

WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME TEACHER'S GUIDE

This teacher's guide to *When Johnny Comes Marching Home: Music of the Civil War* is designed to help educators use the CD and accompanying liner notes, as well as to help students understand the music and history of the time. It contains activities relating to three curriculum connections—American history, music, and English. Teachers are granted permission to print out this teacher's guide for classroom use. Anne Enslow wrote this guide.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS—AMERICAN HISTORY

Activity 1

Listen to the abolitionist song “Get Off the Track!” (track 3). Why is the locomotive called the Liberator? (It's named after William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, which was also called *The Liberator*. The founding of this journal in 1831 was one of the milestones leading up to the Civil War.) What were some of the important events that led to the war? (The Missouri Compromise, Nat Turner's Rebellion, Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe, the Dred Scott decision, John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, the election of Abraham Lincoln.) How did each of these inflame tensions?

Activity 2

In “Get Off the Track! (track 3),” why is the train's bell named the Liberty Bell? (The author wants to draw a connection between emancipation and the ideals of the American Revolution, namely “liberty and justice for all.” It was a contradiction that the Founding Fathers overlooked in the cause of national unity during the Revolution. But it had to be addressed eventually.) In the 1800s, William Lloyd Garrison became one of the founders of the American Anti-Slavery Society, promoting “immediate and complete emancipation of all slaves.” On July 4, 1844, he publicly burned a copy of the Constitution, declaring it “a Covenant with Death, an Agreement with Hell” because it condoned slavery.

Activity 3

Listen to “The Bonnie Blue Flag” (track 4). How many states of the Confederacy can you name? Some of them are mentioned in the song. (In order of secession, the seven states of the Deep South were South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. Next the Upper Tier of Confederate states seceded—Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee.) Why was the Upper Tier so important? (Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee were the most populous states in the Confederacy, and they produced more than half its food crops. Without these states, the Confederacy would not have been viable. Furthermore, a disproportionate number of military leaders, including Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, were from Virginia and Tennessee.)

Activity 4

“The Bonnie Blue Flag” (track 4) stops with the secession of the eleventh state (the “eleventh star”), which was in fact the total number of states that joined the Confederacy.

But count the stars in the Confederate battle flag. There are 13. Why? (Confederate leaders counted Kentucky and Missouri. Though these two states remained in the Union, secessionist minorities in both states voted early on to join the Confederacy.)

Activity 5

Listen to “Hard Times Come Again No More / Hard Tack” (track 12). What does the song tell us about the attitude of the soldiers toward their food rations? Hard tack was eaten in the Union armies. What was the equivalent food among the Southern soldiers? (They were given cornmeal, which they complained was so coarsely ground that it made their gums bleed and chipped their teeth.)

Activity 6

Listen to “Tenting on the Old Camp Ground” (track 10). Some of the soldiers in the song are dead or dying. What were the leading causes of death among soldiers during the Civil War? (Surprisingly, battle wounds only killed a third of those who perished in the war. Two thirds died from diseases like dysentery.)

Activity 7

Listen to “All Hail to Ulysses!” (track 15). The song calls him “the hero of battles renowned.” What were some of those battles? (Fort Donelson, Vicksburg). The second verse begins “When treason her banner unfurled in the land, to Liberty then he was true.” What was the treason the song refers to? (The North thought of the South’s secession as treason. But it’s worth noting that the Confederacy also accused the North of treason. Who was right?) Why was Ulysses S. Grant considered such an important military leader?

Activity 8

Listen to “The Battle Cry of Freedom” (track 1). The song calls for new recruits to “fill the vacant ranks of our brothers gone before.” Why did the Union (and the Confederacy, for that matter) need new recruits? (The Civil War included some of the bloodiest battles of our history. How many soldiers were lost at Shiloh? Antietam?) The song glosses over the losses for a good reason. You might be less likely to volunteer if it focused on all the dead and dying.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS—MUSIC

Activity 9

Listen to “The Battle Cry of Freedom” (track 1). The song calls for new military recruits to “fill the vacant ranks of our brothers gone before.” Is this the kind of song that would make you want to volunteer? Why is it effective? (It speaks of a cause that most Northerners believed in—the Union forever. It has a catchy melody and chorus that would stick in your mind. And it accuses those on the other side of being traitors—always an effective way to rally your own supporters.)

Activity 10

Listen to “The Bonnie Blue Flag” (track 4). This song was just as popular on the

Southern side as “The Battle Cry of Freedom” was in the North. In fact, in April 1862, when Union Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler and his troops occupied New Orleans, they confiscated all the copies of “The Bonnie Blue Flag” they could find and imposed fines on the local people for singing or even whistling the song. Why was the song considered so dangerous? (It was a rallying cry for the Confederates. Singing it was a sign of resistance.)

Activity 11

In their day, these songs were enormously powerful—as rallying cries, as ways to hearten the troops, and make them fight on in desperate situations. Think of the music that you enjoy most. Does it have the power to make you happy? Can it make you sad? Can it make you want to dance or fall in love? This music did all or that and more for people during the Civil War. Listen to “Weeping, Sad and Lonely” (track 5). It was banned in camp by certain commanders because it created such a deep longing for home. Why was this dangerous? (It sapped morale and might cause men to desert from the army.) As we’ve already discussed, “The Battle Cry of Freedom” (track 1) had the opposite effect on the troops.

Activity 12

Listen to “Get Off the Track!” (track 3). The words were written by Jesse Hutchinson, Jr.. However, he did not write the tune. Instead, he set it to the same melody as another popular song of the day called “Old Dan Tucker.” Why did many songwriters of the day use other melodies rather than writing their own? (There are several reasons. It was easier for people to learn the song if they already knew the tune. The familiarity of the melody also made it unnecessary to publish the full sheet music; the lyrics alone could be printed, making it cheaper to distribute the song to the widest possible audience. Finally, in some cases, you could also turn around the meaning of the original song. In fact, “Old Dan Tucker” was a minstrel song.)

Activity 13

“Get Off the Track!” (track 3) was one of the most popular songs of the Hutchinson Family Singers. Research the Hutchinsons. (They were part of what was then a new tradition of family singing groups. They gave concerts regularly from 1839 until after the Civil War and performed for three presidents. They sang for various causes, including women’s rights, temperance and most prominently, abolition. The escaped slave and abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass wrote that the Hutchinsons “brought to the various causes that they served, the divinest gift that heaven has bestowed upon man, the gift of music—the superb talent to touch the hearts and stir the souls of men to noble ends, even when such hearts were encased with the hardest pride and selfishness.”)

Activity 14

Many of the cuts on this CD feature the piano, which was a very popular instrument during this period. How was the piano different from its predecessor, the harpsichord? (Hint: Its full name—pianoforte—literally means “soft, loud.” The harpsichord could not produce differences in dynamics.) How does that work well in this music? (The difference between soft and loud passages helps enhance the emotional quality of the

music.) That doesn't mean that most people played well. Civil War diarist Mary Chesnut wrote, "There is a girl in large hoops and a calico frock at every piano between Richmond and the Mississippi, banging on the out-of-tune thing and looking up into a man's face who wears the Confederate uniform." But she does speak to the popularity of the instrument.

Activity 15

No war was documented in song like the Civil War. Why was so much sheet music written during this time? (Pianos were a relatively new instrument and enormously popular. Families who could afford a piano usually wanted one as a parlor instrument. At the same time, the development of engraving technology made it possible to print music easily using pewter or copper plates. And the Civil War itself provided subject matter for literally hundreds of new songs.)

Activity 16

Confederate General Robert E. Lee said, after enjoying a brass-band serenade in 1864, "I don't believe we can have an army without music." Why? (Music was an essential part of military life. The military day began with drumming and ended with the bugle playing "Taps." Fifers and drummers, as well as brass bands, rallied soldiers on the march. And singing around the camp fire helped the men keep up their spirits amidst the sorrows of military life.)

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS—ENGLISH

Activity 17

Listen to "The Battle Cry of Freedom" (track 1). This was one of the songs to which many people wrote their own sets of words. In fact, during the presidential election of 1864, both Abraham Lincoln and his opponent, Gen. George B. McClellan, had campaign songs set to this melody. Why did the song lend itself to this treatment? (A rallying song can potentially rally people to various causes, whether military or political. Both anticipate victory.) Here's a section of the version written for President Lincoln and his running mate, Andrew Johnson:

For Lincoln and Johnson, hurrah, boys, hurrah!
Down with the rebellion and on with the war,
While we rally round the cause boys, we'll rally in our might,
Singing the holy cause of freemen.

Gen. George McClellan also used the tune for a campaign song, changing the words to "Shouting our Battle-Cry, McClellan." It worked well not only because of the reasons stated above, but also because it was originally a military song and therefore built on the general's popularity with the soldiers:

McClellan is our watchword, hurrah! Boys, hurrah!
So down with the Joker, and up with Little Mac;
While we rally 'round the polls, and vote the hero in,
Shouting our battle-cry—McClellan!"

The tune was so popular that it even acquired a set of Confederate lyrics.

Activity 18

How did songs help rally people to the respective causes of the South and North? (They provided simple slogans—oversimplified, really—glorifying each side’s mission and vilifying the enemy.) Why are the messages in songs necessarily reduced to simple ideas rather than complicated arguments? (You have only a limited number of verses in a song, and you’re constrained by having to make them rhyme.)

Activity 19

Listen to “When Johnny Comes Marching Home” (track 13). It speaks of the celebrations when soldiers come home—bells pealing, people cheering, villagers strewing roses along the roads. Do you think most homecomings were really like that? Why not? And how did they change as the war went on? Research actual homecomings. After the Southern surrender at Appomattox Court House, many Southern soldiers walked home.

Activity 20

Listen to “For the Dear Old Flag I Die” (track 11). Though the song is played as an instrumental on the CD, it has lyrics about a drummer boy dying on the field of battle. Why was this a popular theme? (Drummer boys were young—sometimes as young as 9—and they were innocent. They had no blood on their hands. And who wouldn’t weep for a child who died in battle, far from his mother? Some drummer boys also seized the public imagination with acts of bravery, which seemed all the more remarkable because of the drummers’ youth. The 1871 painting “The Wounded Drummer Boy” by Eastman Johnson depicted an incident during the Battle of Antietam in 1863, in which a wounded drummer boy on the Union side asked a fellow soldier carry him, so that he could continue drumming his unit forward into battle. The painting shows the drummer hoisted up onto the shoulders of a comrade, literally rising above the chaos of the battlefield. The story continued to be popular with Northern audiences after the war.)

Activity 21

We’ve pointed out already that melodies often acquired new lyrics. In addition to “The Battle Cry of Freedom,” another example is Stephen Foster’s song “Hard Times Come Again No More” (track 12). The soldiers invented new words to the melody, criticizing the food they received in camp. Unfortunately, only one such verse was ever written down by an actual Civil War soldier. He noted in his book that there were many verses, but he didn’t say what they were. So here’s a teachable moment. Which is more reliable—the actual verse written down by an actual soldier or the other parody verses that you find on the Internet? (The ones on the Internet may be actual parody verses that were passed down by oral tradition—meaning that people learned the words directly from each other rather than from books—or they may have been written later. We don’t know.)

Activity 22

Try writing your own parody verses to “Hard Times” (track 12). You can use your new song to criticize anything or express any concerns you may have about the world. Here are the original verses.

Let us pause in life's pleasures and count its many tears
While we all sup sorrow with the poor
There's a song that will linger forever in our ears
O Hard Times come again no more.

Chorus:

'Tis the song, the sigh of the weary
Hard times, hard times, come again no more.
Many days you have lingered around my cabin door.
O hard times, come again no more.

There's a pale, drooping maiden who toils her life away
With a worn heart whose better days are o'er:
Though her voice would be merry, 'tis signing all the day—
Oh! Hard Times, come again no more.

'Tis a sigh that is wafted across the troubled wave,
'Tis a wail that is heard upon the shore,
'Tis a dirge that is murmured around the lowly grave—
Oh! Hard Times, come again no more.

FURTHER LISTENING

Jay Ungar & Molly Mason, *Civil War Classics: Live at Gettysburg College* (Fiddle & Dance Records, 1994) Available on amazon.com or by calling 914-338-2996

Wayne Erbsen, *Ballads & Songs of the Civil War* (Native Ground Music, 2007). Erbsen has also produced three other Civil War CDs—*Battlefield Ballads of the Civil War* (2002), *Love Songs of the Civil War* (1999), and *The Home Front: 17 Authentic Tunes of the Civil War* (1996). Available at <http://www.nativeground.com/> or 800-752-2656.

Sparky and Rhonda Rucker, *Blue and Grey in Black and White* (Flying Fish Records, 1992). Their latest CD, *The Mountains Above and the Valleys Below*, also includes a couple Civil War songs, with liner notes on the Civil War in east Tennessee. An order form is on their website, at www.sparkyandronda.com, or send email to ruckweb@aol.com.

Kim and Reggie Harris, *Steal Away: Songs of the Underground Railroad* (Appleaseed Records, 1998) and *Get On Board! Underground Railroad and Civil Rights Freedom Songs, vol. 2* (Appleaseed Records, 2007) Available on amazon.com.

The Civil War—Traditional American Songs and Instrumental Music Featured in the Film by Ken Burns: Original Soundtrack Recording (Nonesuch, 1990), featuring Jay Ungar and Jacqueline Schwab. Available on amazon.com

Cathy Barton, Dave Para, and Bob Dyer, *Johnny Whistletrigger: Civil War Songs from the Western Border* (Big Canoe Records, 1993) and *Rebel in the Woods: Civil War Songs from the Western Border, vol. 2* (Big Canoe Records, 1995). Includes extensive liner notes on the Civil War in the Western Border states, especially Missouri. An order form is available at bigcanoerecords.com.

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