Change Over Time:
Four Perspectives on the role of the American Farmer in Popular Music

The Basics

Subject
This is a cross disciplinary unit created for the Gifted and Talented pullout program incorporating Music, Language Arts, Writing, Math, History, Technology, Health and Science. It is easily adaptable for the regular classroom.

Targeted Grade Level is 3-5
This lesson is relevant to any grade level except Early Childhood.

Standards for Texas Gifted and Talented
II. Domain: Critical Thinking The student will understand and apply the components of critical thinking.
III. Domain: Vocabulary The student will expand vocabulary and adjust vocabulary to varying situations and audiences.
V. Domain: Depth and Complexity The student will examine complex issues and topics in depth.

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The Lesson

Introductory Narrative to Lesson
This 2 week or 6-8 hour Lesson considers the evolving popular perception of the role and status of the American Farmer. The class will follow a timeline beginning in 1880 and continuing to the present day. This unit begins with the c. 1880 “The Farmer is the Man” demonstrating a positive appreciation for farmers as providing food for all. Next, students will learn of the initial 1917 American incorporation of the English song “Old Mac Donald had a Farm,” with all of the song’s cheery, raucous and celebratory barnyard renditions. The lesson continues by examining the WW I quandary over the farmer’s status through the lens of “How ‘Ya Gonna Keep Em Down on the Farm?” by Walter Donaldson 1919. Completing these lessons is the song “Brown Eyed Children of the Sun” by Daniel Valdez, bringing this study to embrace the ongoing questions in American Farming today: How do we define a farmer? Who is working on the farms other than illegal immigrants? Because these immigrants work on farms are they farmers? What is the future of farming today? Do the students anticipate selecting farming as their future career?

*The Week 2 lesson assumes your class is already familiar with WWI. If they aren’t, I suggest that you teach an overview of WWI focusing on the European Theater and the location of Paris. You may find some great footage and supporting material on the Smithsonian website.

Objectives
The student will understand the role of the farmer in American History. Students will apply understanding changes in attitudes toward farming over the past 130 years. Students will write a persuasive opinion piece relating visual and audio forms of art. Students will analyze historic and cultural content within primary content sources. Students will evaluate the components of a work of art in their relationship to cultural issues of the era. Students will create a story sequence using sheet music and music notation. Students will use a dictionary to understand and author their own
definitions of unfamiliar words and terms to increase recall and remembering of new words and language. Students will be able to identify patterns as meaning making tools in unfamiliar language. Students will self evaluate progress toward classroom task goals and create new products as evidence of content understanding.

**Resource/ Materials/ Songs**

“The Farmer is the Man” Anonymous, 1880s *A declaration of the value and primacy of the American farmer.*

“Old MacDonald Had a Farm!” Anonymous, 1917. This *is a lively children’s song celebrating farm animals and their farmers. Multiple sources available on internet including* [http://bussongs.com/songs/old-macdonald.php](http://bussongs.com/songs/old-macdonald.php)

“How You Gonna Keep Him Down on the Farm” Walter Donaldson, Sam M. Lewis, Joe Young, c. 1920. *A show tune illustrates rural to urban migration after World War I.*


**Background Sources**


[http://farmworkermovement.us/](http://farmworkermovement.us/) Primary source accounts by the UFW volunteers who built the movement


[http://objectofhistory.org/objects/extendedtour/shorthandledhoe/?order=5](http://objectofhistory.org/objects/extendedtour/shorthandledhoe/?order=5) Luis Valdez and Agustín Lira created the El Teatro Campesino in 1965 as a group to produce music and theater in support of the United Farm Workers. *El Corrido de Cesar Chavez/ The Ballad of Cesar Chavez UFW founder in a Bilingual version with lyrics.*

[http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qllI5hNVIsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About_Us.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qllI5hNVIsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About_Us.htm) Farm Aid was created 28 years ago by musicians Willie Nelson, Neil Young and John Mellencamp who organized the first Farm Aid concert in 1985 to raise awareness about the loss of family farms and to raise funds to keep farm families on their land.

**Additional Resources**


[http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qllI5hNVIsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About_Us.htm](http://www.farmaid.org/site/c.qllI5hNVIsE/b.2723609/k.C8F1/About_Us.htm) Farm Aid Nonprofit whose mission is to promote Family Farms and raise public awareness in support of their value to our nation. Through annual fundraising concerts and “inspiring and informative TV, radio, mail and web campaigns (including the [HOMEGROWN.org](http://www.farmaid.org) website) Farm Aid supports Family Farms through grants supporting family agriculture.

http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html Bloom's Taxonomy

Gathering The Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish and English, By Alma Flor Ada Illustrated by Simón Silva English Translation by Rosalma Zubizarreta The author’s many years of work with migrant families inspired this poetic ABC of the fields, in two languages, and Simón Silva’s magnificent illustrations, in bold colors, have created a work of art to be enjoyed by children and adults alike. (K-12).

Materials List

Elmo/overhead Projector or Whiteboard
Listening devices such as iPods with songs uploaded / songs available for repeat listening by students / teacher willing to replay song numerous times!
Student copies of Listening Guide “I Can Hear It Now”
Student copies of “Song Comparison” chart
Online computers or poster board or copy paper and tape with art supplies.

Week 1
This first set of lesson activities will require about 3-4 hours of class time. As students enter the classroom play the song “The Farmer is the Man.” Ask them to be ready to listen carefully to a second playing of the song, noticing and recording in their notebooks any words they do not understand. Invite students to share their words, generating a vocabulary list on the board or overhead/Elmo. Discuss the meanings, allow children to share what they think, clarify as needed. This will support your ELL students.

Pass out copies of the “What do I hear?” listening guide. Inform class that their task is to focus on Melody and Words, filling in these columns. Those who are more fluent in non-print musical representations may complete all of the categories on the handout. Allow students about 10 minutes to complete this task. They may use iPods or any other method you have at hand for repeat playing of the song. They may work individually or in pairs. Circulate and scaffold their understanding as needed. Bring group back together and share, completing a group “What do I hear?” chart for all to see.

Next, using VAT page 5.44, share the Background information through a Read Aloud with the class. Follow this up with the discussion questions in the second and third bulleted groupings. Steer the discussion and responses to the point of view of the farmer as well as the point of view of lyricist about the role and status of the farmer in this early industrial era.

Pass out a second set of Listening Guides. Inform students they will repeat the first listening exercise but with a different song. Because this song is practically certain to be familiar to them, increase the level of fun in the class and do not tell them that this song will be “Old Mac Donald Had a Farm”! Allow about 5 minutes for the close listening and completion of the chart. They may work individually or in pairs. Circulate and scaffold their understanding as needed. Bring group back together and share, completing a group “What do I hear?” chart for all to see.
Distribute copies of the “Song Comparison” chart. Ask students to compare and contrast the two songs. They must select at least 3 categories from the checklist. They may work individually, in pairs or small groups. Allow 10-15 minutes for this activity.

Bring class back together and display the Grant wood 1930 painting “American Gothic”. Working in small groups, allow students time to decide which song best fits with the mood or theme of the painting. Students must be prepared to explain their choice and justify their reasoning to the class. They will be limited to 2 minutes per group. Each group needs to have a timer to keep them to the 2 minutes allowed. Students should do this in front of the class, pointing out their basis for the decision using the image as well as their listening guides and Song comparison chart. This activity may require 15-20 minutes.

Using Microsoft Word or Power point, allow students to choose which program they prefer, assign students the following task. This may be done individually or in partners. If you do not have computers available you may offer paper or poster board for this activity.

Create a 6-8 slide or 1-2 page word document that includes the Grant Wood piece American Gothic and a second student selected visual piece. The student selected piece must be a visual representation of the second song. Explain the relationship between the songs and the pieces you have selected to represent them. Include your opinion of the attitude and perspective about farmers communicated by the artists and the songs. Invite students to write these from the point of view of the farmers and the lyricists. Allow 2-3 hours for this end of week one activity.

**Week 2**

The second set of lesson activities will require about 6-8 hours of class time. Begin by reading the background information about the lyricist and the composer for “How ‘Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm”. Omit the third paragraph. Discuss what Black Face and Tin Pan Alley were. (Black Face was a type of racist comedy. Tin Pan Alley was located in New York and featured slapstick comedy stage performances which were wildly popular among many white Americans). Allow children precisely 10 minutes to look these terms up on the computers. Regroup and discuss what they learned, saw and possibly heard too!

With student notebooks or paper at hand, ask the students to close their eyes as they listen to the song. Have them visualize what the characters in the song might be like using all musical elements including instruments and voice to guide their thinking. Play the song again, this time students should sketch what they hear. Play it a third time allowing for addition of some details and completion of their drawings. Post the drawings at the front of the room. After a brief gallery walk ask class if anyone can see the influence of the music in the drawings? Encourage students to describe how the musical melody and rhythm of the piece influenced their drawings. What colors would they have added if given the opportunity?

Pass out copies of the sheet music VAT 6.65-66. Many of the students may be unfamiliar with musical notation. Explain that if they listen carefully to the song while following along with the sheet music they will discover patterns between the number of notes and the tempo of the music. They may also discover patterns in how high or low on the scale the notes are drawn correlates to the rise and fall in tone of the music and singing. Students should read the lyrics, noting any language they do not understand. List the unfamiliar words on the board. Assign words to various students for dictionary searches and definitions. On the margins of the sheet music, or in their notebooks they should note the meanings of the words.
Pass out copies of Plotting the Story VAT B.21. Working in partners students using song sheets, students should plot the sequence of events in the song. Analyzing the contents of the chart, students should evaluate each verses problems and create solutions to the Farmer's quandary of how he's going to keep his returning soldier down on the farm to work when he has seen Paris? Distribute copies of the Broadside for "How 'Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm". Inform class that they will now be able to write lyrics or a slapstick comedy using the visual information on the broadside. In self selected groupings they should collaborate on the task and prepare an in class performance for their peers.

The second song in this lesson group is “Brown Eyed Children of the Sun" by David Valdez, 1973. Download sets of the lyrics as well as the song from the United Farm Workers website listed under resources/Materials Songs. “Songs are excellent at humanizing abstract governmental or economic events” VAT B.4.

Begin with a teacher Read Aloud of the Bilingual book by author Alma Flor Ada Gathering the Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish and English. The author's many years of work with migrant families inspired this poetic ABC of the fields, in two languages, and Simón Silva's magnificent illustrations, in bold colors, have created a work of art to be enjoyed by children and adults alike. (K-12). Go slow and savor the rich language and illustrations. What questions has the reading prompted from the children? Discuss.

Next play the song "Brown Eyed Children of the Sun". Here are the lyrics:

**Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun**
(Daniel Valdez)
Up to California from Mexico you come
To the Sacramento Valley, to toil in the sun
Your wife and seven children, they're working every one
And what will you be giving to your brown-eyed children of the sun?
Your face is lined and wrinkled and your age is forty-one
Your back is bent from picking, like your dying time has come
Your children's eyes are smiling, their lives have just begun
And what will you be giving to your brown-eyed children of the sun?
You marched on Easter Sunday, to the Capitol you've come
To fight for union wages, and your fight has just begun
You're a proud man, you're a free man, and your heritage is won
And that you can be giving to your brown-eyed children of the sun

**Ask Students:** Who are the Brown Eyed Children? Why are they called 'of the sun'? Why is the man at age 41 ancient? If the children are harvesting crops, what aren't they doing? Predict the future of the brown eyed children? Are there any in our classroom right now? Imagine a better life for the children, the man, and the wife? What changes need to be made to improve their lives? Are these people farmers? Why or why not? If they disappeared, who would harvest our crops and grow the food for our tables? Why did Daniel Valdez write this song? Do they think this is a performance song or ballad narrative? How does the music move the listener through the text? Is this a song that is easy to sing?

Distribute copies of the VAT B.20 Song Comparison chart. Students will compare this song with the Alma Flor Ada book. Have students adjust the chart headings accordingly. Students may use their
iPods to revisit the song and reread the lyrics through teacher made copies or directly from the website link:

Finally, offer the students a choice in writing assignments as follows. Many of these Independent Activities involve technology. Students may work in partners or small groups where feasible.

- Rewrite the song lyrics to reflect a positive experience.
- Write the song from the child’s point of view.
- Research and write about the UFW Easter Sunday march on the Capitol.
- Write a newspaper article about the migrant workers using Microsoft Publisher, importing primary source visual examples as support documents.
- Interview a family member who has worked as a migrant farm worker, recording their oral history. Inquire about the ‘Soundtracks of their Lives’ VAT B.12.

Be certain to schedule class time for your students to share their work with the class. This may function as a deadline for them. You may consider inviting their families.

**Field Trips**
- Plan a back stage trip in your school cafeteria to learn more about produce.
- Visit a local farmer’s market and interview the farmers.
- Make a group visit to the supermarket and discover where the produce is coming from.
- Plan a visit to the local Food Bank. Invite students to bring canned goods with them as a contribution.
- Spend a day helping at a Community Garden!

**Evaluation**
There are many activities throughout which could be collected for a grade as needed. Rubrics can be easily used by students for self-assessment, group assessments or use by the teacher.

**Reflection**
In addition to researching a wide variety of topical music on farming and migrant workers, both in English and in Spanish, I found myself referring to many learning strategy stalwarts including Blooms Taxonomy and Sandra Kaplan’s Depth and Complexity. The United Farm Workers website provides numerous visual, oral, musical, and multimedia texts to further expand understanding of the UFW, Cesar Chavez, Protest Strikes and migrant/Illegal Alien Worker issues. Because I created these Lessons with my Elementary students in mind, I chose not to go too deep into these topics. Upper grade level classes would find them rich topics for further exploration of a topical and divisive current political issue in the American Border states of the Southwest extending to the House of Congress in Washington D.C.