

# Music and The Underground Railroad

## Essential Questions:

How did music play a part in the Underground Railroad? OR How did slaves express forbidden feelings and desires, such as anger, resentment, or a longing for freedom? (This is a little advanced for my students, but would work for older grade levels.)

## Objectives:

- Students will sing and listen to songs that are representative of spirituals sung by slaves.
- Students will listen to examples of spirituals and identify them by genre or style.
- Students will understand how reading and history can be integrated with music through the topic of the Underground Railroad.
- Students will sing the Spirituals that are taught.
- Students will read lyrics of songs, and interpret the meaning of the lyrics in terms of their cultural significance.
- Students will identify code words used in some spirituals.
- Extension: Students will write coded messages and include interpretation

## Content/description of lesson:

### Session 1:

- I. Introduce the idea of integration. Discuss how learning reading and history can come alive when you learn it through music.
- II. Review the lyrics to the song Harriet Tubman, by Walter Robinson
  - a. Lyrics: [https://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/~media/ArtsEdge/LessonPrintables/grade-3-4/harriet\\_tubman\\_song\\_lyrics4.ashx](https://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/~media/ArtsEdge/LessonPrintables/grade-3-4/harriet_tubman_song_lyrics4.ashx)
- III. Teach the song “Harriet Tubman”
- IV. Have students perform the song.

### Session 2:

- I. Learn the lyrics and music to 4 spirituals.
- II. Perform each spiritual.
- III. Listen to an authentic example of each spiritual.

### Session 3:

- I. Review by listening to each spiritual again while reading the lyrics.
  - a. Show students a list of the following words:
    - Freedom train
    - Gospel train
    - Conductor
    - Station
    - Station master
    - Agent

- b. Have students brainstorm to decide what the words have in common.
- c. Explain that many words used during communication of slaves were codes, used so that the slave masters would not understand their plan for escape. Slaves were not allowed to talk, but they were allowed to sing, so they did a lot of communicating through song.
- d. Break the students into 4 groups. Give each group the lyrics to one of the spirituals and one recording sheet. Groups should discuss the lyrics, and decide what words might be code, and what secret message the song may have.

II. Collect lyrics and recording sheets for discussion during the next session.

Session 4:

- I. Have students return to their group from the previous session. Distribute lyrics and recording sheets again.
- II. Have each group review what they discussed during the last session.
- III. Have each group share the code words/hidden messages they found.
- IV. Play the recording of that spiritual for the class. Discuss the music, and decide if/how it helped get the message across. Did listening change that groups ideas?
- V. Repeat this procedure for the 3 other groups.

Extension: Students can write coded messages and include interpretation.

**Resources/Materials:**

- Lyrics and recording of “Harriet Tubman” by Walter Robinson ([https://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/~media/ArtsEdge/LessonPrintables/grade-3-4/harriet\\_tubman\\_song\\_lyrics4.ashx](https://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/~media/ArtsEdge/LessonPrintables/grade-3-4/harriet_tubman_song_lyrics4.ashx))
- 1 Packet of Spiritual lyrics per student OR <http://pathways.thinkport.org/secrets/music2.cfm>
- Copy of 1 recording sheet per group for coded message activity

## Student Recording Sheet #1

**Directions:** Discuss the lyrics with your group. Decide what words might be code, and what secret message the song may have.

Song	Notes:
<p><b>Follow the Drinking Gourd</b></p> <p>When the sun goes back and the first quail calls Follow the drinking gourd The old man is a-waitin' for to carry you to freedom Follow the drinking gourd</p> <p><i>Chorus</i> <i>Follow the drinking gourd,</i> <i>follow the drinking gourd</i> <i>For the old man is a-waitin'</i> <i>to carry you to freedom</i> <i>Follow the drinking gourd</i></p> <p>The river bed makes a mighty fine road, Dead trees to show you the way And it's left foot, peg foot, traveling on Follow the drinking gourd</p> <p>The river ends between two hills Follow the drinking gourd There's another river on the other side Follow the drinking gourd</p> <p>When the great big river Meets the little river, Follow the Drinking Gourd. There's another river on the Other side Follow the Drinking Gourd.</p>	

## Student Recording Sheet #2

**Directions:** Discuss the lyrics with your group. Decide what words might be code, and what secret message the song may have.

Song:	Notes:
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Wade In the Water</b></p> <p>Wade in the water Wade in the water, children, Wade in the water God's a-going to trouble the water</p> <p>Chorus</p> <p>See that band all dressed in red God's a-going to trouble the water Looks like the band that Moses led God's a-going to trouble the water</p> <p>Chorus</p> <p>See that host all dressed in white God's a-going to trouble the water The leader looks like the Israelite God's a-going to trouble the water</p> <p>Who are those 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.</p>	

### Student Recording Sheet #3

**Directions:** Discuss the lyrics with your group. Decide what words might be code, and what secret message the song may have.

Song:	Notes:
<p><b>Swing Low, Sweet Chariot</b></p> <p>Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home, Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home.</p> <p>I looked over Jordan and what did I see Coming for to carry me home, A band of angels coming after me, Coming for to carry me home.</p> <p>If you get there before I do, Coming for to carry me home, Tell all my friends that I'm coming, too, Coming for to carry me home.</p>	

## Student Recording Sheet #4

**Directions:** Discuss the lyrics with your group. Decide what words might be code, and what secret message the song may have.

Song:	Notes:
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Steal Away</b></p> <p>Steal away, steal away! Steal away to Jesus! Steal away, steal away home! I ain't got long to stay here!</p> <p>My Lord calls me! He calls me by the thunder! The trumpet sounds it in my soul! I ain't got long to stay here!</p> <p>Chorus</p> <p>My Lord, he calls me!</p> <p>Chorus</p>	