

## Education

# When Johnny Comes Marching Home



Civil War drummer boys. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### Grade Level

- 4-8

### Timeframe

- 1-2 hours

### Materials

Computer with internet access,  
paper, pencils

### Key Words

Shanty, sea shanty

### Activity Summary

This lesson focuses on the songs of the Civil War and the role music played.

### Learning Objectives

To learn the role that music played during the Civil War.

### National Standards:

History K-4: 4E, 6A, 7A

History 5-12: Era 4: 4B; Era 5: 1A, 2B

Slaves planting sweet potatoes on the James Hopkins Plantation, circa 1862. Public domain.



### Background Information

Music could be heard throughout the Civil War amongst soldiers, sailors, slaves, women, men, and children. Many of the songs were taken from print, memory, or passed down orally and were sung because they were familiar songs that brought comfort or inspiration. New lyrics were often created to embellish traditional songs and the words were pertinent to circumstance or motivation.

Some songs originated as African-American spiritual songs. Slaves and workers in the fields often sang spiritual songs to bring courage, strength, and unity to the unkind conditions in which they lived and worked. Spiritual songs were usually composed in the moment, reflecting suffering or understanding.

Shanties were work songs set to a tempo that synchronized to repetitive tasks. Sea shanties, such as *Blow the Man Down*, also brought men together who worked on the ships at sea. The songs had a purpose and the lyrics harmonized with the sailors' labors. There were also patriotic battle songs that inspired and united the troops. Sailors and soldiers had songs about the flag and love of country, their sweethearts, religion, and even drinking songs. Music offered a time for the soldier and sailor to relax and reflect.

Women, children and the men who did not go to war, also sang songs that revealed their suffering and hope for an end to the war. Civil War songs span from spiritual and protest to historical, shanty, and traditional. Action songs roused people to raise their voices. Traditional songs and ballads spoke of heritage and remembrance.

Today, songs usually are sung for entertainment. However, some still serve the purpose to pass down oral traditions, show love of country, pay tribute to the struggles of ancestors, or to protest in order to rally people to action.

## Activity

1. Visit NIEHS's web site and choose a patriotic song.  
<https://kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/songs/patriotic/index.htm>
2. Read the lyrics and listen to the MIDI file to learn the tune.
3. Practice singing the song.
4. Research the song you chose to learn additional information, such as its author, when it was written, what the words represented, why it was sung and by whom, and so on.
5. Conduct research to find Civil War songs.
6. Choose one Civil War song from your research or use the song *Goober Peas*, and write a synopsis of its history and meaning.
  - Soldiers for both sides of the Civil War found that singing could help pass the time and relieve stress. *Goober Peas* became popular during that time and it is still sung "for fun" in classrooms or around campfires. Listen to the melody and then practice singing the song!  
<https://kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/songs/favorites/goober-peas/index.htm>

## Extensions

1. Create your own song. Write lyrics to represent an important event in your life or something you are passionate about. Create a melody for your lyrics and practice singing the song. Share your song with your group or class.
2. Find a tune that you are familiar with and like. Write new lyrics for the song. Practice singing the song and share it with others.
3. Conduct research to evaluate how slaves might have used songs to strengthen their religion and family to create a viable culture during times of slavery.
4. Research North and South Civil War songs and explain how they show the economic, social, and cultural differences between the North and South.
5. Using lyrics from Civil War songs, describe the motives for fighting and daily life experiences of Confederate soldiers with those of white and African-American Union soldiers.
6. Choose a Civil War song that tells a story of a hero or famous battle and discuss if the song is completely factual or not. How might the lyrics of songs change to embellish the truth and why?
7. Analyze several Civil War songs that demonstrate freedom of expression and the role of protest in a democracy.

### *Goober Peas* By A. Pinder

Sitting by the roadside on a summer's day  
Chatting with my mess-mates, passing time away  
Lying in the shadows underneath the trees  
Goodness, how delicious, eating goober peas.

Peas, peas, peas, peas  
Eating goober peas  
Goodness, how delicious,  
Eating goober peas.

When a horse-man passes, the soldiers have a rule  
To cry out their loudest, "Mister, here's your mule!"  
But another custom, enchanting-er than these  
Is wearing out your grinders, eating goober peas.

Peas, peas, peas, peas  
Eating goober peas  
Goodness, how delicious,  
Eating goober peas.

Just before the battle, the General hears a row  
He says "The Yanks are coming, I hear their rifles  
now."  
He looks down the roadway, and what d'ya think he  
sees?  
The Georgia Militia cracking goober peas.

Peas, peas, peas, peas  
Eating goober peas  
Goodness, how delicious,  
Eating goober peas.

I think my song has lasted just about enough.  
The subject is interesting, but the rhymes are  
mighty rough.  
I think the war was over, so free from rags and fleas  
We'd kiss our wives and sweethearts, say good-  
bye to goober peas.

Peas, peas, peas, peas  
Eating goober peas  
Goodness, how delicious,  
Eating goober peas.

## Vocabulary

**Battle songs** – Songs that were sung before, during, or after a battle to inspire troops to fight and/or continue fighting

**Lyrics** – A set of words that make up a song. The writer of lyrics is a lyricist or lyricist. The meaning of lyrics can be either explicit or implicit, while some are abstract.

**MIDI file** – Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) is an industry specification for encoding, storing, synchronizing, and transmitting the musical performance and data of electronic musical instruments.

**Sea shanty** – A sea song or sailor's song; used for work or amusement

**Spiritual songs** – Religious (generally Christian) songs, which were created by enslaved African people in America

## Resources\*

### Books

Crawford, Richard: *The Civil War Songbook*. Dover Publications, 1977, **ISBN-13:** 978-0486234229.

Erbesen, Wayne: *Rousing Songs & True Tales of the Civil War*. Native Ground Music, 1999, **ISBN-13:** 978-1883206338.

Glazer, Tom: *A Treasury of Civil War Songs: Collected, edited and arranged by Tom Glazer (Piano/Vocal/Guitar Songbook)*. Hal Leonard Corporation, 1996, **ISBN-13:** 978-0793561780.

Silber, Irwin (Editor): *Songs of the Civil War*. Dover Publications, 1995, **ISBN-13:** 978-0486284385.

\* *The inclusion of links in this guide does not imply endorsement or support of any of the linked information, services, products, or providers.*



Image of the 107<sup>th</sup> USC Infantry, African American Civil War Musicians. Courtesy Library of Congress.

## Web Sites

### National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) Kids' Pages: Patriotic Songs

Visit this site for patriotic, children, camp songs, and more. Most songs have the lyrics and a midi file for the tune.

<https://kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/songs/patriotic/index.htm>

### National Park Service: Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System

A comprehensive research tool for searching the records of the soldiers and sailors that fought in the Civil War.

<https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-soldiers.htm>

### The Music of the American Civil War

This site has about 30 midi files and lyrics of Civil War Music. Categories include *Patriotic Songs*, *The Soldiering Life*, *Battlefield Deaths*, *Domestic Scenes*, and *Emancipation Songs*.

<http://pdmusic.org/civilwar.html>

### The USCT Chronicle: The Marching Song of the 1<sup>st</sup> Arkansas Colored

Read the story of the 107<sup>th</sup> USC Infantry, a black Union regiment out of Arkansas.

<http://usctchronicle.blogspot.com/2011/01/marching-song-of-1st-arkansas-colored.html>

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