

The Role of African Americans in the Development of South Carolina's Culture

The Basics

Subject Area and/or Course Title:

South Carolina History

Targeted Grade Level:

3rd

Time Required:

45 minutes

Related Standards:

SC Social Studies Standard 3-2.5 Explain the role of Africans in developing the culture and economy of South Carolina, including the growth of the slave trade; slave contributions to the plantation economy; the daily lives of the enslaved people; the development of the Gullah culture; and their resistance to slavery.

SC ELA Standard I 2.1 Explore topics of interest to formulate logical questions; build knowledge; generate possible explanations; consider alternative views.

Author:

Sarah Williams

Introductory Narrative to Lesson:

In second grade, students learned about historical contributions of African Americans. They have knowledge of some stories and songs of African American folklore. However, third grade is the first time students specifically examine the role of African Americans in the growth and development of South Carolina's culture. In addition, third grade is the first year in which students thoroughly explore state history and slavery.

Instructional Goals or Objectives:

- The student will be able to compare and contrast the lives of masters and slaves on a plantation.
- The student will be able to identify music as a form of communication for slaves.
- The student will be able to write a Gullah code song about a hardship of slave life.

Procedures/Lesson Activities:

Initial Engaging Activity: The teacher will read aloud from *Life on a Plantation* by Bobbie Kalman. This children's book compares the lives of wealthy plantation owners to the lives of slaves working on plantations. The teacher will then lead the students in creating a venn-diagram comparing and contrasting these two lifestyles on the board. The teacher will ask

students “If you were a slave working on a plantation, would you want to stay there? Do you think slaves tried to run away?”

Strategy: The Story Behind the Song

The teacher will introduce “Steal ‘Way to Jedus” as a Gullah song, performed in this recording by descendants of Gullah people living in South Carolina. The lyrics of the song will be presented for students to read. The teacher will ask students to consider the following focus questions as they listen to the song:

- What instruments do you hear in the song? What does this tell you about who performed it and where it was performed?
- What is the tempo (speed) of the song. How does the tempo affect the emotion of the song?

Students will listen to the song and think-pair-share their responses to these questions. The teacher will hear students’ ideas and reveal that the song was written and performed on plantations. It requires no instruments but the voice, meaning it was easily performed by slaves on the fields. The teacher will remind students that slave conditions on plantations were difficult and that slaves endured emotional and physical challenges. The teacher will ask students to consider these focus questions as they listen to the song a second time:

- Who do you think is singing the song? A man or woman? Are they young or old? What are they feeling?
- What is the purpose of the song? To entertain, persuade, inform, etc.?
- What does “steal away” mean? What action does this song refer to and what are the singer’s feelings about it?

The students will think-pair-share their thoughts with a partner, and then engage in a class discussion. Through the discussion, the teacher will emphasize that “steal away” refers to slaves running away. “Steal ‘Way to Jedus” is a code song, meaning it was sung by slaves in the fields to communicate a secret code to other slaves.

Assessment and Evaluation:

The teacher will have the class brainstorm a list of hardships (other than running away) that Gullah slaves might face in daily life. Students will then divide into groups and be assigned one of these topics. The students will work together to write one stanza of a code song about their assigned hardship. Each group will share their work song with the class. The checklist used to assess the code songs is presented below.

Code Song Checklist

_____ The stanza is at least 4 lines long.

_____ At least one line of the stanza repeats.

_____ The students can explain how the code song relates to their assigned hardship.

3/3 = Exceeds expectations

2/3 = Meets expectations

1/3 = Below expectations

Closure/Reflection:

Throughout the process of writing these lessons, I came to realize that music does not only supplement academic curriculum, but it can also introduce and teach historical content. Even though the songs I selected for my unit on Gullah and slave life were written and performed centuries ago, students are still able to relate to it. It is common for students to have experience with modern rhymes, play songs, and spirituals much like those introduced in this unit. Because our students relate to music and because it can be used in several versatile ways, it should be natural for educators to integrate music into their lessons.

In addition, researching music for this unit helped me realize how much musical content has been published. There were countless options for me to choose from, even when selecting songs for a very specific topic. This experience taught me that educators should make an effort to become more knowledgeable about music they can use in their classrooms. By researching songs, I gained a better understanding of which musical selections would be the most appropriate for my goals and objectives.

Resources/Materials:

- Life on a Plantation by Bobbie Kalman
- Chart paper or white board
- Recording of "Steal 'Way to Jedus"

Song: "Steal 'Way to Jedus"

Background: On plantations, slaves were typically forbidden to speak to one another in public places. To overcome this, they used songs to communicate. Some songs carried secret messages. These songs were called code songs, because slaves sang them while they worked in the fields. "Steal 'Way to Jedus" is a song that Gullah people would sing to let other slaves know that they were planning on escaping. The lyrics speak of Jesus, leading overseers to believe that this was a typical Gullah spiritual. The recommended recording is one made by current members of the South Carolina Gullah community.

SCETV. (2015, July 17). Gullah Net. Retrieved from Knowitall.org:

<http://www.knowitall.org/gullahmusic/>

Lyrics

Steal 'way, steal 'way, steal 'way to Jedus.

Steal 'way, steal 'way home. Me ain't got long for stayin'.

Steal 'way, steal 'way, steal 'way to Jedus.

Steal 'way, steal 'way home. Me ain't got long for stayin'.

*Transcribed from The Gullah Kinfolk recording Steal 'Way to Jedus by Sarah Williams

Sheet Music

Although sheet music for the recording used in this lesson is not available, sheet music for a different version of Steal Away can be found at the following source.

Steal Away. (n.d.). Retrieved from Jubilee Songs, PBS :

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/singers/sfeature/songs_steal_sheet.html

Recommended Recording

The Gullah Kinfolk . (2007). Steal 'Way to Jedus. On *Songs Uv Dee Gullah Pee'puls*.

Charleston, SC, United States of America. Matrix Media, Inc.

Also available on Spotify