

FROM WHERE I STAND

RHIANNON GIDDENS RESPONDS

What is the function of music? (Grades 7-12+)

Rhiannon Giddens wrote an introductory essay for *From Where I Stand: The Black Experience in Country Music*. For this activity, you are invited to read her essay, "[A Reckoning](#)," and listen to "[Black Myself](#)" (Disc 4), recorded by Giddens as part of *Our Native Daughters*. Questions are included below for responding to the essay, the song, or as a combined activity.

QUESTIONS FOR RESPONDING TO GIDDENS'S ESSAY, "A RECKONING"

- According to Giddens, why do people make music? What is the purpose of music today compared to a hundred years ago?
- What do we value in music? How has this changed or stayed the same over time? Compare Giddens's claims to your own.
- Giddens claims that "everybody on earth can see themselves in American music." Explain this claim and either defend or refute it.
- Based on Giddens's essay, create an infographic, illustration, or pictorial history tracing the roots of the banjo or the roots of country music.

TOPICS TO CONSIDER FOR RESPONDING TO THE SONG "BLACK MYSELF" (LYRICS AVAILABLE BELOW FOR ANNOTATION)

- Biblical and/or historical allusion
- Perspective and changes in perspective
- Narrator and audience
- Purpose and message

EXTENSION

Read [Amythyst Kiah's interview about her song "Black Myself."](#)

- Amythyst Kiah says she wrote "Black Myself" about human experience. Defend this claim.

QUESTIONS FOR RESPONDING TO GIDDENS'S ESSAY "A RECKONING" AND THE SONG "BLACK MYSELF" AS A COMBINED ACTIVITY

- What is "a reckoning," and why is this the title of Giddens's essay? How could the song "Black Myself" also be considered a reckoning?
- Trace the roots and function of country music as outlined in Giddens's essay. How does the idea of function relate to the "Black country renaissance" referenced at the end of her essay? Relate these ideas to "Black Myself."

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SONG LYRICS

“BLACK MYSELF”

written by Amythyst Kiah Phillips, performed by Our Native Daughters

[Verse 1]

I wanna jump the fence and wash my face in
the creek
But I'm Black myself
I wanna sweep that gal right off her feet
But I'm Black myself
Tired of walkin' 'round with no shoes on
But I'm Black myself
Your precious god ain't gonna bless me
'Cause I'm Black myself

[Chorus]

Is you washed in the blood of your chattel?
'Cause the lamb's rotted away
When they stopped shipping work horses
Bred your own anyway, ooh

[Verse 2]

I don't pass the test of the paper bag
'Cause I'm Black myself
I pick the banjo up and they sneer at me
'Cause I'm Black myself
You better lock your doors when I walk by
'Cause I'm Black myself
You look me in my eyes, but you don't see me
'Cause I'm Black myself

[Chorus]

They're washed in the blood of the chattel
'Cause the lamb's rotted away
When they stopped shipping work horses
They bred their own anyway, ooh

[Bridge]

I don't creep around, I stand proud and free
'Cause I'm Black myself
I go anywhere that I wanna go
'Cause I'm Black myself
I'm surrounded by many lovin' arms
'Cause I'm Black myself
And I'll stand my ground and smile in your face
'Cause I'm Black myself

[Chorus]

I washed away my blood and tears
I've been born brand new
There's no more work horses
But there's still work to do, ooh

[Outro]

'Cause I'm Black myself (Black myself)
'Cause I'm Black myself (Black myself)
'Cause I'm Black myself (Black myself)
'Cause I'm Black myself
'Cause I'm Black my —
Black my —
Black myself