MANCHESTER COLLEGE  
Department of Education

LESSON PLAN by: Laura Ahnert

Lesson: IUP #4: Slave Songs

Length: 50 minutes

Age or Grade Intended: 7th Grade English

Academic Standard(s):

7.2.7 Draw conclusions and make reasonable statements about a text, supporting the conclusions and statements with evidence from the text.

Performance Objectives:

Using a t-chart, the students will draw conclusions about the symbols in the songs, identifying 5 symbols for 5 songs with 100% accuracy.

Assessment:

I will have the students pick out their own symbols from the songs, explain what they think the meaning of the symbol is, and provide the passage and song title they found the symbol through a t-chart. I will give the students 2 points per symbol, 2 points per meaning, and 1 point per passage and song title, making each symbol set worth 5 points. This will make the assignment worth 25 points total.

Advanced Preparation by Teacher:

- Find several slave songs
- Print the lyrics to the slave songs, 1 set for each student
- Make t-chart worksheet
- Print enough worksheets for each student.

Procedure:

Introduction/Motivation: Last class we talked about the myth of quilt codes. The myth was supposedly that the slaves sewed maps into their quilts to show the way to the north through a story told using quilt blocks. Even though this myth is not true, it is an interesting idea. The slaves did convey messages such as these through different mediums. One of these mediums was through songs. The slaves would sing the songs every day while they worked, sometimes making up the lyrics as they went, and the plantation owner thought nothing of them. The songs actually allowed the slaves to communicate secret messages to each other about the Underground Railroad. Ask the students to get their journals out and write down a few sentences for the day about anything they might already know about slave songs/spirituals. (Give them about 5 minutes to write down their thoughts.) (M.I. Verbal-Linguistic)
Step-by-Step Plan:
1. Pass out the slave song lyrics to the students.
2. Explain to the students that we are now going to listen to the first two, which are the most famous of the Underground Railroad songs, so they can hear what they sound like. (M.I. Musical)
3. First play “Follow the Drinking Gourd.” Then play “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.”
4. After listening to the songs, ask:
   a. Why did slaves sing these songs? (Bloom’s: Knowledge)
   b. What do you think is the main idea of the song “Follow the Drinking Gourd”? (Bloom’s: Comprehension)
   c. If you had the opportunity, what is one question you would ask a slave about these songs? (Bloom’s: Application)
   d. Why do you think the singer is singing about the drinking gourd? Is it really a gourd? (Bloom’s: Analysis)
   e. What do you think would happen if a slave did not understand a direction in one of the songs? (Bloom’s: Synthesis)
   f. Based on what you know, why do you think these songs were so important? (Bloom’s: Evaluation)
5. Hand out the t-chart worksheet.
6. Then, explain some of the symbolism in “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” to the students. (This is the example given on the worksheet, so the students should follow along there.)
   a. “The chariot referred to in “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and other spirituals referred to the carriages and wagons used to transport fleeing slaves in the early 19th century. Later in the century, a faster-moving chariot became available in the form of the railroad train” (City of Owen Sound).
7. Tell the students that they are now going to pick out symbolism in the other songs that they think conveyed a message to the slaves.
8. Ask the students to look at the lyrics of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and see if they can find another example of symbolism in the song. (Take only one hand, and if it is a good answer such as: the Jordan is the river they would have to cross, or the angels are the people who were going to help them to freedom) tell the students they may use it as their first symbol. Please ask me if you need help with this!
9. Tell the students that they must list 5 symbols, their meanings, and the song and passage they found it in.
10. Give the students the rest of class to work on this. (They may not work in partners.)

Closure: (With about 5 minutes left in class) Today we talked about the songs that slaves used to sing while they worked to convey messages to each other about the Underground Railroad. These songs were very important, and they were passed down for generations, which is why we have them today. The songs are so rich in symbolism because their messages had to be kept secret from the slave owners. I hope you were able to pick out the symbols and meanings! When we look at the meanings behind the songs, they take on a whole new light. Isn’t it interesting how creative people can be? Next class we will be bringing this unit to a close. We will be doing a fun activity, and taking a short quiz to see what you remember about what we have been saying about slavery!
Adaptations/Enrichment:
For LD students who struggle in Language Arts, they will benefit from hearing the songs while having the lyrics in front of them to follow along with. I will be there to help them find symbols and talk through meanings with them, if they need the help.

For students who need enrichment, I will ask them to find another interesting fact about slave songs on the internet. (Another interesting fact that they could potentially find would be that the slaves also used these songs to drive the pace of their work. They would have call and answer sections to the songs to keep each other going.)

Self-Reflection:
• What could I have done differently?
  o I could have chosen different songs and lyrics for the students to look at and listen to.
• How did the students respond to the symbolism activity? Did the example help them to see what it was I wanted? Did they understand this concept?
  o By looking at the students’ work on the t-chart worksheet, I will be able to see if the students were able to pick out other symbols and give their meanings. I will be able to see if I need to keep addressing symbols and their meanings.
Follow the Drinking Gourd

When the Sun comes back
And the first quail calls
Follow the Drinking Gourd,
For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to freedom
If you follow the Drinking Gourd

The riverbank makes a very good road.
The dead trees will show you the way.
Left foot, peg foot, travelling on,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.

The river ends between two hills
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
There’s another river on the other side
Follow the Drinking Gourd.

When the great big river meets the little river
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
For the old man is a-waiting for to carry to freedom
If you follow the Drinking Gourd.

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

Chorus:
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home!

I looked over Jordan and what did I see,
Comin' for to carry me home!
A band of angels comin' after me,
Comin' for to carry me home!

Chorus:

If you get there before I do,
Comin' for to carry me home,
Jess tell my friends that I'm acomin' too,
Comin' for to carry me home.

Chorus:

I'm sometimes up and sometimes down,
Comin' for to carry me home,
But still my soul feels heavenly bound
Comin' for to carry me home!
**Wade In the Water**

*Chorus:*
*Wade in the water,*
*Wade in the water children.*
*Wade in the water*
*God’s gonna trouble the water*

Who’s all those children all dressed in Red?
God’s gonna trouble the water.
Must be the ones that Moses led.
God’s gonna trouble the water.

*Chorus:*

What are those children all dressed in White?
God’s gonna trouble the water.
Must be the ones of the Israelites.
God’s gonna trouble the water.

*Chorus:*

Who are these children all dressed in Blue?
God’s gonna trouble the water.
Must be the ones that made it through.
God’s gonna trouble the water.

**The Gospel Train’s A ‘Comin’**

The Gospel train’s a’comin’
I hear it just at hand
I hear the car wheel rumblin’
And rollin’ thro’ the land

*Chorus:*
*Get on board little children (x3)*
*There's room for many more*

I hear the train a’comin'
She's comin' round the curve
She's loosened all her steam and brakes
And strainin' ev'ry nerve

*Chorus:*

The fare is cheap and all can go
The rich and poor are there
No second class aboard this train
No difference in the fare
Symbolism…What Does it Mean?

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POTENTIAL ANSWERS KEY

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| Ex: Chariot                    | The chariot referred to carriages and wagons used to transport fleeing slaves, and later, in the form of the railroad train. | *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*
  *“Swing low, sweet chariot, Comin' for to carry me home!”* |
| Drinking Gourd                 | The drinking gourd refers to the big dipper in the night sky.          | *“Follow the Drinking Gourd”*                                           |
| Old Man/ Band of Angels        | Could be God, or could be someone on the safe side of the riverbank waiting to help the slaves to freedom. | *“For the old man is awaiting for to carry you to freedom.”*
  *“A band of angels comin’ after me.”*                                      |
| Big River/ Jordan/ The water   | Probably the Ohio River that served as a physical barrier between the North and the South. | *“When the great big river meets the little river.”*                     
  *“I looked over Jordan and what did I see?”*                                
  *“Wade in the water”*                                                      |
| The Gospel Train               | Most likely the Underground Railroad.                                  | *“The Gospel train’s a’comin.”*                                         
  *“the fare is cheap and all can go.”*                                       |
| Children dressed in Red, White, and Blue | The colors for the North were red, white, and blue. The fact that they are capitalized in the song attests to the fact that the colors are very important. | *“Who’s all those children dressed in Red?”*                             
  *“What are those children dressed in White?”*                               
  *“Who are these children all dressed in Blue?”*                            |
Sources:

