

Web Unit Plan

Title: Music of the Westward Expansion

Description: Students study the great westward migration of the mid-19th century in the United States and learn how important music was to those traveling along the trail. Students listen to popular music of the time, and investigate the history and origins of a variety of songs. In a final celebration, students sing and play tunes, and present their interpretations from the points of view of a pioneer or composer.

At a Glance

Grade Level: 3-5

Subjects: Music, Social Studies

Topics: Westward Expansion, Pioneer Life, Music

Higher-Order Thinking Skills: Analysis, Cause and Effect, Evaluation

Key Learnings: Music Appreciation, History and Culture through Music, Patterns of Human Migration

Time Needed: 8 weeks, 5 hours per week

Background: [From the Classroom in Florida, United States](#)

Unit Summary

What was life like for a western pioneer? Students take a journey through westward expansion using music to understand the experience of the pioneers. As they listen to lyrics and analyze the different types of music that was being sung and played during the later half of the 19th century, students gain insight into the life of the pioneers. Students identify the relationship between folk songs and historical events, and explore how music inspires and influences people today. The project culminates with a concert where students reenact life on the trail and share songs from the period.

Curriculum-Framing Questions

- **Essential Question**
How do the arts reflect history?
- **Unit Questions**
What can music teach us about history?
How does the pioneers' music reflect their lives?
- **Content Questions**
What is period music?
Who were the early pioneers?

Assessment Processes

View how a variety of student-centered [assessments](#) are used in the Music of the Westward Expansion Unit Plan. These assessments help students and teachers set goals; monitor student progress; provide feedback; assess thinking, processes, performances, and products; and reflect on learning throughout the learning cycle.

Instructional Procedures

Start this unit by posing the Unit Question, *What can music teach us about history?* Record ideas on butcher paper to be posted on a wall in the classroom. Tell students they will be returning to this question and will have an opportunity to add to their responses.

Who Were the Pioneers?

Continue this project with a discussion by asking, *Who were the early pioneers?* and, *Why did they travel to the frontiers of the West?* Record ideas and answers as well as questions on a Know-Wonder-Learn (K-W-L) chart. Guide students to the ThinkQuest Web site [A Pioneer's Journey to the Frontier](#)*. This ThinkQuest introduces students to the pioneers. The site explains who the pioneers were, where they traveled, and how they traveled. Allow time to explore the information located at this site. Lead a discussion about any questions that arise.

Have students work in pairs to explore the question, *Why did pioneers travel west?* Consider having students use the [Seeing Reason](#) Tool to organize the factors that influenced westward expansion and show how these factors influenced one another. (The [Seeing Reason](#) Web site has examples of causal maps as well as resources to help you get started.) Before students use the tool, model a causal map with the whole class to familiarize them with the process. As they research western expansion and gather new insight, instruct students to modify their maps to reflect their changing understanding. These maps can serve as the basis of a role-playing activity and character diary entries. For an interesting comparison, have students create a new [Seeing Reason](#) map to investigate the question, *Why do people move today?*

Create group scenario role-playing cards, such as this [example](#). Develop each group scenario to include three or four characters who may have journeyed westward together, such as a farm family or a group of prospectors. Divide students into groups of three or four and randomly pass out a card for each group. Explain to students that they are to select roles from the card and then gather more information about the journey west, keeping in mind how their characters would have experienced the journey. With this information, students can write brief fictional diary entries for their characters, explaining the daily events and happenings in their travels from the characters' points of view.

What Role Did Music Play in Westward Expansion?

Introduce music and songs from the first half of the 19th century. Present basic music lessons on the different forms that the songs use. Answer the Content Question, *What is period music?*

Have students brainstorm in small groups their answer to, *What role did music play in westward expansion?* Have one person from each group share the group's answers with the whole class.

Play one song, such as [Red River Valley](#)*, and discuss its interesting origin. Ask students to consider which "character" in their group would have been likely to sing this lovelorn song. Play other songs, and, as students listen, have them write descriptive words that come into their minds. Ask students, *How does the pioneers' music reflect their lives?* Have students share their thinking and describe the moods, feelings, or images each song evokes. Introduce the Essential Question, *How do the arts reflect history?* and the Unit Question, *What can music teach us about history?* Have students write responses from the points of view of their characters in their diaries. Make sure students include not only how their *characters* think the arts

reflect history but also how *they* think the arts reflect history. Have students read their entries to the class, and add new ideas to the K-W-L chart.

Tell the students they will be taking on the role of pioneers. In their role, they share in a song in a final concert. Have each group choose a different song to study and interpret. Instruct students to research the writer of their song and find out what inspired him or her. From the point of view of their characters, have students write in their diaries about what the particular song means to them. They might write about when they first heard the song, what it reminds them of, or the images or "memories" it evokes. Have students illustrate their songs on large (12 x 18) pieces of construction paper, representing the narrative features as well as the feelings or moods the lyrics and tunes evoke. All these student products can be used in a slideshow backdrop for the final concert.

Gather Research

Explain to students they will also be creating a newsletter that reflects their knowledge of the pioneers and their music. This newsletter is for their characters' hometown newspaper. Guide student research so each group answers the following questions:

- *How does the music express the pioneer way of life or the life that was left behind?*
- *What can music teach us about history?*
- *Are some songs exaggerated tall tales? In what ways?*
- *Are some songs based on an actual person or event? Who or what?*
- *How does the pioneers' music reflect their lives?*
- *What musical instruments were used in the most popular renditions, and where did they come from?*
- *When would this song have been sung or played, and by whom?*

Copies of the different publications can be distributed during the concert. See a [newsletter sample](#). Distribute the [newsletter checklist](#) to help students create their newsletters.

Culminating Project

Help each group create a multimedia slideshow that supports their interpretation of the song they studied. Hand out the [project scoring guide](#) to review expectations. Illustrated phrases and pictures (including scanned original artwork) can be included to evoke the mood of the song and enrich the presentations. Make sure they include how the particular song reflects the history of the pioneers. Have students make their oral presentations in character. See one group's work in this slideshow sample. Distribute the slideshow checklist to help students develop their slideshows. Use the project scoring guide to assess students' work.

Differentiated Instruction

Resource Student

- Place the student in a heterogeneous pairing or small group to do research and complete unit projects
- Keep the project open-ended to ensure that the student has an opportunity to be successful
- Provide the student with additional adult assistance, extra work time, and task modifications as needed

Gifted Student

- Assign the student to an expert role (in reading, writing, or technology) and encourage the student to help others
- Provide opportunities for the student to pursue independent projects related to the topic during spare time

English Language Learner

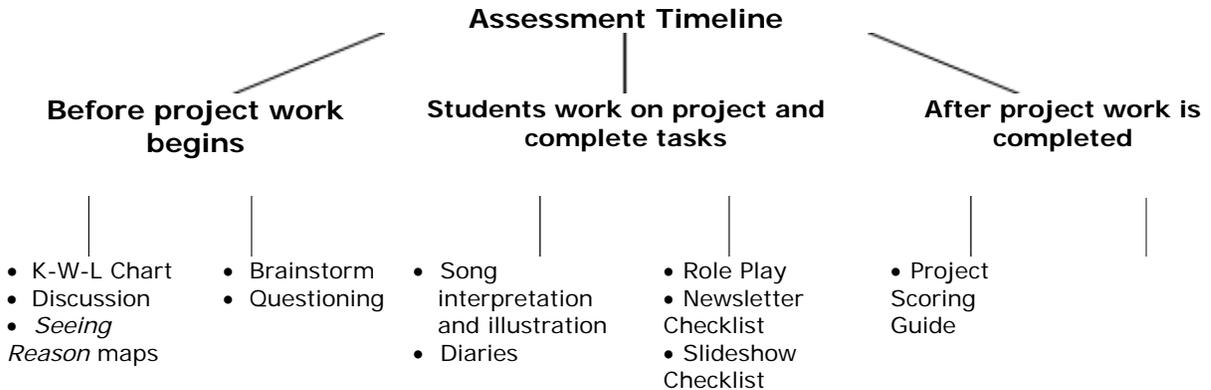
- Call upon ELL assistant teachers to help the student translate basic terms into an English/first language glossary
- Post translated terms around the room to allow all students to learn something new
- Explain difficult concepts and help the student complete assignments and conduct research
- Pair a bilingual student with a non-native speaker for tasks that require reading and writing
- Adapt assignments or allow more time as necessary

Credits

Cecelia Vaillant-Yanes participated in the Intel® Teach Program, which resulted in this idea for a classroom project. A team of teachers expanded the plan into the example you see here.

THINGS YOU NEED (highlight box)

Assessment Plan



Prior to digging into content, assess student understanding of the pioneers and westward expansion with a Know-Wonder-Learn chart. Use discussion strategies to further explore reasons why pioneers moved west. Check for understanding throughout the discussions to ensure that students understand the content. Use the *Seeing Reason Tool* to delve into the content, and be sure to review the maps and use the teacher comment feature to probe student thinking and informally assess the cause-and-effect relationships on each map. Use other strategies throughout the unit, such as peer brainstorming and questioning techniques, to help students ask questions, guide their research, and develop content expertise. Provide students with many opportunities to explore the relationship between music and westward expansion using different learning modalities, such as listening to music, writing in diaries, illustrating songs, and role-playing pioneers. Gauge student understanding informally throughout. Discuss newsletter and slideshow expectations and

requirements with the [newsletter checklist](#) and the [slideshow checklist](#). Share the [project scoring guide](#) and use this to assess students' final presentations.

Targeted Content Standards and Benchmarks

Targeted Oregon Content Standards and Benchmarks

Social Science: Grade 5: Geography

- Understand why places and regions are important to human identity and serve as symbols to unify or fragment society.
- Identify patterns of migration and cultural integration in the United States.

Social Science: Grade 5: Analysis

- Examine an event, issue, or problem through inquiry or research.
- Gather, use, and document information from multiple sources (such as print, electronic, and human).

Targeted National Content Standards

Music Standards

- Sing alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
- Listen to, analyze, and describe music.
- Evaluate music and music performances.
- Understand relationships among music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
- Understand music in relation to history and culture.

National Educational Technology Standards (NETS)

Performance Indicators for Technology Literate Students (grades 3-5)

Prior to completion of grade 5, students will:

- Use technology tools (such as multimedia authoring, presentation, Web tools, digital cameras, and scanners) for individual and collaborative writing, communication, and publishing activities to create knowledge products for audiences inside and outside the classroom.
- Determine which technology is useful and select the appropriate tool(s) and technology resources to address a variety of tasks and problems.
- Use technology resources (such as calculators, data collection probes, videos, and educational software) for problem solving, self-directed learning, and extended learning activities.

Student Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Examine the role of music in westward migration

Music

- Research songs and musical instruments of the period
- Perform songs and add new lyrics in student performances
- Explain how music inspires and influences people today

Social Studies

- Identify patterns of migration and cultural integration
- Formulate questions
- Collect and organize information from multiple sources
- Classify information

Process Skills

- Work cooperatively in small groups
- Document observations in a journal or learning log
- Ask questions, gather research, organize information, prepare data, and present findings in writing

Materials and Resources

Printed Materials

- Jackson, R. (1978). *Popular songs of nineteenth-century America: Complete original sheet music for 64 songs*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
- Silber, I. & Robinson, E., eds (1995). *Songs of the great American west*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

Supplies

- Basic art supplies

Internet Resources

Music Resources

- Kingwood College Library
<http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/music-1.html>*
Collection of American popular music before 1900
- Capistrano Elementary School: The Music Room, The Wild West
www.empire.k12.ca.us/capistrano/Mike/capmusic/the_wild_west/how_the_west_was_sung.htm*
Collection of music from the westward expansion
- Glossary of Folk Instruments
www.hobgoblin-usa.com/info/glossary.htm*
Definitions and images of various folk instruments
- Cowboy Songs Index
http://lonehand.com/cowboy_songs_index.htm*
Lyrics to cowboy songs
- Popular Songs of American History
www.contemplator.com/america/index.html*
Information and lyrics under the heading "The Gold Rush and Westward Journey"
- WPA California Folk Music Project Collection
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/afcchtml/cowinst.html>*
Glossary of musical instruments

Learning Resources

- The American Experience: WayBack-Gold Rush
www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/kids/goldrush*
Resources for teachers on the history of the gold rush
- Historic Sites on the Oregon Trail
<http://www.isu.edu/%7Etrnmich/Sites.html>*
Facts about the Oregon Trail

- Go West Across America With Lewis and Clark
www.nationalgeographic.com/west*
Take a simulated journey with Lewis and Clark
- The Land of Glittering Dreams
www.glittering.com/home.html*
Photographs and letters from the California Gold Rush
- National Archives: The Digital Classroom
www.archives.gov/*
Materials from the National Archives and methods for teaching with primary sources
- A Pioneer's Journey to the Frontier
<http://library.thinkquest.org/6400/default.htm>*
WebQuest focusing on early American pioneers

Technology—Hardware

- Computer(s) for conducting research, creating presentations, and formatting newsletters
- Internet connection for accessing the Internet
- Printer to print newsletters
- Projection system for final presentations
- Scanner to scan original artwork

Technology—Software

- Desktop publishing for preparing newsletters
- Encyclopedia on CD-ROM for conducting research
- Internet Web browser for conducting research
- Multimedia software for developing presentations