

## **Patting Juba**

### **The Basics**

#### **Time Required**

5 class days

#### **Subject Areas**

English as a Second Language, grades 3-5

Expansion and Reform, 1800-1860

#### **Common Core Standards Addressed:**

Writing Standards K-5

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### **The Lesson**

#### **Introduction**

“Patting Juba” was first described and derided as a “secular amusement” practiced by slaves in Kentucky by Henry Bibb in the 1820s (Epstein, 142). Bibb’s frustration with slaveholders’ indulgence of slaves “patting juber” was not shared by poets, who were interested in the metrical complexities of the rhythms involved by those patting juba. Patting or clapping juba was described as percussive sounds made on the body, usually with hands, thighs, and feet. The music was performed in a circular formation customarily with variations on the basic rhythm, in the form of syncopation and shifting accented notes. Patting juba was not linked exclusively to the song Juba, but these dance movements were used to a variety of songs.

The circular dance formation involving hand clapping was recorded in Africa as early as 1621, by Richard Jobson, a European traveler, who wrote: “the standers by seem to grace the dancer, by clapping their hands together after the manner of keeping time” (Epstein, 141). The word juba is derived from an African word meaning ‘king’ or ‘dove’ in East African languages. It is also the name of a city in Sudan. Haitians have called this dance the djouba. Others posit the word is derived from Jubal, the inventor of musical instruments described in the Old Testament. Bessie Jones, a 20th century-born African-American song-keeper, contests that juba is similar to ‘jibba’ or giblets, the ends of food. Finally, Juba was a person, AKA William Henry Lane, an African-American minstrel performer in the 1840s. After winning a dance competition against a white performer, he was given the title “Juba,” or master of all dancers (Juba Dance).

#### **Guiding Questions**

What songs and games do you play?

How did you learn these songs and games if you did not learn them in school?

## Learning Objectives

- Students will identify and perform a song that they have been taught by a parent or peer, to connect the method of transmission of play songs and lullabies to the experiences of others.
- Students will identify and discuss at least two hardships that children born into slavery encountered.
- Students will graphically compare the fulfillment of basic needs in their lives to their knowledge of the life experiences of slave children, as acquired through song lyrics, photographs and stories from that time period.

Higher-level extension: Students will write and perform their own verse of “Juba” based on their knowledge of slave children’s experience.

## Preparation Instructions

Song used in this lesson

“Patting Juba”

## Lesson Activities

### Day 1

- Introduce Juba using the Tashjian version repeating the verse and adding clapping and knee-slapping successively.
- Discuss the word Juba, explaining that it is a nonsense word in this song, and could be a person (“Juba killed a yellow cat”) or an action (“Juba up and Juba down”).
- Ask students to think of songs that they know that involve clapping or nonsense words; these could be songs they learned from friends, older siblings or parents.

### Day 2

- Solicit students’ songs through public or private performance.
- Make the students feel more comfortable performing by demonstrating a song you sang as a child and/or having an older student perform a play song.
- For play songs in languages other than English, and all unfamiliar songs, ask students to describe what the song is about, who they learned the song from, and when they would sing the song.
- Record songs and names on sentence strips and sort them by theme (i.e. topic, emotion expressed, etc.).
- Discuss purposes for singing songs: to celebrate, to deal with difficult experiences, etc.

### Day 3

- Solicit songs from students that they use to express emotions.
- Sort these songs into categories visually using a topic web: sad, happy, angry, calm, etc.
- Introduce the idea of inequality (i.e. discrimination because of young age, etc.)
- Sing a song or taunting rhyme that exemplifies this concept.

## Day 4

- Present students with the idea of inequality that existed in America during the antebellum period through pictures. Relate to familiar stories and characters if possible (i.e. *Follow the Drinking Gourd*).
- Ask students to look at the pictures and compare the setting, style of dress and activity to their own experiences (use photos from Morrison and Thomas' books).

## Day 5

- Introduce Bessie Jones' version of Juba that she was taught by her grandfather.
- Present the inequality in distribution of resources, by acting out the verse pertaining to food. Set up two bowls, one for the slaveholder's child and another for the slave child. While singing the song, demonstrate the peeling of the husk off the corn, placing the ear of corn in the slaveholder's child's bowl and the husk in the slave child's bowl. Continue with the other types of food (bread and meat), placing the good portions in the slaveholder's child's bowl and the leftovers in the slave child's.
- After the demonstration, display pictures from Day 4 and ask students to identify two hardships that children born into slavery encountered.
- Ask students for their ideas regarding the purpose for singing this song (i.e. to deal with a difficult situation, to express anger, etc.)

## Assessment

Depending on proficiency level, have students draw, discuss in small groups, or write a short essay comparing the fulfillment of basic needs in their lives to those of children born into slavery. Encourage students to refer to photographs, Jones' lyrics and characters from stories they've read for ideas.

## Extending the Lesson

Work with students to compile a list of words that could be used to make a new verse to Juba. The new verse could extend Bessie Jones' version, relate to students' own immigrant experiences, or express the ideas of a character from *Follow the Drinking Gourd* (Monjo or Winter editions).

## Resources

Lyrics:

Like many folk songs passed down through an oral tradition, the lyrics of Juba vary by publication.

These lyrics were recorded in Prince Edward County, Virginia, sometime before 1838:

Juber up and Juber down  
Juber all around de town  
(Smith in Epstein 143).

Here are the lyrics from a 1969 children's book:

Juba this and Juba that  
Juba killed a yellow cat  
Juba up and Juba down  
Juba runnin' all around  
(Tashjian 4).

These lyrics were found online:

Juba up 'n Juba down  
Juba all aroun' the town  
Juba jump, Juba sing  
Juba cut that pigeon wing  
Juba kick off this old show  
Juba dance that Jubilo  
Juba this and Juba that  
Juba killed a yella' cat  
Juba for Ma, Juba for Pa  
Juba for your brother-in-law  
(Patting Juba website).

These lyrics are those performed by Bessie Jones in 1972:

Juba this and Juba that  
Juba killed a yellow cat  
And get over double trouble, Juba.  
You sift-a the meal, you give me the husk  
You cook-a the bread, you give me the crust.  
You fry the meat, you give me the skin  
And that's where my mama's trouble begin.  
And then you Juba.  
You just Juba.  
Juba up, Juba down  
Juba all around the town.  
Juba for ma, Juba for pa  
Juba for your brother-in-law.  
(Jones 37).

**Other resources:**

Bibb, Henry. 1849. *The Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. New York: published by the author, p. 23. As cited in Dena J. Epstein's *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*.

Epstein, Dena J. 2003. *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*. Chicago: University of Illinois.

Jobson, Richard. 1968. *Golden Trade*. London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, p 107. As cited in Dena J. Epstein's *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*.

Jones, Bessie and Bess Lomax Hawes. 1972. *Step it Down: Games, Plays, Songs and Stories from the Afro-American Heritage*. New York: Harper & Row.

Morrison, Toni. 2004. *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Smith, William B. 1838. "Persimmon Tree and Beer Dance" pp 59-60. As cited in Dena J. Epstein's *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*.

Tashjian, Virginia A. (Eds.) 1969. *Juba This and Juba That: Story Hour Stretches for Large or Small Groups*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

Thomas, Velma Maia. 2001. *No Man Can Hinder Me: The Journey from Slavery to Emancipation Through Song*. New York: Crown.

Juba Dance <http://www.streetswing.com/histmain/z3juba.htm>

Patting Juba [http://www.dhyatt.com/music/tab/Patting\\_Juba\\_info.pdf](http://www.dhyatt.com/music/tab/Patting_Juba_info.pdf)