

THE HISTORY OF AMERICA REFLECTED IN ITS SONGS

From variations on the “Star-Spangled Banner” as played by different bands in different eras, to sheet-music art documenting historical themes, the tapestry of American culture and life has been woven through music.

The Library of Congress's
Songs of America

online presentation explores American history through sound recordings, videos, sheet music and more. From popular and traditional songs, to poetic art songs and sacred music, the relationship of song to historical events from the nation's founding to the present is highlighted through more than 88,000 online items and is documented in the work of some of our country's greatest composers, scholars and performers.

Experience the link between American history and song with a wide variety of audio, video and print resources from the collections of the Library of Congress!

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS CAN EXPLORE THE SONGS OF AMERICA SITE THROUGH

- Interactive maps of the United States which highlight musical traditions by state, region and “Mapping the Songs of the Civil War”
- A timeline illustrating the connection between culture and history
- Articles and essays on historical topics like immigration, politics, sports and industry connecting music to social studies themes
- Biographies of artists from the colonial era to the present, illuminating the people behind the music like Stephen Foster, Scott Joplin, Francis Hopkinson, Vera Hall, Aaron Copland, and Woody Guthrie
- Essays about the histories of specific songs, with links to audio recordings of different interpretations of the same song over time
- Keyword searches of the entire site – and the ability to narrow searches by time period, subject, and format – to hone in on just the right source

H I S T O R Y
S O C I A L S C I E N C E
M U S I C A P P R E C I A T I O N

Interior photo: Musician “Putti” sculpture by Philip Martiny on the Grand staircase of the Thomas Jefferson Building; Carol Highsmith, Prints and Photographs Division
Cover Art: Work Projects Administration Poster Collection, Prints and Photographs Division

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

The Library of Congress celebrates the

SONGS of AMERICA
a digital resource



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SONGS-OF-AMERICA/
ABOUT-THIS-COLLECTION

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO "THE SONGS OF AMERICA"

"Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair"
Sheet music
(ca. 1854)
Music Division



"Yankee Doodle"
Recording, Victor Records
(1904)
National Jukebox



James "Super Chikan" Johnson
In performance in the
Coolidge Auditorium, Library of Congress
(2006)
American Folklife Center



Encourage students to generate and test hypotheses about the source.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

- What historical period is this song from?
- Does this song tell us something about an historical event or how people felt about an historical event?
- Does the way the song is sung tell us how people felt?
- Was this song used during an historical event or was it created after an event?
- Was this sung by a particular group of people (ethnic groups, political parties, people with a cause)?
- What does the style of music tell us about the time period when it arose?

REFLECT



Guide students with the sample questions as they respond to the primary source. Encourage them to go back and forth between the columns; there is no correct order.

OBSERVE

Have students identify and note details.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

- Describe what you hear or see.
- What do you notice first?
- If you hear any voices, can you understand what is being sung or said?
- Does it sound like an interview or a conversation?
- Does it sound like a studio recording, or just "off the street"?
- If the performance is musical do you know the song, or do you recognize any instruments?
- What kind of design or image is printed on the sheet music?

A FEW FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY IDEAS:

BEGINNING

Have students write a description of the song in their own words.

INTERMEDIATE

Speculate about the purpose of the song and what its creators expected the song to accomplish. Do you think the song achieved its creators' goal? Explain why you think so.

ADVANCED

Think about what you already know about this period in history. How does this song support or contradict your current understanding of this period?

FOR MORE TIPS GO TO WWW.LOC.GOV/TEACHERS

QUESTION

Have students ask questions to lead to more observations and reflections.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

- What do you wonder about...
- Who?
 - When?
 - Why?
 - What?
 - Where?
 - How?

FURTHER INVESTIGATION

Help students to identify questions appropriate for further investigation and to develop a research strategy for finding answers.

SAMPLE QUESTION:

What more do you want to know, and how can you find out?