

“The Liberty Song”

The Basics

Time Required

3-4 class periods

Subject Areas

US History

A New Nation, 1760-1820

Common Core Standards Addressed:

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

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The Lesson

Introduction

Throughout our history, America’s wars have been met with both the approval and the dissatisfaction of the populace. Using the American Revolution, World War I and the Viet Nam War, explore songs of the times that express support and protest. Students should, when they have completed these activities, have a sense that this is a recurring theme in our history. Patriotism and protest are terms that need to be defined. What makes a song patriotic? What makes a song one of protest? Using four songs from each of the three wars named above, discuss the stated reasons for support in each of these conflicts. Identify the things about the conflicts which have sparked protest. We have selected these three wars because they span virtually the entire history of the United States of America. Songs of patriotism and protest can be found for all of the wars which students will study and a similar exercise can be done at appropriate points in those studies.

Guiding Questions

What is patriotism?

Learning Objectives

The Big Idea of this lesson is that all wars in American history have been met with support and dissent. America’s music is rich in patriotism and protest. A corollary to this is that perspective is relevant. Protesters usually think of themselves as patriotic.

Preparation Instructions

Songs used in this lesson:

“The Liberty Song”

“Free America”

“You Simple Bostonians”

“The Burrowing Yankees”

Lesson Activities

Begin the class with a picture of Paul Revere’s engraving of The Boston Massacre. Do not tell them the artist or the title. Ask the students to interpret what they see. They will probably see the picture as a representation of a deliberate and massive attack of a military force on a civilian population. Ask them to look carefully at the picture and make hypotheses about the place and time. Elicit answers that direct the students to identify the event as The Boston Massacre. Ask them to define the term massacre. Do the actual events of that day in Boston qualify as a massacre?

Since, by all objective standards, they do not, what was Paul Revere thinking when he produced this artwork? Lead the discussion to the terms *propaganda* and *protest*.

What were some conditions in the colonies that prompted men like Revere to protest? Why did others not protest? Were there advantages to being a part of the British Empire?

Ask the students to name other art forms that can be used to protest. When they point out that music is used today, introduce songs such as “The Liberty Song” and “Free America.” Ask them if these are songs of protest or are they songs of patriotism? Does the answer not depend on the perspective of the person making the judgment?

In “The Liberty Song”, the references to tyrannous acts refer to those of Great Britain, the mother country. Certainly Great Britain would view this song as another example of protest. The second and third verses pay homage to our forefathers and their motivations in coming to the New World. Note that nowhere in the song is there a hint of a demand for independence. Rather the song is singing the praises of freedom which has been spread by English colonization of America. Return to the engraving and ask what Revere’s motivations may have been in producing this piece of art in just a matter of days after the event.

The chorus of the song mentions that the colonists stand ready to open their purses when they feel that they are being treated as free men, not slaves. Is this an attempt to defuse the criticisms of the colonists that they were simply opposed to paying taxes which were necessary to ensure their protection by Great Britain?

Are the sentiments expressed in “Free America” similar to those of “The Liberty Song”? Which was written first? Which is more militant? What do the melodies and tempos of the songs suggest to you? What is the message of the final verse of “Free America”? Is it a call for independence? A boastful warning to Europe?

Divide the class into groups and ask each group to:

- identify who would have been singing each of these songs (reference the text)
- underline words or phrases which they do not understand.
- identify characteristics which the author attributes to Americans and their forefathers
- identify emotions which the song is attempting to evoke
- make an hypothesis about how the “other side” would view the song

After establishing that these songs which now are referred to as patriotic were once viewed by those in control as protest songs or songs of rebellion, discuss the fact that there was clearly an opposition to the

likes of the previous songs. Introduce the terms loyalist and Tory. Two songs popular with that segment of the colonists were “Burrowing Yankee” and “You Simple Bostonians.”

Once again divide the class into groups and ask each group to:

- identify who would have been singing each of these songs
- underline words or phrases which they do not understand
- identify characteristics which the author attributes to Americans
- identify emotions which the author is attempting to evoke
- make an hypothesis about how the “other side” would view the song

Note that the lyrics of these two songs are much more devoid of a sense of togetherness. The lyrics refer to Bostonians in very derogatory terms. The songs are filled with warnings to the colonists. The boastful talk of the power of the Lion in 1776 is well after the first battles of the revolution while “You Simple Bostonians” was written in 1770 and can be presented as a presaging of the events of The Boston Massacre.

Assessment

An interesting way to close the lesson and reinforce the tenet that the lines dividing patriotism and protest are not always clear is to discuss the author of the words to “The Liberty Song.” John Dickinson would, many believe, be in the pantheon of Washington, Jefferson, Adams and Franklin had it not been for one thing. Despite this song and the many letters and proclamations which he authored in his life, he resisted the final step of independence. Explore how his life and rehabilitation after the revolution is indicative of the fact that the general population of the colonies had its trepidations about making a revolution. Was he a patriot? A protester? Both?

Extending the Lesson

1. Direct the students to watch the movie “1776.” Have them list issues which made some colonists seek independence from Great Britain and other issues which made some colonists wish to remain a part of the empire.
2. Ask students to use their text to identify reasons that some colonists would want to remain loyal to Great Britain and some reasons why colonists would want independence from Great Britain
3. Have students write a song of protest or patriotism about an issue which they have studied in their unit on the American Revolution. They may use one of the tunes which they have heard or music from a song with which they are familiar.
4. Write an essay on what it means to be patriotic.
5. Draw a picture that represents patriotism to you.
6. Draw a picture protesting an issue that is of concern to you.
7. Identify other forms of protest which took place between 1765 and 1775. Discuss

what the goals of these protests were.

Resources

Lyrics

“Liberty Song”

Come, join hand in hand, brave Americans all,
And rouse your bold hearts at fair Liberty's call;
No tyrannous acts shall suppress your just claim,
Or stain with dishonor America's name.
*In Freedom we're born and in Freedom we'll live.
Our purses are ready. Steady, friends, steady;
Not as slaves, but as Freemen our money we'll give.*

Our worthy forefathers, let's give them a cheer,
To climates unknown did courageously steer;
Thro' oceans to deserts for Freedom they came,
And dying, bequeath'd us their freedom and fame.
*In Freedom we're born and in Freedom we'll live.
Our purses are ready. Steady, friends, steady;
Not as slaves, but as Freemen our money we'll give.*

The tree their own hands had to Liberty rear'd,
They lived to behold growing strong and revered;
With transport they cried, Now our wishes we gain,
For our children shall gather the fruits of our pain.
*In Freedom we're born and in Freedom we'll live.
Our purses are ready. Steady, friends, steady;
Not as slaves, but as Freemen our money we'll give.*

Then join hand in hand, brave Americans all,
By uniting we stand, by dividing we fall;
In so righteous a cause let us hope to succeed,
For heaven approves of each generous deed.
*In Freedom we're born and in Freedom we'll live.
Our purses are ready. Steady, friends, steady;
Not as slaves, but as Freemen our money we'll give.*

*In Freedom we're born and in Freedom we'll live.
Our purses are ready. Steady, friends, steady;
Not as slaves, but as Freemen our money we'll give.*

“Free America”

That seat of science Athens,
And earth's proud mistress, Rome,

Where now are all their glories
We scarce can find a tomb.
Then guard your rights, Americans,
Nor stoop to lawless sway,
Oppose, oppose, oppose, oppose
For North America.

Proud Albion bow'd to Caesar,
And numerous lords before,
To Picts, to Danes, to Normans,
And many masters more;
But we can boast Americans
Have never fall'n a prey,
Huzza, huzza, huzza, huzza
For Free America.

We led fair Freedom hither,
And lo, the desert smiled,
A paradise of pleasure
New opened in the wild;
Your harvest, bold Americans,
No power shall snatch away,
Preserve, preserve, preserve your rights
In Free America.

Torn from a world of tyrants
Beneath this western sky
We formed a new dominion,
A land of liberty;
The world shall own we're freemen here,
And such will ever be,
Huzza, huzza, huzza, huzza
For love and liberty.

God bless this maiden climate,
And through her vast domain
May hosts of heroes cluster
That scorn to wear a chain.
And blast the venal sycophants
Who dare our rights betray;
Assert yourselves, yourselves, yourselves
For brave America,

Lift up your hearts, my heroes,
And swear with proud disdain,
The wretch that would ensnare you
Shall spread his net in vain;
Should Europe empty all her force,
We'd meet them in array,
And shout huzza, huzza, huzza
For brave America.

The land where freedom reigns shall still
Be masters of the main,
In giving laws and freedom
To subject France and Spain;
And all the isles o'er ocean spread
Shall tremble and obey,
The prince who rules by Freedom's laws
In North America.

“You Simple Bostonians”

You simple Bostonians, I'd have you beware,
Of your Liberty Tree, I would have you take care,
For if that we chance to return to the town,
Your houses and stores will come tumbling down.
Derry down, down, hey derry down.
If you will not agree to Old England's laws,
I fear that King Hancock will soon get the yaws
But he need not fear, for I swear we will,
For the want of a doctor give him a hard pill.
A brave reinforcement, we soon think to get;
Then we will make you poor pumpkins to sweat:
Our drums they'll rattle, and then you will run
To the devil himself, from the sight of a gun.
Our fleet and our army, they soon will arrive,
Then to a bleak island, you shall not us drive.
In every house, you shall have three or four,
And if that will not please you, you shall have half a score.
Derry down, down, hey derry down.

“The Burrowing Yankees”

Ye Yankees who, mole-like, still throw up the earth,
And like them, to your follies are blind from your birth;
Attempt not to hold British troops at defiance,
True Britons, with whom you pretend an alliance.
Mistake not; such blood ne'er run in your veins,
'Tis no more than the dregs, the lees, or the drains:
Ye affect to talk big of your hourly attacks;
Come on ! and I'll warrant, we'll soon see your backs.
Such threats of bravadoes serve only to warm
The true British hearts, you ne'er can alarm;
The Lion once rous'd, will strike such a terror,
Shall show you, poor fools, your presumption and error.
And the time will soon come when your whole rebel race
Will be drove from the lands, nor dare show your face:
Here's a health to great George, may he fully determine,
To root from the earth all such insolent vermin.