

## **The *Lusitania* in Music**

### **The Basics**

#### **Time Required**

4 class periods

#### **Subject Areas**

High School US History

Emergence of Modern America, 1890-1930

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

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

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### **The Lesson**

#### **Introduction**

The sinking of the *Lusitania* was a tragic event in history. This lesson is designed to help students not only understand the event itself, but to see how the event is remembered in song.

#### **Guiding Questions**

- 1) Does music inspire change or does change inspire music?
- 2) What can be learned about United States's citizens from the manner by which the country mobilizes, prepares, and participates in war?
- 3) Are the political, fiscal, social, and military goals of war worth the loss of human life and social upheaval?
- 4) How does war justify or challenge our feelings of patriotism? Does war strengthen or destroy our honor and appreciation as Americans?
- 5) How does the United States's entry into World War I foreshadow the prominent role that the United States will play during the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

#### **Learning Objectives**

Students will...

- 1) Evaluate whether or not music inspires change or change inspires music.
- 2) Analyze the lyrics of "When the *Lusitania* Went Down" and relate them to events occurring in America during 1915's.
- 3) Hypothesize whether or not America would have entered World War One if the *Lusitania* was never sunk.

- 3) Use a variety of primary sources to create a propaganda artifact relating the sinking of the Lusitania to your view on World War One

## Preparation Instructions

Songs used in this lesson:

“When the Lusitania Went Down” by Charles McCarron & Nat Vincent, 1915

## Lesson Activities

### Day 1

#### Before Class:

Cut out Lusitania roles (one for each student). Have 6 designated areas in room marked with signs: 3 signs should say “Germany is at fault,” and 3 signs should say “Great Britain is at fault”. The goal is to create 6 groups of 3-4 students.

#### Do Now:

Complete the acronym M.A.N.I.A and explain why that resulted in World War I. Review causes of World War One with students to clarify any concepts that students may be unclear about.

M= Militarism

A= Alliances

N= Nationalism

I= Imperialism

A= Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (6/28/1914)

**1).** Distribute Attachment B Lusitania Song Analysis to every student and ask that they silently read the information sheet about the Lusitania. To ensure reading comprehension, advise the students to create 1 discussion question for each paragraph. Students may attempt to answer their question or leave it blank. Once completed, have the students share and answer their discussion questions with a partner. As a class, briefly summarize the sinking of the Lusitania and answer any final questions.

**2)** Distribute lyrics and play song “When the Lusitania Went Down” by Charles McCarron and Nat Vincent. Please see the URL below for lyrics and recording. Once song is played, inform the students that they will be playing “High Five Knowledge Comes Alive”. When the music begins playing, the students must walk around the room (with their paper and a pencil) and high five anyone they cross paths with. When the music stops, the students must partner up with the last person they high-fived. With their partner, the team should answer a set number of questions off of the worksheet. When the music begins playing again, the students should resume high-fiving. Once the music stops, the students become partners with the last person they high-fived. With their new partner, the team must answer more questions. This should continue until all questions are answered. Discuss as a class when finished.

Recording: <http://archive.org/details/WhenTheLusitaniaWentDown>

Lyrics: <http://www.usgennet.org/usa/mo/county/stlouis/ww1-music/lusitania.htm>

**3)** Pass out Attachment C: Lusitania Roles (roles should have been cut out prior to students’ arrival) and allow the students several minutes to brainstorm with a partner about their role. Ask them to brainstorm, in character, who is responsible for the *Lusitania* sinking: Britain or Germany. Once the

students have good idea about which side they are one, direct them to the appropriate signs (“Germany is to blame or Great Britain is to blame”). Once in the groups distribute Attachment D: Lusitania Propaganda Project and Attachment E: Lusitania Perspective Packet. Read directions and answer any questions. Instruct the students NOT to worry about the project, but to simply keep it in mind, so they can gather propaganda ideas.

4) Ask the students to begin completing questions 1-6 on the Lusitania Perspective Packet.

**Closure:**

Round Robin: Ask students to write down their role and explain why they chose the place fault with the British or Germans for the sinking of the Lusitania.

Post-it Note: Would “When the Lusitania Went Down” inspire you to change your view about the US entry into war? Why or why not?

**HW:** Finish questions 1-6 on Lusitania Perspective Packet

**Day 2**

**Do Now:**

Get in your groups from yesterday and share your answers from questions from 1-6 on Lusitania Perspective Packet. Review as a class.

1) Provide students with primary sources and instruct students to complete Lusitania Perspective Packet WS while in groups.

2) Monitor students and provide assistance when needed.

**Closure:**

Have students write down what question on the worksheet they still having difficulty with. Instruct the students to switch papers with another group. The other group should attempt to answer the question. If clarification is still needed, discuss as a class.

Exit Ticket: What surprising fact did you learn today?

**HW:**

Complete entire Lusitania Perspective Packet

**Day 3**

**Do Now:**

T-P-S: What artifact from yesterday was most interesting? Why? Share as a class.

1) Submit Lusitania Perspective Packet from last night.

2) Ask students to get in the groups from yesterday. Once in groups, allow the students to work on their Lusitania Propaganda Project.

**Closure:**

Round Robin: Share your view about who was at fault for the sinking of *Lusitania*. Support your answer with at least one primary source.

**HW:** Finish Lusitania Propaganda Project

**Day 4**

**Do Now:**

Snowball: How would you feel if you lost a family member in the *Lusitania*?

1) Final touches on Lusitania Propaganda Project

2) Present Lusitania Propaganda Project to class

3) Class vote: Students must vote Yes or No. Have a student record the votes by creating a bar graph or chart on board

1) Who was to blame for the sinking of the *Lusitania*?

2) Should have America entered the war immediately after the sinking of the *Lusitania*?

Why/why not?

**Assessment**

Assign one question to each group. Ask the students to answer the question as a group and present a one-minute summary of their answer.

1) Does music inspire change or does change inspire music?

2) What can be learned about United States's citizens from the manner by which the country mobilizes, prepares, and participates in war?

3) Are the political, fiscal, social, and military goals of war worth the loss of human life and social upheaval?

4) How does war justify or challenge our feelings of patriotism? Does war strengthen or destroy our honor and appreciation as Americans?

5) How does the United States's entry into World War I foreshadow the prominent role that the United States will play during the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

**Resources**

**Lyrics**

"When the Lusitania Went Down" available at

<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/mo/county/stlouis/ww1-music/lusitania.htm>

## Attachment A

Lusitania Song Analysis

*When the Lusitania Went Down*

Charles McCarron & Nat Vincent, 1915.

### **RMS Lusitania and World War One**

When the *Lusitania* was launched in 1907, it was the largest and fastest ship in the world. The luxurious British ocean liner quickly caught the British government's attention for its speed, size, and successful Trans-Atlantic voyages. In 1913, the British Navy realized that war was looming over them. Therefore, they secretly and quickly fitted the *Lusitania* for war. This fitting including the installation of ammunition magazines and gun mounts on her decks, making the ship ready for the addition of guns when needed. However, these new additions were completely hidden under the deck. The passengers who continued to enjoy this luxurious Trans-Atlantic trip were oblivious to the machines of war buried beneath their feet.

After World War I broke out, the *Lusitania* continued to make her regular sailings, carrying British and American passengers between Liverpool and New York. However, on February 4, 1915, Germany declared that the seas surrounding the British Isles were a war zone, and they would sink all ships sailing under the flags of Britain, Russia, or France within British waters. If any neutral ships were in British waters, they were liable to be sunk. The US government, wanting to remain isolated from the war, warned Germany to take all steps necessary to protect the lives and property of Americans.

On April 24<sup>th</sup> 1915, the *Lusitania* was docked at New York. While there she was loaded with meat, medical supplies, copper, cheese, lard, bacon, oil, and machinery. However, she was also being covertly stocked with munitions for Britain war effort. Before the *Lusitania* was set to sail back to Liverpool, through a war zone, a group of German-Americans began to worry. Terrified of the repercussions that would occur if the *Lusitania* was attacked by a U-boat, they decided to express their concerns the German embassy. The Imperial German embassy, also worried about a U-boat attack, placed a large warning in American newspapers, warning travelers that they would be traveling through war zone and could be at risk. However, the warning did provoke much concern from the passengers.

On May 1, 1915 the *Lusitania* set sail for Liverpool, carrying thousands of both passengers and secret munitions. On May 7, 1915 the *Lusitania* entered the Irish Channel when it was hit by a single torpedo sent from a German U-boat. A second explosion came within minutes later, and the ship began to rapidly sink. Within 18 minutes, the ship had sunk taking 1,195 passengers and forever embedding memories of fear within the 764 people survivors. Several theories exist in an attempt to determine where the second explosion originated; however, the theorists cannot seem to agree. Some theorists hypothesize that the explosion was caused by the hidden munitions, while others believe that the boilers simply exploded.

After the German attack, which killed 128 Americans, the US began to put pressure on Germany submarines warfare. The pressure worked, and U-boat warfare was suspended in September 1915. However, unrestricted submarine warfare recommenced on February 1, 1917. The unrestricted submarine warfare, along with the Zimmerman Telegram, prompted the US to break diplomatic relations with Germany, eventually leading the United States into World War I.

### **Popular Music and World War One**

Between 1913 and 1915 Americans began to become more encompassed with the thought of the potential US entry into war. Songwriters began to share their views on the war patriotic tunes, neutrals songs, and antiwar songs. However, the majority of tunes vastly ignored the death and dying that was occurring in Europe. However, once the *Lusitania* was sunk in 1915, American musicians began to prepare citizens for the US entry into WWI, as heard in *When the Lusitania Went Down*. As the European

war escalated, war songs, containing both anti and pro war sentiment, began to infiltrate popular music. Soon after, music became a key source of propaganda, sending messages about the war into the minds of all Americans willing to listen.

Lusitania Song Analysis  
*When the Lusitania Went Down*  
Charles McCarron & Nat Vincent, 1915.

1. What types of instruments are heard? Are they used alone or are they an accompaniment?
2. Describe the voice(s) that you hear.
3. Write down the “images” that music “paints”?
4. What strikes you most about this song?
5. What cultural, occupational, or gender group does then song represent?
6. What is the purpose of the song? Entertain, encourage, persuade, etc
7. Are there any opinions being presented in this song? If so, please identify them.
8. What questions does this song raise?
9. What is the message of this song? Is it a form of “propaganda”? Why or why not?
10. Image that you lost family when the *Lusitania* sank. How would you feel if you heard this song?
11. Does this song inspire change? Why or why not?

Lusitania Roles

**Teacher Directions:** Cut up the roles and pass one role to each student.

German Soldier

British Survivor of Lusitania

British Soldier

Family member of British Lusitania victim

Recent German Immigrant in America

Family member of American Lusitania victim

American Citizen

Irish Citizen who rescued survivors and  
Deceased passengers

German Sailor on U-Boat

American World War I protester

German Citizen

American World War I supporter

American Soldier

American Sailor

American Survivor of Lusitania



### Lusitania Propaganda Project

It is June 1, 1915, several weeks after the *Lusitania* sank. Put yourself in the shoes of your character. How would you feel after the *Lusitania* was sunk? Who is at fault: Great Britain or Germany? Some things to think of...

- The German-Embassy warned the *Lusitania* passengers not to travel in a war zone.
- The German U-Boat did not provide the *Lusitania* with a courtesy warning before torpedoing it.
- The British Military enacted a "Hunger Blockade" which prevented food items from reaching German, ultimately starving civilians.
- The *Lusitania* was secretly carrying munitions intended to help the British Military in the war effort against Germany.

**Directions:** *Please follow teacher directions to ensure all work is submitted on time.*

- 1) Complete the "Lusitania Perspective Packet" before completing Propaganda Project
  
- 2) Your group must create a propaganda artifact, expressing **your characters'** view towards World War One **and** the sinking of the *Lusitania*. The artifact may be a song, newspaper article, poster, speech, or political cartoon. Remember to draw on the knowledge acquired from listening to *When the Lusitania Went Down* and the various other primary source documents.

Be prepared to present your propaganda artifact to the class!!!

Lusitania Perspective Packet

1. Role:
2. Name, Age, and Gender:
3. Description: (family members, occupation, etc)
4. Where were you when you heard that the Lusitania was torpedoed?
5. How did it make you feel? Why?
6. How did the sinking of the *Lusitania* impact you?
7. Choose one artifact that supports your view on the sinking of the *Lusitania*.

Title of artifact and name of artist (if given):

Description of artifact (note people, objects, animals, setting, words, etc):

Are there any words in the artifact? What do they tell you?

What is the artifact's message?

What items in the artifact support your previous answer?

Based upon your perspective, why do you agree with the artifact's message? Explain.

8. Choose one artifact that DOES NOT support your view on the sinking of the *Lusitania*.

Title of artifact and name of artist (if given):

Description of artifact (note people, objects, animals, setting, words, etc):

Are there any words in the artifact? What do they tell you?

What is the artifact's message?

What items in the artifact support your previous answer?

Based upon your perspective, why do you agree with the artifact's message? Explain.

9. Read the lyrics *When the Lusitania Went Down*. Does this song support or refute your opinion about the sinking of the Lusitania. Why or why not?

10. Who do think is at fault for the sinking of the *Lusitania*? Why? Use primary documents as evidence for your answer.

11. Describe one controversial theory or conspiracy theory about the *Lusitania*. You believe it? Why or why not?

12. Do any modern controversial or conspiracy theories exist today? If so, what are they?

Do you believe them? Why or why not?