



Liberty!
 THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION™
 CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Revolutionary War Music

Overview:

Music frequently plays an important role in military and social history. Often, songs become standards of troops fighting in war, such as the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” during the Civil War, “God Bless America” during the World War years, “Ballad of the Green Berets” in the Vietnam era and, most recently, Lee Greenwood’s “God Bless the USA” in the Gulf War years.

This lesson will investigate some of the more familiar and famous songs of the Revolutionary War period and will examine how music helped convey messages of patriotism and highlighted popular sentiments.

Related Resources for the Lesson

In this lesson, students will use the following resources:

1. Episode 5 of *Liberty!*, in particular the segment on the British surrender at Yorktown, which is included in Chapter 10, from 45:47-53:42.
2. The *Songs of the Revolution* page on the *Liberty!* web site (<http://www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/chronicle/songs.html>).
3. The lesson draws on several song lyrics available at the Franklin (Tennessee) Special School District “A Time In Music” web site (http://www.fssd.org/PGS/PGS_Digital_Museum/music%20Folder/index.html).

The songs can be found at

http://www.fssd.org/PGS/PGS_Digital_Museum/music%20Folder/songs.html.

While the teacher may wish to have students view lyrics to some/all of the Revolutionary-era songs on the site, the following songs will be used for the lesson:

- a. “God Save the Thirteen States”
 (http://www.fssd.org/PGS/PGS_Digital_Museum/music%20Folder/save.txt)
- b. “The World Turned Upside Down”

(http://www.fssd.org/PGS/PGS_Digital_Museum/music%20Folder/world.txt)

- c. “Johnny Has Gone For A Soldier”
(http://www.fssd.org/PGS/PGS_Digital_Museum/music%20Folder/johnny.txt)
- d. “The Liberty Song”
(http://www.fssd.org/PGS/PGS_Digital_Museum/music%20Folder/liberty.txt)

Note: The teacher may also wish to play the melody of a specific song. Each song is also available for play as a .midi file. The teacher should prepare ahead of time by ensuring that the web browser has the correct plug-in installed to play .midi files and that the system has a working sound card and speakers.

4. Information about the roots of the Liberty! Soundtrack at http://www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/liberty_music.html
5. Question Sheet PDF (for students)
6. Question Sheet PDF (for teachers, with answers)

Relevant Standards

This lesson addresses the following national content standards established by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>).

US History:

- Understands the social, political, and religious aspects of the American Revolution (e.g., decisions leading to crisis of revolution, efforts by Parliament and colonies to prevent revolution, the ideas of different religions and the economic and social differences of Loyalists, Patriots and neutrals)
- Understands the social and economic impact of the Revolutionary War (e.g., problems of financing the war, wartime inflation, hoarding and profiteering and personal and social economic hardships brought on by war)

Music

- Knows various roles that musicians fulfill (e.g., entertainer, teacher and transmitter of cultural tradition) and representative individuals who have functioned in these roles
- Classifies unfamiliar but representative aural examples of music (e.g., by genre, style, historical period and culture)
- Knows sources of American music genres (e.g., swing, Broadway musical and blues), the evolution of these genres and musicians associated with them

Strategy for the Lesson:

The teacher may wish to begin this lesson with a quick overview of the historical importance of the songs used in this lesson as well as other songs on the web site. For example, the teacher may specifically note that “The World Turned Upside Down” was played during the British surrender at Yorktown or that some of the specific lyrics might have served to generate sympathy for the colonial cause.

Next, the teacher should distribute copies of the song lyrics to each student or direct the student to access the lyrics on the web site. (*Note: One suggestion to reduce the number of pages might be for the teacher to “copy and paste” the lyrics into another word processing document in a layout which uses fewer pages*). Distribute the question sheets.

Allow sufficient time for students to complete the questions. Once students have completed the question sheets, the teacher should evaluate them according to the depth of the answer desired, the amount of time allowed for the assignment, as well as any other criteria established by the teacher, such as spelling and grammar.

Extension Activities:

1. Have the students write song lyrics or poetry regarding a battle or event depicted in the *Liberty!* series. They may either write lyrics that fit the tune of a Revolutionary-era song, or if students are able, they might want to write their own music *and* lyrics for a song.
2. Ask students to compare a song from this lesson with another war/protest song from more recent times. Have them write a comparative essay regarding the two songs.

Question Sheet for Revolutionary War Music (with answers)

1. First, review the lyrics for “God Save the Thirteen States.” The song was sung to the tune of “God Save the King.” Why do you think the writer of this song wanted to have the song sung to the tune of a British song?

Answers will vary, but many students might note that “God Save the King” would be an easily recognizable song for many people, and the music would be easy to remember. Other students may note that “God Save the King” was a tribute to King George III, and if the colonists wrote a song that would support the independence movement, then that might be considered a “slap” against George.

2. Look at the third stanza of the song. How does this sum up the reason for revolution?

In the stanza, reference is made to “slavery” from oppressive policies of the British. Also, in this stanza, the author notes that the colonists tried to negotiate with Britain (“Oft did her grievance state”), but in the lines, “But Britain, falsely great, Urging her desp’rate fate, Turned a deaf ear,” we learn that the British refusal to listen to colonial issues was, in the song’s context, the impetus for Revolution.

3. Next, view the lyrics for “The World Turned Upside Down.” Legend is that this song was played when Cornwallis surrendered to Washington at Yorktown. Why would this song be fitting according to Britain’s view?

Some students may note that the song highlighted the end of the British Empire. Others may feel that the song symbolized how the British Army felt having been beaten by colonial troops, who they frequently considered inferior to their better trained, better equipped army.

4. From whose viewpoint is “Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier” sung? How are these lyrics different than the lyrics sung at the end of each episode of *Liberty!*?

In this version of the song, the viewpoint is of a woman whose “Johnny” has left her to join the army. Based on the lyrics on the site, it is difficult to tell whether she is mourning Johnny’s death in battle or if she is sad because Johnny has left her all alone. At the end of each episode of the series, James Taylor sings this song in the third person. Rather than using “I,” he uses “She”.

5. What do the words in the last stanza of “Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier” symbolize, in your view?

Answers will vary. Most students may look at the line, “And through the streets I’ll beg for bread...” as a symbol of the hardships endured by spouses of soldiers. Members of the army were often unable to provide a living for the families they left behind while they fought.

6. Next, study the lyrics for *Liberty Song*. In the first stanza, what do you think the author means by “No tyrannous acts shall suppress your just claim or stain with dishonor America’s name”.

Answers will vary. Some students may note that this, again, is a slap against the British and a way of highlighting injustice against the colonists. Still, others may view that the line refers to something internal that affected the American cause, such as Benedict

Arnold's treason.

7. What do you think the message in the chorus of this song is?

Most students will infer that the meaning of the chorus is an attempt to get colonists to support the colonial cause, not only with their beliefs, but by assisting financially as well.

8. How do these songs compare in scope and tone to a song such as "Yankee Doodle," which is probably more well-known as a Revolutionary-era song? What was the original purpose of "Yankee Doodle?" (*Note: the song and lyrics are included in the Franklin School District site and are also discussed in the related music page on the Liberty! site*).

Answers will vary. Most students will probably note that "Yankee Doodle" was originally considered a derogatory song by the British, but the Patriots simply took it and made it "their own".

9. Which one of these songs, in your view, tended to unite colonists the most? Which one the least? Explain your view.

Answers will vary. Most will probably say that "The World Turned Upside Down" probably doesn't explain the cause of liberty and that "Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier" is more a lament than a unification song.

Most students would probably feel that either "Liberty Song" or "God Save the Thirteen States" would be most likely to unite colonists because of the lyrics' tone.

10. Speculate on whether music today has the same impact on political, military, and social issues as it did in the 18th Century. Is the impact greater? Less? Explain your answer.

Answers will vary.



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7. What do you think the message in the chorus of this song is?
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