

Origin of "Taps"

The Basics

Time Required

1 class period

Subject Areas

11th Grade US History

Civil War and Reconstruction, 1860-1876

Common Core Standards Addressed:

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

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The Lesson

Introduction

Though there are a number of myths surrounding the origin of the melody, it is apparent that its genesis is sometime during the Seven Days battle around Richmond in July, 1862, by a collaborative effort of Union General Daniel Butterfield and his brigade bugler, Oliver Wilcox Norton.

This music was heard and appreciated by other brigades, both Union and Confederate, who asked for the music and adopted the bugle call not only to be played at military funerals but it would also come to replace the traditional military bugle call, "Lights Out."

It was made the official Army bugle call for day's end and at military funerals after the Civil War. It was given the title "Taps" in 1874.

Guiding Questions

What is the importance of marking various periods of time in a military camp?

How, or why, do military traditions become part of the larger society?

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- given data determine whether it is fact, opinion or fiction

- after reading, listening, and participating in class discussion, think inductively and formulate his/her opinions
- to organize research material into an organized fashion for a written and oral presentation
- to interpret primary resources

Preparation Instructions

Song used in lesson:

- "Taps"
- "Lights Out"

Lesson Activities

This lesson would be used in a Civil War unit when important battles are being studied.

Introductory learning activities:

- Play a recording of "Lights Out" and identify this as the military signal for day's end.
- Identify one of your students that can adequately play the bugle (or talk to your band director) to play "Taps" in your classroom. (I feel this is more effective than just playing a recording of the instrumental.)
- In discussion, have the class compare and contrast the two instrumentals and their effectiveness of portraying a sense of day's end and a funeral.
- Identify a trio or quartet of your students (or talk to your choir director) and have them sing the verses of "Taps."

Song discussion questions and activities:

- Why do you think both the North and South used this at their military funerals during the Civil War?
- Why do you think God is such a dominant theme in the verses?
- Why do you think the melody and song were so quickly and universally accepted as a military call for day's end and at military funerals?

Assessment

The students will be assigned the following questions to research and answer:

- Identify what campaign the Seven Days Battle was a part of.
- Why was this battle important?
- How did the melody come about?
- Examine the myth about Captain Robert Ellicombe.
- Identify and research at least one other song of the Civil War that was popular on either or both sides of the fighting.

Resources

Lyrics:

“Taps”

Fading light dims the sight.
And a star gems the sky, gleaming bright.
From afar drawing nigh – falls the night.

Day is done, gone the sun,
From the lake, from the hills, from the sky.
All is well, safely rest, God is nigh.

Then good night, peaceful night,
Till the light of the dawn shineth bright.
God is near, do not fear – friend, good night.

Additional verses

Go to sleep, peaceful sleep,
May the soldier or sailor God keep.
On the land or the deep, safe is sleep.

Love, good night, must thou go,
When the day, and the night, need Thee so.
All is well, speedth all to their rest.
Fades the light, and afar goeth day,
And the stars shineth bright, fare Thee well.
Day has gone, night is on.
Thanks and praise, for all our days,
‘Neath the sun, ‘neath the stars, ‘neath the sky,
As we go, this we know, God is nigh.

Other resources:

Bailey, Thomas. *The American Pageant: A History of the Republic* (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1971).

Arlington Cemetery: <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net>

“24 Notes That Tap Deep Emotion”

http://www.west-point.org/index.php?option=com_wrapper&Itemid=40