled up Iwo Jima’s hill,

Two hundred and fifty men

But only twenty-seven lived to walk back down again

And when the fight was over

And when Old Glory raised

Among the men who held it high

Was the Indian, Ira Hayes

Call him drunken Ira Hayes

He won’t answer anymore

Not the whiskey drinkin’ Indian

Nor the Marine that went to war

Ira returned a hero

Celebrated through the land

He was wined and speeched and honored

Everybody shook his hand

But he was just a Pima Indian

No water, no home, no chance

At home nobody cared what Ira’d done

And when did the Indians dance

Call him drunken Ira Hayes

He won’t answer anymore

Not the whiskey drinkin’ Indian

Nor the Marine that went to war

Then Ira started drinkin’ hard;

Jail was often his home

They’d let him raise the flag and lower it

like you’d throw a dog a bone!

He died drunk one mornin’

Alone in the land he fought to save

Two inches of water in a lonely ditch

Was a grave for Ira Hayes

Call him drunken Ira Hayes

He won’t answer anymore

Not the whiskey drinkin’ Indian

Nor the Marine that went to war

Yeah, call him drunken Ira Hayes

But his land is just as dry

And his ghost is lyin’ thirsty

In the ditch where Ira died

[3] Adapted from http://www.iwojima.com/raising/raisingc.htm