

Lesson: “Oh, Susanna!”

Lesson

“Oh, Susanna!”

Grade(s)

3-5

Objectives

Students will:

- Participate in a call and response warm up.
- Learn and sing the folk song, “Oh, Susanna!”
- Discuss and understand the use of nonsense lyrics in folk music
- Create their own silly verse to “Oh, Susanna!” using the rhythmic patterns of the song
- Explore how people in the 1800’s used songs for entertainment and storytelling

Materials

Audio equip.

Recording of “Oh, Susanna!”

Sheet music of “Oh, Susanna!”

Verse composing worksheet

Pencils

National Standards

Performing

- **MU:Pr4.2.3a/4a/5a** Demonstrate understanding of expressive qualities and musical structure when singing.
- **MU:Pr6.1.3a/4a/5a** Perform music with expression, technical accuracy, and appropriate interpretation.

Creating

- **MU:Cr2.1.3a/54a/5a** Improvise or compose rhythmic and melodic ideas within a given form.

Connecting

- **MU:Cn10.0.3a/4a/5a** Demonstrate how personal interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.
- **MU:Cn11.0.3a/4a/5a** Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

Introduction/Warm up

1. Begin with the “Boom Chicka Boom” song (chanted)

Teacher: I said a Boom Chicka Boom

Students: I said a Boom Chicka Boom

Repeat.

Teacher: I said a Boom Chicka, Rocka Chicka, Rocka Chicka Boom

Students: I said a Boom Chicka, Rocka Chicka, Rocka Chicka Boom

Teacher: Uh-huh

Students: Uh-huh

Teacher: Oh yeah

Students: Oh yeah

Teacher: One more time



Lesson: “Oh, Susanna!”

Students: One more time

Teacher: A little lower – I Said a Boom Chicka Boom (continue using different voices, such as, baby voice, Cowboy voice, robot voice, and it’s best to end on whisper voice).

Jack Hartmann’s version is a lot of fun:

Hartman, J. (2012). *Songs for Teaching: Music to Promote Learning*. (2012). Boom Chicka Boom in Jack Hartman’s Brain Breaks. <https://www.songsforteaching.com/store/jack-hartmann-brain-breaks-music-cd-with-printable-lyrics-pr-60526.html>

Transition

Ask students: “Have you ever made up your own songs when you were bored, or on a long car ride?”

Explain: “In 1849 Gold was discovered in the California foothills. People traveled to California by train, horse and wagon, and sometimes by ship all the way around Cape Horn. They had no computers, smart phones, or TV’s, so very often they’d sit around the campfire and sing old songs or make up their own, silly songs to entertain each other. Some people brought violins, harmonicas, guitars, or banjos. One of those silly songs, with nonsensical sentences was “Oh, Susanna!” It’s an upbeat song but some words that don’t always make sense—on purpose!

Teach the Song: “Oh, Susanna!”

1. Play or sing one verse and chorus so students become acquainted with the tune.
2. Sing one phrase at a time, having students repeat each.
3. Highlight the silly lines such as:
 - “It rained all **night** the **day** I left the weather it was dry
 - “The sun so hot I froze to death”
 - Ask: “What’s silly about these lyrics? Do they make sense? Why do you think the songwriter wrote them that way?”

Composing Activity

This activity can be done as a class or in pairs or small groups. Fourth, and fifth-grade students are especially good at *Mad Libs*. You can complete one as a class and have the students create their own silly verses using the “Mad Susanna Worksheet.” You can set the students up for success by demonstrating the rhythm slide of the original verse and then the one you have made up. (See pdf files for “Mad Susanna Worksheet” and “Mad Susanna Slides”).

Once students have completed their verses invite the groups to share by performing, or use a projecting camera to share their work with the class.



Lesson: “Oh, Susanna!”

Wrap-Up & Reflection

Ask:

- “What did you notice about the rhythm or beat of the song?”
- “Why do you think the forty-niners liked singing songs like this?”
- “How can/do we use music today to tell stories or just have fun?”

Assessment Options

- Formative: Observe student participation in singing, and group verse composing.
- Reflective: Listen to students’ nonsense verses for understanding of rhythm/form.
- Discussion Topics:

Ask:

- 1) “If you had to travel across the country today, what kind of song would you sing to pass the time?” “What if you had no technology?”
- 2) “Can music help people feel better when they’re tired or sad?”

Wrap-Up & Reflection

Ask: Why do you think music is used in the military?

Sing one last phrase from the Marines Hymn. Have students provide the handsign for high or low Do for the starting pitch of the phrase.

Resources

Sheet Music, worksheets, and slides on website <https://www.americanheritagesongs.com/51-o-susanna>

