

## **Before Lincoln: The Kansas-Nebraska Act, James Buchanan, and Bleeding Kansas**

### **The Basics**

#### **Subject Area**

Social Studies (U.S. history through the Civil War)

#### **Targeted grade level**

Middle School (8<sup>th</sup> grade)

#### **Standards Addressed**

- Students will use a variety of tools to describe and explain historical events and conditions and to analyze the perspectives of different individuals and groups in U.S. history prior to Reconstruction.
- Students will describe the political, social, economic, and cultural differences among sections of the U.S. and explain how these differences resulted in the American Civil War.

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### **The Lesson**

#### **Introduction**

Many students are aware of the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln, but much fewer are familiar with the violent clashes before the war in the years preceding the election of President James Buchanan and throughout his tenure as president. Bleeding Kansas, brought about by the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska act in 1854, became one of the culminating events in clashes between abolitionists, led by John Brown, and supporters of slavery. Buchanan's inability to quell the violence helped bolster Lincoln's presidential campaign. Students will be provided with a brief historical background of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and abolitionist John Brown in order to get a historical background of the songs that we will analyze, which include "The Freeman's Song," "The Kansas Emigrant Song," "The Abolition Show (or Great Baby Show)," and "John Brown's Body/The Battle Hymn of the Republic." We will analyze how each of the two foes in the battle over abolition used music to sway public opinion in their favor and encourage action on their behalf.

#### **Learning Objectives**

Students will analyze primary and secondary source documents to understand the perspective of people on both sides of the slavery debate; they will be able to explain the important social events and figures and political events that led to the Civil War. Through the analysis of music and lyrics from songs of the era, students should be able to understand how songs can be used as a vehicle to persuade and influence opinion and are not merely a means of entertainment.

#### **Resources/Materials**

- Whittier, John G. "Lyrics, The Freeman's Song and The Kansas Emigrant Song." *Territorial Kansas Online*. Kansas State Historical Society, 25 July 2012. Web. 16 July 2013. Originally published c. 1854.
- Sheet music for "The Freeman's Song" to the tune of "Scots Wha Hae Wi' Wallace Bled" [http://schotanus.us/music/Sheetmusic\\_Anthems/Scots\\_Wha\\_hae\\_wi'\\_Wallace\\_Bled.jpg](http://schotanus.us/music/Sheetmusic_Anthems/Scots_Wha_hae_wi'_Wallace_Bled.jpg) by Robert Burns, 1793.
- "Bleeding Kansas" *YouTube*. YouTube, 03 Sept. 2012. Web. 17 July 2013. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEl7Hg2aghU>>. "Song of the Kansas Immigrants/Call

to Kansas," from "Johnny Whistletrigger: Civil War Songs from the Western Border (vol 1)," Cathy Barton, Dave Para, Bob Dyer; 1993.

- Thompson, Kev. "Robert Burns: Scots Wha Hae." *YouTube*. YouTube, 27 Feb. 2008. Web. 16 July 2013. <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXh4b\\_jikqU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXh4b_jikqU)>.
- Sheet music for "The Kansas Emigrant Song" to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne." [http://www.virtualsheetmusic.com/images/first\\_pages/BIG/Burns/AuldLangSynePffFirstBIG.gif](http://www.virtualsheetmusic.com/images/first_pages/BIG/Burns/AuldLangSynePffFirstBIG.gif)
- Foster, Stephen C. "The Great Baby Show, Or, The Abolition Show." *Lyrics: The Great Baby Show, Or, The Abolition Show*. Johns Hopkins University, n.d. Web. 16 July 2013. <<https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/24240>>. Composed 1856.
- Unknown. "Sheet Music: Villikins and Dinah." *Harry Beard Collection*. Victoria and Albert Museum, 3 July 2013. Web. 16 July 2013. <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1157195/harry-beard-collection-sheet-music-unknown/>>. Published ca. 1840.
- Lamb, Derek. "Villikins and Dinah." Rec. 1962. *She Was Poor but She Was Honest: Nice, Naughty and Nourishing Songs of the London Music Hall and Pubs*. Derek Lamb. Folkways Records, 1962. MP3.
- Foster, Stephen C. "Buchanan and John Breckenridge." Rec. 1999. *Presidential Campaign Songs, 1789-1996*. Oscar Brand. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1999. MP3. Composed 1856.
- Patton, William P., and Julia W. Howe. "Lyrics: John Brown's Body (1861), Battle Hymn of the Republic (1861)." *John Brown's Body Lies A-mouldering in the Grave*. University of Missouri Kansas City, n.d. Web. 17 July 2013. <<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/johnbrown/brownbody.html>>.
- Sheet Music: John Brown's Body/Battle Hymn of the Republic. Composed by William Steffe. 1856. [http://2.s.cdn2.semplicewebsites.com/music/larger\\_f0ee0de532d048ceb64ecd5b74491c33.jpg?page=1](http://2.s.cdn2.semplicewebsites.com/music/larger_f0ee0de532d048ceb64ecd5b74491c33.jpg?page=1)
- Crooke, Raymond. "1490. John Brown's Body (William W. Patton)." *YouTube*. YouTube, 03 Jan. 2013. Web. 17 July 2013. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmvOHQ4zgm0>>.
- "Battle Hymn of the Republic - Mormon Tabernacle Choir." *YouTube*. YouTube, 23 May 2013. Web. 20 July 2013. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSiVjlknuSw>>. Performed May 27, 2012.

## Lesson Activities

Lesson One: "The Freeman's Song," "The Kansas Emigrant Song"; 1 blocked class (1 hour 30 minutes)

The first lesson will take a look at the reasons abolitionists descended upon Kansas in droves, including the passing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the concept of popular sovereignty. The music we will focus on will be from the point of view of free-soilers, as we will sing "The Freeman's Song" and "The Kansas Emigrant Song," written by abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier. The purpose of plotting the story presented in "The Kansas Emigrant Song" is for students to understand that the reasoning behind the influx of abolitionists to Kansas was very different than the reasoning behind homesteaders in other western states. While most pioneers came to the west for economic opportunity, many Kansas homesteaders came for more ideological reasons; these ideological reasons are reflected in Whittier's songs. We will close by mapping a second Whittier song, "The Freeman's Song." This song's lyrics are more explicitly about the abolishment of slavery and give greater insight into Whittier's motivation for his songwriting.

## **Procedures**

First, students will need some background information on the Kansas-Nebraska Act, popular sovereignty, and abolitionist John Brown, who led the abolitionist movement in Kansas during violent confrontations with supporters of slavery. Following this brief discussion, we will use the “Plotting the Story” strategy for the “Kansas Emigrant Song.” The song would be played once for listening only, and a second time to plot the story on a graphic organizer. After plotting the story, we would have a discussion about the images the song brought to students minds and pay special attention to the term “homestead of the free.” After the discussion, The class would be given the assignment of writing a letter from a Kansas homestead, focusing on the events and difficulties of daily life on the plains.

## **Evaluation**

Students would be evaluated based on answers in class discussion and on their written sample of life on a Kansas homestead.

## **Closure**

In closing, we would sing another Whittier song, “The Freeman’s Song,” Comparing the idyllic lyrics of the “Kansas Emigrant Song” to the more violent lyrics of “The Freeman’s Song” to give students a taste of the mindset that brought about “Bleeding Kansas.”

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why did Whittier draw a comparison with the pilgrims?
2. What is a homestead? What is meant by “Homestead of the free?” What would be the opposite of this?
3. What was Whittier’s purpose in this song?
4. What is the importance of religious imagery to Whittier’s purpose?
5. Was living on a Kansas homestead as idyllic as the picture painted in Whittier’s lyrics?

**Vocabulary (vocabulary will be defined through in-class discussion and dissection of familiar aspects of words to come to an understanding of the word as a whole. For example, A common school may seem like a school for regular people, or commoners, and in some sense it was as common schools were tuition free and open to the public.)**

Homestead

Common School

Sabbath

## **THE KANSAS EMIGRANT SONG**

**BY J. G. WHITTIER**

*Tune..... Auld Lang Syne.*

We cross the prairie as of old,  
The pilgrims crossed the sea,  
To make the West, as they the East,  
The homestead of the free!

*Chorus—*

The homestead of the free, my boys,  
The homestead of the free,  
To make the West, as they the East,  
The homestead of the free.

We go to rear a wall of men  
On Freedom's Southern line,  
And plant beside the cotton-tree,  
The rugged Northern pine!

*Chorus.*

We're flowing from our native hills  
As our free rivers flow;  
The blessing of our motherland  
Is on us as we go.

*Chorus.*

We go to plant her common schools  
On distant prairie swells,  
And give the Sabbaths of the wild  
The music of her bells.

*Chorus.*

Upbearing, like the Ark of old,  
The Bible in our van,  
We go to test the truth of God  
Against the fraud of man.

*Chorus.*

No pause, nor rest, save where the streams  
That feed the Kansas run,  
Save where our Pilgrim gonfalon  
Shall flout the setting sun!

*Chorus.*

We'll sweep the prairie as of old  
Our fathers swept the sea,  
And make the West, as they the East  
The homestead of the free!

*Chorus.*

**Follow up:** Listen to the lyrics of "The Freeman's Song." Does the tone seem different to you? Did Whittier have a different intent for this song than the first?

## **THE FREEMEN'S SONG**

### **J.G. WHITTIER**

Men, who bear the Pilgrim's name,  
Men, who love your country's fame,  
Can ye brook your country's shame,  
Chains and Slavery?

Traitors, shaped in Southern mould,  
Have our honest birthright sold;  
Wolves are set to guard our fold;  
Shame! Democracy!

Hunted in his native lair,  
Furious fights the Northern bear;

Woe to those who roused his ire;  
Let the turn and flee.

From our mountains in the North,  
Freedom's legions sally forth  
Shouting o'er the trembling earth,  
Death to Slavery!

Raise the standard in the van.  
Sacred to the rights of Man;  
Tyrants! Meet us if ye can;  
*We are ready now.*

Ere a score of years be past,  
Slavery shall breathe her last;  
Spike the colors to the mast,  
Hurrah for Liberty!

## **Lesson 2: "The Great Baby Show (The Abolition Show)" and "Buchanan and John Breckenridge" (1 hour 30 minutes)**

The second lesson of the "Bleeding Kansas" unit will focus on the event from the point of view of pro-slavery Democrats and supporters of James Buchanan. We will do this by taking a close look at the lyrics of two campaign songs for James Buchanan, both penned by Stephen Foster. Foster, neither an abolitionist nor supporter of slavery, nevertheless supported the pro-slavery Buchanan. The songs give some insight into the views of many people who were "on the fence" about slavery at the time. The first song we will listen to is "The Abolition Show." Before singing the song, we will listen to a performance of "Villikins and His Dinah" to get a sense of the melody intended by Foster. "The Abolition Show," though not the official campaign song for Buchanan, demonstrates how sometimes supporting a candidate is less about supporting a person and more about supporting (or rejecting) a way of life. The comparison song is the official Buchanan campaign song, "Buchanan and John Breckenridge." This song is much more centered on the candidate himself. The comparison should draw out how the same message can be transmitted through different means and students should be able to analyze the differences in intent and audience each song uses, deciding for themselves which of Foster's songs they feel is more effective at communicating his message.

### **Procedure**

The opening activity will focus on presidential campaign ads. Students will be asked to think about and try to remember campaign ads from the last presidential election (in this case, 2012). What ideas stood out? Which of these ads did they think was effective? Would any of these ads convince you to vote for a candidate? Why? After a discussion about presidential campaign songs, we will listen to two songs from the Buchanan campaign and compare them using the song comparison graphic organizer. Though both songs are for Buchanan and written by Stephen Foster, they have a very different tone. After noting the similarities and differences, we will have a "think, pair, share" of what students noted on their organizers.

### **Vocabulary**

Cavaliers  
Ruffians

## Balm of Gilead

### Discussion Questions

1. How does Foster portray abolitionists in the first song?
2. What's the reasoning behind the expression "gemmem ob color?"\*students may not understand this expression and its roots in minstrel shows. This presents an opportunity to explain minstrel shows and their popularity as entertainment for white audiences curious about the lives of black Americans but willing to accept exaggerated stereotypes performed by whites.
3. How does this differ from the second song?
4. What are some of the qualities of Buchanan mentioned in the songs?
5. What's the difference in tone between the two songs?

### Assessment

After our discussion of the songs, students will work in groups to write a political song for one of the candidates of the 1856 presidential election: Buchanan, Fremont, and Fillmore. They will research the candidates to find their stances on political issues and will have about 30 minutes to write the song, which they will perform at the end of class. The song can be to the tune of any popular song (from past or present; this allows for more creativity and gives students an opportunity to link the past with the present).

**Follow-up question:** What did you learn in your research about the candidates? Why was Buchanan able to win even though he only received 45% of the vote?

### Closing

Foster mentions the date September 17<sup>th</sup> in "The Abolition Show." He's likely referring to the Constitution, but other interesting things happened on that date (The Star Spangled Banner is completed, Harriet Tubman escapes slavery, Battle of Antietam, Dred Scott Decision). For homework, try to figure out what Foster was referring to when using that date.

### The Abolition Show

On the seventeenth day of September you know,  
Took place in our city the great baby show;  
They shut up the factories and let out the schools,  
For the Seventeenth day was the day of all fools.

*chorus:*

Sing tu ral lala lu ral lal lu rall lal lay,  
Sing tu ral lala lu ral lal lu rall lal lay,  
Sing tu ral lala lu ral lal lu rall lal lay,  
Sing tu ral lala lu ral lal lu rall lal lay,

They made a procession of wagons and boats,  
Of raccoons and oxen (they all have their votes)  
Sledge hammers, triangles and carpenter's tools,  
One thousand and eight hundred horses and mules.  
They had gemmen ob color join in their games  
And jokers and clowns of all ages and names  
They had pop guns and tin pans and all kinds of toys  
And a very fine party of women and boys.

They had young men on horse back, so nice and so gay  
Aged Seventeen years on this Seventeenth day,  
And the ladies all thought they were bold cavaliers  
These bright looking lads aged seventeen years.  
They had grim border-ruffians, I'll bring to your mind,  
And they've plenty more left of the very same kind,  
They drank from a flask and played cards on the way,  
And the children looked on, on this Seventeenth day.  
They had Ohio Yankees of Western Reserve  
Who live upon cheese, ginger cakes and preserve,  
Abolition's their doctrine their rod and their staff,  
And they'll fight for a sixpence an hour and a half.  
Now was it not kind in these good simple clowns  
To amuse all the children in both of our towns  
To shut up their work shops and spend so much money  
To black up their faces, get tight and be funny.  
They called it a council of freemen you know  
But I told you before 'twas a great baby show,  
For when they had met they had nothing to say  
But "Poor Bleeding Kansas" and "Ten Cents A Day".  
Then their ship Constitution was hauled through the street  
With sixteen small guns she was armed compleat  
But the brave ship of State by which Democrats stand  
Carries thirty-one guns with old Buck in command.  
In the year '45 when the fire laid us waste  
Old Buck gave us five hundred dollars in haste  
They then took his money and lauded his name  
But he's now "Ten cent Jimmy", their banners proclaim.

### **Buchanan and John Breckenridge**

Come all ye men, from every state,  
Our creed is broad and fair;  
Buchanan is our candidate  
To take the White House chair.

For there is balm in Gilead,  
We hear the people say;  
Buchanan and John Breckenridge  
Will surely win the day!

Come all ye Democrats!  
Hear the people say;  
Buchanan and John Breckenridge  
Will surely win the day!

We'll turn our backs on Fremont,  
For his principles endorse;  
A woolly-headed platform,  
Upon a woolly horse.

But let our hearts for Union be,  
The North and South be one!  
They've worked together manfully,  
Together, they'll work on.

Come all ye Democrats!  
Hear the people say;  
Buchanan and John Breckenridge  
Will surely win the day!

### **Lesson 3: "John Brown's Body," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" (1 hour 30 minutes)**

The focus on lesson 3 is to analyze how "Bleeding Kansas" served as motivation for troops in the Civil War. We will analyze two songs sung by troops during the war, paying particularly close attention to who would have been listening to these songs and in what setting. The intent of using "John Brown's Body" is twofold; first, to illuminate the activities of one of the most controversial figures in American history, and second, to show how troops in the field would use Brown's story as inspiration. Listening to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" is intended to encourage students to think about how the same melody can conjure up very different images about the war. Ideally, students will envision two very different images to draw from when listening to the two songs, most likely in very different settings.

#### **Procedure**

The procedure used for this lesson will be "I Can Hear It Now: Developing Historical Imagination." First, play "John Brown's Body." Have students paint a scene in their minds about where and when this is taking place, paying close attention to sensory details. After a second time playing the song, students will write a story or draw the scene. Students will share their thoughts and images. We will then do the same activity for "Battle Hymn of the Republic." After sharing the thoughts and images from the second song, student will choose one of their two responses to expand on, whether through drawing or in writing.

#### **Vocabulary**

Moldering  
Wrath  
Burnished  
Jubilant  
Transfigures

#### **Questions**

1. Why was John Brown such an inspiring figure for some?
2. In the song, what was the reward for John Brown's sacrifice? How might this resonate with the soldiers who sang this song?
3. What was the purpose of invoking religion in each of these songs?
4. Which do you find more inspiring?
5. Why have these songs lived on to present day?

#### **Assessment and Closure**



After sharing their second song responses, students will be assigned the task of completing one of the two responses with full detail, whether through drawing or writing a story. Students will present their drawing or story during the next class period.

**Follow-up question:** What is the proper setting for each of these songs to be performed? Is there such thing?

### **Evaluation**

The culminating assignment for this unit is to take the assignments (letter from the homestead, campaign song, and picture/story) and create a Bleeding Kansas scrapbook with a one page written summary about how the events of Bleeding Kansas influenced national politics, the lives of Kansans, abolitionists, southerners, and soldiers as they prepared to embark on the Civil War.

### **Reflection**

In designing this lesson plan, I realized myself that Bleeding Kansas had major ripple effects throughout America. I'd always thought of it as a localized issue that was limited to those who participated in the bloody battle between slavery and anti-slavery partisans. But in reading and learning more about the topic, I now know that what was happening in Kansas was merely a microcosm and prelude to what would occur in the years that followed. Hopefully I can help my students understand that the Civil War didn't start overnight, and Ft. Sumter was the culmination of events that had been building over decades.