



Curriculum to Support the Opera *John Brown*

To the Teacher:

John Brown was a larger-than-life figure. He generally appears in history text books, noted as a person who tried to take over Harpers Ferry prior to the start of the Civil War. Usually, there is no more than a paragraph or two of information as texts quickly move to a discussion of the war itself.

Brown is a historical figure in American history who still stirs controversy among historians. Was he a zealot? Was he insane? Was he a man working for justice? Was his judgment flawed or was his insight into the situation beyond other mortals? Did he precipitate the start of the war? Did he raise awareness of the injustices of slavery? Did he hurt the cause he gave his life to support?

Kansas City Lyric Opera presents this curriculum on the opera *John Brown* to address some of these questions. It supports your students as they prepare for the opera experience. The unit consists of 14 lessons plus additional resources that can expand opportunities to support student interests outside of the lessons. It is web-based in that many of the resources and supporting material are found online. If your students do not have access to computers during their study, the lessons have been designed so that you can copy most of the sites and use the information in a non-web centered class. We hope that you can access the web to make use of the interactive features.

Each lesson has a brief introduction, objectives, alignment of the lesson to Kansas and Missouri state standards, a materials list and a procedure for implementing the lesson. These are followed by possible extension activities for students younger than and older than the target age – the middle school student.

We hope you find that the lessons support and enrich your curriculum. Our additional wish is that students become immersed in the questions surrounding John Brown and that the experiences help support their growth in decision-making and evaluative abilities.

Lyric Opera of Kansas City presents *John Brown* to you and your students during their 2008 season on Saturday, May 3 and Friday, May 9 at 8:00 p.m.; Monday, May 5 and Wednesday, May 7 at 7:30 p.m. and on Sunday, May 11 at 2:00 p.m. Tickets may be purchased from the Ticket Office at 816-471-7344.

Sincerely,

Martha A. Henry, Ed.D. and Keith S. Murray
Authors

Kansas and Missouri State Standards in *John Brown*

State departments of education standards from Missouri and Kansas that are referenced in the lessons are described here. Keys to the numbering code are described at the beginning of each state's standards.

Kansas State Standards

Most of the Kansas content standards are indicated by a code such as 5.3.1.3. The first number is the grade level. The second indicates the standard, the third is the benchmark and the fourth is the indicator. Lessons are keyed to the Intermediate standards where grade levels are not indicated. The theater and music standards are coded 3.B.1.1 to indicate Standard 3, Level (Basic), Benchmark 1, Indicator 1.

Civics-Government

- 5.1.1 Understands laws must be followed by those in authority as well as those who are governed.
- 7.1.3 Evaluates the importance of the rule of law in protecting individual rights and promoting the common good.

Geography

- 7.1.2 Develops and uses different kinds of maps, globes, graphs, charts, databases, and models.
- 8.1.2 Creates maps, graphs, charts, databases and/or models to support historical research.
- 8.1.3 The student creates maps, graphs, charts, databases and/or models to support historical research.

History

- 5.2.5 Analyzes the causes and impact of forced servitude in North America.
- 5.4.2 Examines multiple primary sources to understand point of view of an historical figure.
- 5.4.4 The student uses information including primary sources to debate a problem or an historical issue.
- 5.4.6 Uses research skills to interpret an historical person or event in history and notes the source(s) of information.
- 8.4.2 The student examines a variety of different types of primary sources in United States history and analyzes them in terms of credibility, purpose, and point of view.

Mathematics (Bulleted items are numbered for easier location. NC = Number and Computation, A = Algebra, G = Geometry)

- 4NC3 One- and two-step real-world problems with addition, subtraction, and multiplication.
- 5NC4 One and two-step real-world problems with addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.
- 4A1 One variable, one-step whole number equations with basic facts, money, and time.
- 5A1 Representation with variables and symbols.
- 5A2 One-step whole number equations.

- 6A2 One-step equations with positive rational numbers in real-world problems.
- 7A5 Represents real-world problems using variables and symbols.
- 4G1 Plane figures within a composite figure.
- 5G4 Real-world application of measurement.
- 6G5 Transformations of two-dimensional figures.
- 7G2 Measurement formulas for area, perimeter.
- 7G4 Scale drawings.
- 7G5 Real-world problems for area and perimeter.

Music (Intermediate = I)

- 6I21 Analyzes the uses of music elements in aural examples representing diverse genres and cultures.
- 8I21 Describes ways in which principles and subjects matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with those of music.
- 9I31 Compares the function music serves in selected cultures of the world.
- 9I33 Compares the avenues of performance in selected cultures of the world.

Reading

- 5.1.2.2.1 The student reads expressively with appropriate pace, phrasing, intonation, and rhythm of speech. (Corresponds to 6.1.2.2, 7.1.2.2, 8.1.2.2)
- 5.1.3.5 The student identifies and determines the meaning of figurative language including similes, metaphors, analogies, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, personification, and idioms. (Corresponds to 6.1.3.5, 7.1.3.4, 8.1.3.4)
- 5.1.3.6 The student recognizes the differences between the meanings of connotation and denotation. (Corresponds to 6.1.3.6, 7.1.3.5, 8.1.3.5)
- 5.1.4.1 Chooses a position to write about on a selected topic.
- 5.1.4.11 Writes to convey opinion and to convince the reader to agree with the author.
- 5.1.4.5 The student uses information from the text to make inferences and draw conclusions. (Corresponds to 6.1.4.5, 7.1.4.5, 8.1.4.5)
- 5.2.2.1 The student understands the effects history and cultures may have on works of literature. (Corresponds to 6.2.2.1, 7.2.2.3)

Theater

- 2.B.1.1 The student demonstrates team work in dramatizing written texts and life experiences.
- 3.B.1.1 The student explores, assumes and imitates various character roles.
- 3.B.2.3 The student demonstrates clear vocal and physical characterization during class or public performances.
- 3.P.2.1 The student develops clear vocal and physical characterization during rehearsal and presents it in performance.
- 3.A.2.1 The student demonstrates voice, movement, and gesture that are appropriate for character portrayal and consistent throughout a performance.
- 3.A.2.2 The student employs various dialects while creating characters.
- 4.P.3.2 The student makes and collects props for a play production.
- 4.P.3.3 The student collects costumes needed for a production.
- 5.P.3.5 The student selects objects needed for physical setting of a production.
- 6.B.1.1 The student understands the interrelationship that exists between theatre and other disciplines.

Writing

5.1.4.1 The student chooses a position to write about on a selected topic.

5.1.4.11 The student writes to convey opinion and to convince the reader to agree with the author.

Missouri State Standards

Missouri standards are classified by content area and are formatted by standard, benchmark, and grade level. Communication Arts, Reading 1I4 means standard 1, benchmark I, grade level 4. Several content areas are under revision. The dates of the standards documents are in parenthesis by content area.

Communication Arts (2004)

Reading

1I4 Identify and explain connections between *text ideas – information and relationships in various fiction and non-fiction works *text ideas and the world by demonstrating an awareness that literature reflects a culture and historical time frame.

2C4,5 Use details from text to *draw conclusions *identify author's purpose.

Listening and Speaking

2A4 In discussions and presentations, identify and apply appropriate speaking techniques such as volume, context, pace, and eye contact.

2A5 In discussions and presentations, select and use appropriate public speaking techniques such as rate, pace and enunciation.

Writing

3.C.7.3 Write expository and persuasive responses to literature that show an understanding of theme and characters, using details/examples from the text as support.

Fine Arts (May 2007)

AP1A4-5 Identify and analyze forms and composition techniques.

AP1B4-5 Identify ways in which principles and subject matters of other disciplines are interrelated with those of music.

AP1B6-8 Describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines are interrelated with those of music.

HC1A4 Identify characteristics of teacher-selected genres or styles *spirituals. Identify music representing diverse cultures including Missouri and American heritage.

HC1C4 Describe the function of music representing diverse cultures, including Missouri and American Heritage, in various settings and cultural events *spirituals.

HC1C5 Describe the function of music in various settings and cultural events
*Multicultural music

HC1C6-8 Describe the function of music in various settings and cultural events.

PP1B5 Use vocal skills through reading aloud and interpreting characters.

PP1F4,5 Participate in a performance for a class or invited audience.

PP1F6,7 Rehearse, polish and present a performance for a class or invited audience.

IC1A4-5 Compare in two or more arts how the characteristic materials of each art can be used to transform similar events, scenes, emotions, or ideas into works of art.

IC2A5,6 Using improvisation or dramatic play, act out a character or scene from a previous time period or culture that is not your own.

Mathematics (2004)

4AR2A Represent a mathematical situation as an expression or number sentence.

6,7AR2A Use variables to represent unknown quantities in expressions.

6N03D Solve problems using equivalent ratios.

7G3A Reposition shapes under informal transformations such as reflections (flip), rotation (turn), and translation (slide).

6-8G4B Draw or use visual models to represent and solve problems.

Social Studies (2004)

5A5-8 Use geographic research sources to acquire information and answer questions.

5I5-8 Use geography to interpret the past, explain the present and plan for the future.

5F6,7 Identify and explain the effect of natural forces upon human activities from historical experiences.

6D7,8 Identify how laws and events affect members of and relationships among groups.

6E6,8 Identify how personal and group experiences influence people's perceptions and judgments of events.

7A5-8 Select, investigate, and present a topic using primary and secondary resources, such as interviews, artifacts, journals, documents, photos and letters.

7B5-8 Use maps, graphs, statistical data, timelines, charts and diagrams to interpret, draw conclusions and make predictions.

7C5-8 Create maps, graphs, timelines, charts and diagrams to communicate information.

7F5-8 Identify, research and defend a point of view/position.

Putting Yourself in the Picture

Background

This lesson examines the difficult position of having to make a decision about breaking a law that you think is immoral or unethical, or complying with it because it is the law. John Brown was among a group of people, mainly in the northern states, who thought that slavery was immoral even though it was lawful in some states. These people, abolitionists, had views ranging from accepting the law and trying to change it through legal means, to advocating the abolition of the law by any means possible, including violence. Not all abolitionists advocated using violence. Frederick Douglass worked with John Brown. However, while they shared similar views toward slavery, Douglass declined to participate in Brown's raid on a government armory. Douglass felt this would do more harm than good to their cause.

Students will be placed in a situation they may see as immoral or unjust because of a law and will be asked to respond to that situation.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Analyze a personal situation and take a position based on personal ethical values;
2. Take a position on a controversial situation and justify it.

Standards

Kansas State Standards

Civics-Government

5.1.1

7.1.3

Missouri State Standards

Social Studies

6D7,8

7F5-8

Materials

Paper and pencil for students

Time

2 class periods

Procedure

1. Announce to students, "A new law has just been passed by Congress and signed by the President. As of today, all students are now property of the state. You may live with your families, but the government will decide what else you can do. Some of you will be sent to school and some will immediately begin to work. The assignment list will come out in two weeks. For now you can keep your cell phones, iPods, computers, and other electronic devices, but after the instructions are received, all but the students who are chosen to remain in school will have to give them up."

“Although it is not official, it has been leaked that the students who are born in the months of January through June (JJ Group) are going to be the ones that will be required to leave school and go to work.” Have those students who were born in those months raise their hands.

2. Have students immediately write what they think will be the ramifications of this new law for them personally.

After about 10 minutes, group the students into groups of 5 or 6 students. Make sure the JJ students are together in one group. Have them share what they are thinking and feeling with each other.

3. After 5 minutes, reshuffle the groups, making sure that at least one JJ student is in each group. Have them again talk about the ramifications of such a law. Ask them to respond to these questions:

1. What will this law mean to you personally?
2. Do you agree with this law?
3. If you do not agree with it, why not?
4. What can you do about it?

Pay close attention to this discussion.

4. As a whole class, have the groups summarize what they discussed. Ask them if the conversations were the same or if conversations differed from their first to their second grouping. You may find that with the JJ in the group, there may have been some discussion that excluded this person, or put the person in a less powerful position. Some groups may also have discussed how to get around the law or reverse it.

5. If students do not get to the point in the discussion of talking about what to do about the law, lead them by asking, “How do you feel about this law? Is it fair?” Have them justify their responses. For those who think it is unfair, have them talk about ways to rectify the injustices this law represents.

Write all of the options students suggest on the board. When they are noted, have students group them in some kind of order. Look for the less violent to most violent groups or ranks; however, don’t guide the students in their groupings.

6. Discuss the groupings constructed by the students. Assign one group or one strategy to a small group of students. Have them decide on the pros and cons of each of these strategies. After each group reports out, have students determine which they would choose for themselves as a way to approach this law. They should write a short essay on how they chose to address this law and justify their choice.

7. Prior to closing this lesson, take the opportunity to share with the students your observations about what went on as they were in their mixed groups. Talk about power positioning, inclusion or lack of inclusion, acceptance of diverse viewpoints, etc. Let them talk about their experiences as they were in each of these positions. This debriefing time is

important for reestablishing the cohesion of the class after the division set up in this simulation.

Extension

John Brown said, "In time of immoral laws, patriotism looks like treason." John Brown may be seen to have taken the role of parent in the issue of slavery. He saw people with little power in situations that he perceived as unfair. Have students discuss or write about how their parents or another important adult in their family would have responded to this law?

John Brown – The Opera and the Story

Background

This lesson should be taught following *Putting Yourself in the Picture*. It introduces students to John Brown's life through examination of the libretto of the opera, *John Brown*.

If students have not discussed primary and secondary sources, this lesson will provide an opportunity for that discussion.

Primary source documents are those official documents from the time such as wills, letters, census records, diaries, newspaper articles, or other documents written by people who lived at the time and witnessed the events. Secondary documents are sources such as text books, novels, biographies, movies, operas, plays or other sources that draw on primary sources but may also reflect the opinions or biases of the authors. Secondary documents may be all that are available, but in using them care must be taken to understand the origin of the documents and the biases their authors may have had, as well as the relative accuracy of their sources.

You can share the example of information from a Website. Wikipedia can be edited by anyone, though it is often the first source many students go to for information. Errors have been noted and are corrected by the Website contributors and others, but prior to corrections, misinformation is available for people to access. Knowing about the site's ownership and the source of the information on the site is critical to understanding how much you can trust the information.

Objectives

Following this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify critical events of John Brown's life;
2. Compare the libretto story to the actual story;
3. Trace the travels of John Brown;
4. Create an accurate time line of the events of John Brown's life.

Materials

Butcher paper
Board or flip chart
Markers
John Brown Libretto

WWW sites:

Lyric Opera of Kansas City Website:

<http://www.kcopera.com/About/johnbrowneducation.html>

PBS Website (map):

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/brown/maps/index.html>

PBS Website or handout (timeline):

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/brown/timeline/index/html>

Valley of the Shadow site:

<http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/tour.html>

For Extension activity:

Genealogy Website:

<http://www.kancoll.org/articles/browns.htm>

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Park/9580/jbfamily.html>

Time

2 + class periods

Standards

Kansas

Geography

7.1.2

8.1.2

History

5.4.6

Missouri

Social Studies

5A5-8

5I5-8

7B5-8

7C5-8

Procedure

1. Introduce the lesson to the students. "You have finished thinking about a situation where there was no 'right answer' to a very difficult question. It involved laws and a person's reactions to a law that seemed unjust."

2. Say to students, "Today we will begin to look at an actual event in history that has the same conflict. John Brown was an important man in Kansas, Missouri, and US history. What do you know about John Brown?" Allow students to report out what they know as you record the information on the board or a flip chart. Accept all answers whether they are correct or not. Save the list for later in the lesson.

3. Tell the students, "Among stories, plays, and songs written about John Brown, there has been an opera composed. We will use the opera to begin to examine John Brown's life. The words of the opera are called the libretto." Pass out copies of the libretto and have students read it. You can do this silently, individually, or you can assign parts and have students read it aloud in class. You may also assign the reading as homework prior to this lesson. Have students take notes on what they think are the most important parts of John Brown's life.

4. Discuss critical incidents as illustrated in the opera. Remind students that an opera is a story and does not have to be entirely accurate. They will begin to study John Brown

through documents that accurately tell the story of his life. Some will be primary source documents and others secondary source documents.

5. Examine the PBS Website <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/brown/timeline/index.html> You can duplicate copies of the site for each student or if you have access to a computer students can read it online. Compare these highlights to those that students noted from the libretto. Fill in any missing events to complete a written timeline of John Brown's life. Note any conflicting information.

In preparation for the next part of the lesson, create a class timeline (diagram) using butcher paper. Make it large enough so that additional events can be added as your study continues. You may want to assign a group of students to create it or you can make the timeline and post it where students can continue to record information on it.

6. Go to the Kansas City Lyric Opera site (<http://www.kcopera.com/About/johnbrowneeducation.html>) and/or return to the PBS site <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/brown/timeline/index.html>. Click on the <maps> on the left. You have a choice here of an interactive map site or the graphics and text version. If you have the ability to project a computer image, show the students the interactivity by pointing the cursor to one of the numbers on the map. Have them read the date and what happens at each of these times. If there is new information, have students add it to their own timeline of John Brown's life.

If you do not have projection capabilities, students can interact with the map in groups at computers or you can copy the information from the map with text for student use.

7. Divide the students into six groups. Assign a part of John Brown's life to each of the groups. These groups will become experts on a part of John Brown's life. Using the Map from the PBS site, you might want to assign the groups using these time divisions:

Group 1: Birth (1800) to 1848: Numbers 1-5 on the map

Group 2: From 1848 through 1856; Number 6 on the map

Group 3: 1857: Numbers 7-13 on the map

Group 4: 1858: Numbers 14-15 on the map

Group 5: January through August 1859: Numbers 16 - 17 on the map

Group 6: September through December 1859: Numbers 18-19 on the map

Materials for research for the students can be found in the resources list. Primary sources can be found at both the PBS site, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/brown/> or at the Library of Congress site www.loc.gov Search for John Brown at these sites. Primary source documents can be found at the Valley of the Shadow site <http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu> (Click <Enter the Valley Archives>). Specific documents related to John Brown are listed in the resources list at this site. Encourage students to check in their school and local library and to do online searches in order to fill in missing information that will tell them more about John Brown.

Some of the things you might prompt students to include are:

1. Important people in his life.

2. Events that seemed to influence his thinking about slavery.
3. Things that shaped his character and his understanding of his place in the world.

8. When students have had enough time to gather information, they should write a brief summary of what they found and present it to the class. When it is appropriate, have them add these events to the class timeline. Let each group add events to their part of the timeline.

9. Review the timeline to see if everything of importance is there.

10. Go back to the list of things the students knew about John Brown. Identify the correct information and edit what you have found was incorrect.

11. Revisit the libretto to see if there are mismatches between the libretto and what you have found about John Brown's actual life. Identify those places and discuss artistic license. Why would an artist take liberties with facts as he or she presents a story? What would be the advantages or disadvantages to doing that? (This libretto is a fairly close representation of the events and sequence of John Brown's life. Students may not find many differences between the two sources of information.)

Extension

Students with a continued interest in John Brown's life may pursue this activity. John Brown was married twice and had a lot of children. Have the students examine the documents, "The Children of John Brown of Harpers Ferry" accessible from the Websites <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Park/9580/jbfamily.html> and <http://www.kancoll.org/articles/browns.htm>. Using the timeline, have students note the dates when John Brown's 20 children were born. While he was busy with his work and mission, his wives were likewise as occupied!

Students may make a genealogy chart of Brown's parents, his generation, and his children with information students now have about their spouses and children. They may also want to continue research to follow one of his children's families. Of course it would have to be one who did not die at Harpers Ferry!

John Brown is a common name. If students continue with their own searches, alert them to look for clues in the information that this is, in fact, the John Brown of Harpers Ferry. Even sites that claim to have information about Brown will have conflicting information. Use this as an opportunity to discuss how information from secondary sources must be confirmed from several other sources before we can trust its validity.

Students interested in history may want to investigate the sources of the conflict in Kansas arising out of the Missouri Compromise and the Kansas Nebraska Act.

But, It's the Law!

Background

Students of middle school age are expert at testing rules and regulations. They know there are rules but often don't think the rules are for them. Sometimes when a rule seems unfair, they don't hesitate to break or ignore it. They are at a stage of development when they are beginning to be able to critically think and argue and are developing a sense of self and of fairness.

This lesson taps into those developing values and sense of justice as students examine how a school functions. School governance with its rules and regulations is designed to provide an environment that promotes order and equality while meeting the mission of the school. It can be compared to the federal government structure of laws.

This lesson sets the stage for students to begin to understand why John Brown might feel compelled to break the law for what he perceived as a just cause.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Describe the governance structure of their school;
2. Describe how laws contribute to the functioning of a stable society;
3. Describe steps to take if they disagree with the law.

Standards

Kansas

Civics-Government

5.1.1

7.1.3

Missouri

Social Studies

6D7,8

Materials

Copy of the school's student handbook

School policy manuals or books

Time

2 class periods

Procedure

1. Say to students, "You attend school as part of a community that has certain controls on how each of us behaves and gives you certain rights. What are those controls? What are your rights?" Write these rights and controls (rules) on the board.

Ask students where they can find a list of these rights and rules. Lead the students to identify sources for all of the school's policies and procedures including the student

manuals, teacher's manuals, school policy as written and passed by the school board, and any other statement of the rights and responsibilities of students, teachers and staff.

2. Put students into groups of 3-4 students. Pass out one copy of the various handbooks and manuals to each group. Give the students a few minutes to look at them to see what they contain.

Ask the students, "What general categories of things do you find?" Make a list down one side of the board. There should be a general mission/goal/vision of the school or district, a list of rules, perhaps a list of rights and responsibilities, emergency procedures or regulations, a grievance process, and other sections as they apply specifically to your district.

3. Ask students to choose one rule that they would like to change. Brainstorm how that might be accomplished. The school might have a student council through which a resolution might be taken, or students may organize and go to the school board with their suggestion, or the grievance policy may address that rule. Don't forget to include possibilities that students may not immediately think of, such as non-violent protests and violent action. You may need to allow students time to think while they brainstorm to come up with protests or more violent action. They will not usually want to mention it at first – or maybe they will!

Ask them which method they would choose and to tell a partner why they chose that method.

4. Go back to the list on the board and look for comparable parts of the federal government or comparable parts of federal documents. Federal laws may be comparable to school rules. The Bill of Rights may correspond to student's rights. The mission/vision/goals may be comparable to the Declaration of Independence or the Preamble to the Constitution.

5. Ask the students, "How do we as citizens of the U.S. go about changing a law that we don't agree with?" Briefly discuss the legislative process for making laws, constitutional amendments, non-violent protests against wars, or violent methods such as the attempted assassinations of presidents or violent protests such as the Watts riots and Greenpeace actions. Students may volunteer others with which they are familiar. Use any examples that the students may be familiar with or that you have studied in your class.

6. Return to the story of John Brown. Put students in groups of 3-4 students. Ask the students to trace his life and thinking in terms of his response to the laws concerning slavery within the US. Ask students to take notes as they think. Include in their notes his attitude (his position or thinking about slavery), the time in his life (this can be general or you may want to require specific times and dates if available), and his response.

In reporting out, have each group mention one time, his position, and his response. Record this on the board in chronological order. After each group has reported, ask for any times that have been omitted that students think are important to include.

7. On your timeline of Brown's life, have the students add the critical points where his thinking seemed to change. Look at the other events occurring in during that time in the country or the world and see if there are any connections to the development of or changes in his attitude or actions. (The purpose of this discussion is to examine the influence of national events on Brown's actions.)

8. Have students select one of these critical points in Brown's life and write about it. Have them describe it and Brown's response, and then describe how they would have responded. They should defend their response.

Extension

For social studies classes, a more thorough examination of the comparison of the school policies to government laws can be undertaken. The process of making laws, initiative petitions, and amending the constitution may also be areas of discussion.

Students may want to examine how the laws affect them within the school environment by studying the censorship issue for student newspapers. Lessons to support this investigation can be found in the Resources section.

A language arts class may want to focus more directly on people who have chosen methods in conflict with laws in order to affect change. The United States was begun by revolutionaries who took violent action against the British government. Today there are people like Cindy Sheehan taking visible stands against the Iraq war. Students can select a person in their area of interest and research and report on how that person affected change.

Remembering Slavery

Background

Though students may have studied slavery, few have had an opportunity to hear slaves' stories first-hand. In this lesson students will listen to former slaves tell their own stories or they will hear actors read transcripts from conversations with slaves. Listen to their experiences from field work to house work, from joy to despair.

Allow students to immerse themselves in these stories. You may find that strong feelings arise. Allow time for students to work through them through class discussions.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Describe one aspect of the life of slaves;
2. Evaluate that aspect expressed through a letter written to a slave.

Standards

Kansas State Standards

History

5.2.5

5.4.2

8.4.2

Writing

5.1.4.1

5.1.4.11

Missouri State Standards

Communication Arts - Writing

3.C.7.3

Social Studies

6.D.7,8

Materials

Access to the Website: <http://rememberingslavery.si.edu>

Access to computers connected to the WWW with good quality sound or with headphones that

allow students to hear the slaves' voices

Written transcripts from the <http://rememberingslavery.si.edu> site

Optional:

Book and audio tape set with these and additional slave stories: *Remembering Slavery* available from the Library of Congress. Published by The New Press, New York, 1998.

Time

2-3 class periods

Procedure

1. Tell students, "Today you will hear the real-life stories told by American slaves. Listen carefully. You will be responding to them from the future." Tell the students that they will listen to slaves talk about their experiences and will write a letter to them from a student in the future expressing their thoughts about these experiences.

2. Divide your class into 5 groups. Depending on the size of the groups, let students go to the computers in groups of 2 to 3 students. On the Website <http://rememberingslavery.si.edu> go to the Hearing Their Voices tab. That will take you to a page with five stories. Assign one of the stories to each group.

Have each group listen to the sound clip. They are about 5 minutes in length. Tell the students to listen to the whole clip and try to picture what the slave was talking about. They may even want to close their eyes as the slave is talking.

Have students listen to the clip again and take notes about things they want to write in a letter to the slave.

Let them listen to it a third time if they need to.

3. Let the students talk about their clip with those in their group. They should review what they heard, share their notes, decide on what they would like to say to that slave, and then write a group letter to that slave. Some of the clips have more than one slave talking. They may choose to write more than one letter, or write a general letter to all of them.

4. When the letter is written, let the groups report to the class. They should tell the group what their clip was about and read their letter to the class. Allow the class to provide feedback to the group that is reporting. Encourage them to tell two things they liked about the letter and one thing they would like to have heard about. If there are questions, let the group answer them.

5. Students may have heard about slavery from other sources. This activity may have provided them another perspective on slavery. Have the students write a page about what they previously knew about slavery and how this assignment supported or disputed what they had understood.

6. If students know about primary and secondary sources, have them evaluate this information as to accuracy based on the source. Some of these clips are told by the slaves themselves (primary source). Others are read from transcripts of interviews of slaves (secondary source). You may want to talk about the problems of developing transcripts of interviews (some words not heard, dialects may not have been translated accurately, intonation must be inferred, etc.) Have students add to this list.

Extension

Older students may want to pursue additional research into the lives of slaves in the big house or in the field. One book by Missouri authors, Patricia and Fredrick Mckissack with John Thompson, is *Christmas in the Big House* that tells the story of Christmas in both the plantation house and the slave quarter. This can be purchased online from Amazon for as little as \$2.50. Other resources include *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South* by William Kauffman. *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* by John M. Vlach has pictures of the slave quarters behind the plantation house and will provide a setting for discussing differences. The narrative at this Website depicts slave life beyond the ordinary narrative:

<http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/family/schwartz.html>. The slave narrative at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~msgenweb/xslaves/mcgaffey-xslave.htm> provides another first-hand narrative about the use of slaves for the benefit of the white family.

Other resources can be found by doing a Google search and are readily available.

Listening to Slaves

Background

In this lesson students will read transcripts of interviews with American slaves conducted by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s. This rich resource is found on the Library of Congress Website along with recordings and other resources to support the lessons in this unit on John Brown.

The purpose of hearing stories from the slaves themselves is to provide the students with an understanding of the context, life, and attitude of slaves in Missouri and Kansas during the time that John Brown would have been working toward their liberation. As these stories are told, have the students think about life as a slave as compared to their own lives at the ages of these slaves.

This lesson can be an extension of *Remembering Slavery* or it can stand alone.

Objectives

Following the completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Describe daily life as a slave;
2. Differentiate slave life from life of a free person;
3. Justify the position from the point of view of a slave and of a master;
4. Represent the slave's story through dramatization.

Standards

Kansas State Standards

Reading

5.1.2.2 (Corresponds to 6.1.2.2, 7.1.2.2, 8.1.2.2)

Theater

2.B.1.1

3.B.1.1

3.B.2.3

3.P.2.1

3.A.2.1

3.A.2.2

4.P.3.2

4.P.3.3

5.P.3.5

Missouri State Standards

Fine Arts

PP1B5

PP1F4, 5

PP1F6, 7

IC2A5,6

Listening and Speaking

2A4,5

Social Studies (2004)

6E6, 8

Time

3+ days

Materials

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>

Computer access to the WWW

Optional:

Props and costumes for the dramatic readings

Procedure

Ask the students what they know about life as a slave. Their responses will probably mirror what they have seen in movies or studied about, including working in the fields, working in the big house, and perhaps enduring some types of punishment. If they have completed the lesson, *Remembering Slavery*, students will have more extensive information to share.

Have students go to the Website, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>. When they arrive at the page, select “volume” and then select either Missouri or Kansas. Once on the site, they can begin to read the stories of slaves as told by the slaves themselves.

Have students choose one to read to the class as a dramatic reading. You may want to put the students into groups and let them examine all of the stories chosen by their group members. They can select one to read as a group with roles assigned to the slaves in the story. This approach will reduce the time spent in class on the readings but will allow each student to hear at least four stories from their group in addition to those presented in class.

Give the students time to rehearse their readings. They may bring in props or costumes on the day that they perform their dramatic reading for the class.

After the students have read their stories, allow time for the class to reflect orally on what they heard. You may want to prompt their reflection with questions such as:

1. What was the most surprising thing you heard?
2. What did you hear that confirmed your previous knowledge about slaves or slavery?
3. How did you feel when you were listening to the stories?
4. If you lived in that time, how would you have felt about slavery?

Tell the students: “Choose one of the stories you heard. Answer these questions:

1. Justify why the master/mistress acted as he or she did. What advantage did it provide for the master/mistress?
2. Justify why the slave acted as she or he did. What advantage did it provide for the slave?

Extension

Students may want to investigate the stories more fully and create a dramatic reading for the school or other classrooms using some of the stories found on this site.

Underground Railroad (UGRR)

Background

Slaves seeking to escape their bondage in the southern states were assisted in their trip to free states or to Canada by people who were joined in this purpose. The route taken by slaves was called the Underground Railroad (UGRR) and the people along the route who provided food, shelter, and guidance were called conductors or stationmasters. They usually housed and fed slaves and then assisted them along the route, hiding them in wagons under parcels, tools, or household goods in case they were stopped along the way. John Brown was a well-known and active conductor on the Underground Railroad.

In this lesson students will use an online resource to trace the path a slave might take to escape to Canada.

Objectives

Following the completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Trace one route taken by slaves on the Underground Railroad;
2. Identify obstacles on the route and determine how to overcome them.

Standards

Kansas State Standards

Geography

8.1.2

Missouri State Standards

Social Studies

5.F.6,7

6E6,8

7B5-8

7C5-8

Materials

Various topographic maps of the eastern United States

WWW accessibility

Site with landforms for each state. Click on the state, then <“Shaded Relief”> to find the state landforms and barriers to travel:

<http://fermi.jhuapl.edu/states/states.html>

Kansas City Lyric Opera Web site:

www.kcopera.com/About/johnbrowneeducation.html

Map of free and slave states:

<http://www.learner.org/biographyofamerica/prog10/maps/>

Map of UGRR routes:

<http://education.ucdavis.edu/NEW/STC/lesson/socstud/railroad/Map.htm>

Time

2-3 class periods

Procedure

Day 1

1. Ask students if they can name the slave states before the Civil War. Record those that they name on the board. Hand out the map of free and slave states. Have students compare the shaded states with their list.

2. Ask students individually to choose a slave state that they are interested in or may have visited. Have students get into groups that represent the same state that they chose. Tell them, "You are now slaves in your state. You want to escape and get to Canada. In your group, talk about what route you would take to get from your state to Canada. Determine what geographical and survival challenges you would have. Think about the geography of the states through which you would have to travel. Are there any mountains, rivers, deserts? Will there be enough natural resources to provide you with food, shelter, and water? How will you protect yourself?"

Students may want to check the topographic maps or do some research on the Web for the geography of their state and those in the path on their way to Canada. Have them draw what they believe would be the best route on their maps.

3. Students should identify major rivers and the great lakes, which were major obstacles in getting to Canada. Ask students how the slaves would be able to get over those obstacles. (Slaves often had to time the trip so that the rivers were frozen so that they could cross them safely. Sometimes they chose to travel through the mountains because they provided a good place to hide and game to eat.)

Day 2

4. Tell students about the Underground Railroad and that there were certain routes that the escaping slaves would take because of things such as ease of travel, ability to hide along the route, safe houses or stations, or conductors who could help them along the way. Have students go to the Lyric Opera of Kansas City Web site to see where the major Underground Railroad routes were. If computers are not available, you may want to download the map and copy it for the students.

5. Let the students return to their state-alike groups and have the groups see how closely these actual routes matched those they designed in the previous lesson. Have students decide which route they think is the best route and defend it. Have students predict if they would make it to Canada or to a free state safely or not. They can defend their position in writing or orally.

Extension

Students who are interested in the Underground Railroad could read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or do research on the Web about it. Have them locate the slave routes referenced in the book.

Students may also want to do some research into local stations on the Underground Railroad. Missouri, especially in areas near St. Louis and along the Mississippi River, has a rich history in supporting slaves as they moved north. John Brown took the slaves he captured in Missouri up a route that led through Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and north or northwest. Students may want to research that route and trace it on their maps.

Signs and Symbols

Background

As slaves were considering escaping from their bondage, it is said that quilts were used by conductors on the underground railway and by safe houses to indicate places where they could safely acquire food, transportation, and rest. Because the information had to be kept secret, there is no written record to support these assertions. Some believe this is a myth and quilts told no story at all.

This lesson will examine some of the quilt patterns and what they may have represented as slaves tried to identify the various routes on the Underground Railroad. Students will create a quilt that shows what they believe might be a safe route to freedom from one of the slave states.

Students will find conflicting information in this lesson because all of this is oral tradition. Use this opportunity to reinforce primary and secondary sources and the importance of being able to confirm any information from more than one source.

This lesson extends the Underground Railroad lesson but can stand alone.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify some codes through quilts said to assist slaves as they moved on the Underground Railroad;
2. Create quilt patterns that show a path to freedom.

Standards

Kansas State Standards

Mathematics

4G1

5G4

6G5

7G2

7G4

7G5

Missouri State Standards

Mathematics

7G3A

6-8G4B

Materials

Pictures of quilts and patterns from WWW sites:

www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum <http://educ.queensu.ca>. Search for UGRR, Click on <Underground Railroad Worksheet> for information about Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt.

Search for UGRR quilt code at these sites:

<http://www.nsa.gov/museum/museu00033.cfm>

<http://ugrrquilt.hartcottagequilts.com/rr3.htm>

www.osblackhistory.com

Lyric Opera of Kansas City site for maps:

www.kcopera.com/About/johnbrowneeducation.html

Paper (large sheets) and markers

Flat bed sheets

Felt

Scissors

Glue

Graph paper

Other art supplies as needed

Optional:

Book: Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad (1998, Tobin and Dobard)

Time

2-3 class periods

Procedure

1. Ask students if they have ever used a secret code to communicate with their friends. Let them share some of their experiences. They may talk about using disappearing ink or creating a code of their own using numbers and letters. In history, “one if by land, two if by sea” may be a familiar code to students who have studied the Revolutionary War. If your students have created codes in your class, you can refer to that activity. Text messaging is a form of code used by students today. Have students share some of the text messaging codes.

2. Say to the students, “Some people say that quilts have a code. The story of quilts in assisting slaves on the Underground Railroad might be familiar to you. What do you know about this connection of quilts to slavery?” Allow students to briefly discuss what they know about the connection of quilts to the Underground Railroad. Record their thoughts on the board. They might mention that the patterns on quilts supposedly represented directions and levels of safety for the slaves who knew the codes. Explain to the students, “This is oral history and there are some who believe these stories have been made up and were not true. However, the stories are intriguing and you will be investigating them more closely.”

3. Have students examine some of the quilt patterns. You can find them at www.osblackhistory.com (click on <quilt patterns>, then on <Underground Railroad quilt codes>). You will find 18 patterns with explanations of these codes. Another site is at <http://educ.queensu.ca>. You will need to search for Underground Railroad Quilt Code. This site discusses 10 quilts with 10 patterns along the route. Patterns are also pictured and explained at this site.

If students don't have access to the WWW, you can copy pages from these sites to hand out to students.

4. Have students report back about the types of codes they found that were incorporated into the quilts. They should include codes about directions, preparing for the journey, and people and areas of safety. Ask students if they thought these patterns accurately indicated what they were suppose to show. Ask them if they think they would they be able to decode a quilt. Some quilts had only one design that gave directions for the next step on the railroad. Sometimes these quilts were hung on a clothes line to direct slaves as they came by. Occasionally several quilts, each with unique designs, were hung together to indicate a route as they were "read" from left to right on the line.

5. If you have not completed the lesson on the Underground Railroad, you may want to complete it before you continue. If you have completed it, ask the students what they remember about the Underground Railroad. Elicit the fact that slaves used it as a way to get away from their bondage in a slave state through free states to Canada where they had no fear of being returned. The routes were usually along rivers, over ocean routes, or through wooded areas that could provide shelter and protection. "Stations" were safe houses where the people could rest or where "conductors" could guide or take them further along the route.

John Brown was a conductor on the Underground Railroad. He hid and fed slaves when they stopped at his home in North Elba. He took many slaves from his home in Kansas and New York to Canada. When he was in Kansas, he led a group of slaves that he had stolen from Missouri slave owners along a route to Canada.

You can find a map of the Underground Railroad routes at the Lyric Opera of Kansas City Web site <http://www.kcopera.com/About/johnbrowneducation.html> or at www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum/Socialstd/ Click on the <Archives>, <Underground Railroad Assignments>,< Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt>, then <Underground Railroad routes maps>. If you want to copy the map it can be distributed to your students. Or, you can use the map of the U.S. with slave and free states at www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum/Socialstd/ following the same path except at the last step click on <U.S. Free and Slave States map>. Have students trace one of the routes John Brown used to help slaves escape. Maps can also be found at the Lyric Opera of Kansas City Web site www.kcopera.com/About/johnbrowneducation.html.

6. Tell students that they are going to make a quilt that will have directions to help a slave escape. Ask students to tell you what you usually find on a map. (roads, major rivers, landmarks, etc.) Ask students what they think would be helpful for slaves to know on any map they would have to help them escape. (roads, rivers, landmarks, safe houses, danger areas, etc.)

In groups of no more than 4 students, have students choose one of the routes John Brown took when he helped slaves escape to Canada. They are to design a quilt that contains important information about that area of the country. They may incorporate the symbols from the quilts if they want or they can make their own symbols. The requirements are that the quilt should provide directions for getting from where they are to their destination.

(If students have completed the Underground Railroad lesson, they may want to make a quilt depicting the route they designed in that lesson. Allow them to do this if they wish.)

This process can be accomplished in several ways. Students can sketch their quilt and draw it to scale (students determine the scale to be used). They can also bring in a sheet and cut out felt symbols to glue on the sheet. Older students may want to draw their designs on graph paper and create a quilt with one design using quilt squares.

<http://www.nsa.gov/museum/museu00033.cfm> shows a quilt containing only designs and illustrates the range of possible symbols commonly used.

<http://ugrrquilt.hartcottagequilts.com/rr3.htm> is another site with pictures and links to other designs.

7. After the quilts are finished, have the class members see if they can decode the quilts. Then let the quilt designers tell their stories.

Extension

There is much disagreement about the use of quilt symbols to guide slaves to freedom.

Though this lesson has not addressed any of these disagreements, you may want to continue the discussion through an examination of the converse arguments at

<http://ugrrquilt.hartcottagequilts.com/rr3.htm>. Older students can follow these arguments and continue their research on symbols from this site.

The knowledge of geometry was and is necessary for the precise fitting of various quilt designs. Mathematics students could take one design and determine the exact size and angles necessary for the squares or other designs to be able to fit exactly together when joined. After their calculations, they should draw two quilt squares containing pieces of various shapes and see if they fit together.

Stories Through the Music of the Slaves

Background

The popular media often depict slaves singing as they work. The songs were more than just something to do during hard labor. They were a way of communicating important messages about hope and escape to freedom. This lesson examines some of those songs and helps students uncover the hidden meanings in the music of slaves.

If desired, this lesson could be presented just prior to the *Signs and Symbols* lesson and the messages in some of the songs could be designed as quilts. You may want to offer the quilt activity as an extension to this lesson if you have already completed the *Signs and Symbols* lesson.

Objectives

Following the completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Describe how slaves communicated with each other through coded songs;
2. Decode an unfamiliar slave spiritual.

Standards

Kansas State Standards

History

5.4.4

8.4.2

Reading

5.1.3.5 (Corresponds to 6.1.3.5, 7.1.3.4, 8.1.3.4)

5.1.3.6 (Corresponds to 6.1.3.6, 7.1.3.5, 8.1.3.5)

5.1.4.5 (Corresponds to 6.1.4.5, 7.1.4.5, 8.1.4.5)

5.2.2.1 (Corresponds to 6.2.2.1, 7.2.2.3)

Writing

5.1.4.11

Missouri State Standards

Communication Arts

Reading

1I4

2C4,5

Fine Arts

HC1A4

HC1C4, 5, 6-8

Time

1 class period

Materials

Recordings of songs sung by slaves including:

Oh, Freedom
Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees
Wade in the Water
Go Down Moses
Trampin'
Swing Low
Follow the Drinking Gourd

WWW site:

Site for lyrics of spirituals

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/TWH/Higg.html>

Optional:

Steal Away: Songs of the Underground Railroad by Kim and Reggie Harris. Appleseed Recordings - CD that includes the songs listed above

Procedure

1. Play some of the recordings of slave spirituals for the students. Ask them what they know about these songs.

2. Tell students, "As slaves were planning their escape on the Underground Railroad, they communicated through song. Many of the songs had a religious theme and could be sung in the presence of overseers or masters without fear of detection." Listen to *Wade in the Water*. Have students suggest what this song may be about.

Wade in the Water gives directions to fugitive slaves. It reminds them to stay near rivers and streams and not to travel on the highways where they may be discovered. Bodies of water provided cover, safety, food, and access to the conductors who often used bodies of water for transportation. It also provided information about the direction in which the slave was traveling.

3. Some other words that students may find in spirituals and their meanings appear below. You may want to have them available in a handout or project them on a screen so that students can see them as they continue to listen to some of the songs.

Darkness – closer to slavery

Glory – closer to freedom

Moses – an Underground Railroad Conductor

Pharaoh – Slaveholder

Israel – slaves

Egypt – bondage

Promised Land – freedom

Heaven/home – safe place

4. Play several of the other songs and discuss what these songs may have been telling the slaves. Accept student interpretations. Have students discuss and justify alternate interpretations.

5. Several songs gave specific directions within their lyrics.

a. Play the song, *Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees*. Ask students if they have heard this song and where. What do they think it means? Ask them what they think it would mean to a slave. This song, frequently sung today at Protestant communion services, was a coded call for a secret meeting or a call to gather in the early morning (rising sun) to talk about important things. Discussions often included plans for escape. Share with them the meaning of the song and play it again so that they can hear it as if they were a slave listening to it.

b. Another familiar song may be *Follow the Drinking Gourd*. Follow the same procedure with this song. Escaping slaves frequently used the Big Dipper (drinking gourd) to provide directions for their escape over unfamiliar terrain. In this song, specific directions are provided about where they could find conductors (the old man is a-waitin' for to carry you to freedom), and to use dead trees (see the moss on the north side) to find the way. Of all of the songs, this one provides perhaps the most explicit directions and landmarks.

6. Provide the lyrics to a new song to small groups of students. Have them discuss the lyrics and decode them. Discuss their findings and see how similar or different their interpretations are. Discuss reasons for any differences. You can obtain a few other spirituals from the Web site <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/TWH/Higg.html>. Words to some are below.

I KNOW MOON-RISE.

"I know moon-rise, I know star-rise,
Lay dis body down.
I walk in de moonlight, I walk in de starlight,
To lay dis body down.
I 'll walk in de graveyard, I 'll walk through de graveyard,
To lay dis body down.
I 'll lie in de grave and stretch out my arms ;
Lay dis body down.
I go to de judgment in de evenin' of de day,
When I lay dis body down ;
And my soul and your soul will meet in de day
When I lay dis body down."

XIX. WRESTLING JACOB.

"O wrestlin' Jacob, Jacob, day 's a-breakin';
I will not let thee go !
O wrestlin' Jacob, Jacob, day 's a-breakin';
He will not let me go !
O, I hold my brudder wid a tremblin' hand ;
I would not let him go !
I hold my sister wid a tremblin' hand ;
I would not let her go !

"O, Jacob do hang from a tremblin' limb,
He would not let him go !
O, Jacob do hang from a tremblin' limb ;
De Lord will bless my soul.
O wrestlin' Jacob, Jacob," day's a-breakin';
would not let him go !

He

7. Have students discuss or write about why it would be important to know the code in order to more fully understand text. Ask them what might happen if they misinterpreted or didn't understand the code in the songs.

Extension

Older students may want to write a song that describes a specific route from a place in a slave state to a place of freedom. Have them think of code words and directions that will help lead the way while keeping the meaning hidden to anyone who does not have the code. The class may want to develop a code book of words for general use in their compositions.

Younger students may want to write a song that provides directions to and from familiar places in their community.

\$600 of Gold

Background

As John Brown was trying to purchase weapons to take to Kansas he solicited contributions from wealthy acquaintances. One of Brown's contributors gave Brown \$600 in gold. This lesson examines the equivalence in today's dollars and the amount of gold that actually represented in 1858. It compares the cost of an ounce of gold and has students examine what \$600 in gold could buy both then and now.

If your students don't have access to the WWW, you may want to download the appropriate pages and copy them for the students to use during this lesson.

Objectives

Following the completion of this lesson, students will be able to

1. Compare the equivalence of \$600 of gold in the mid 1800s and today;
2. Find various ways to calculate \$600 worth of gold in 1858.

Standards

Kansas State Standards

Mathematics

4NC3

4A1

5NC

5A1

5A2

6A2

7A5

Missouri State Standards

Mathematics

6N03D

Materials

Access to a computer linked to the WWW for access to these Web sites:

<http://www.finfacts.ie/Private/currency/goldmarketprice.htm>

<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-the-historical-price-of-gold.htm>

<http://www.22karatjewelers.com/goldprice.htm>

Time

1 class period

Procedure

1. Ask students how John Brown got the money to purchase his pikes and other weapons to take to Kansas (contributors). One person gave John Brown \$600 worth of gold. Have students guess how much gold that would be then and in today's dollars. (You can find the actual price of gold for today by going to

<http://www.finfacts.ie/Private/currency/goldmarketprice.htm>).

2. Have students go to <http://www.finfacts.ie/Private/currency/goldmarketprice.htm>. Use this price of gold per ounce to have students calculate how many ounces of gold John Brown would have today if he was given \$600 worth.

Students may use some variation of this formula: $\$600 = (\text{price of gold today}) \times X_{(\text{ounces})}$. Let students explain how they found their answer. They may have discovered several ways to solve the problem. Let students talk about the different ways this problem can be solved.

3. Now have students determine how much gold John Brown would have had using the prices in the late 1850s. You can find the historical cost for gold at <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-the-historical-price-of-gold.htm>. Ask students if they should use the price given for 1855 or 1860 if John Brown received the gold in 1858. In this case the price was the same (\$21/oz) but their ability to interpolate dates can be practiced using other dates in this chart. You can check these prices on the chart also found at <http://www.finfacts.ie/Private/currency/goldmarketprice.htm>.

Have students use a different method than they used before to determine how many ounces of gold John Brown would have received. They may use proportions, algebraic expressions, or other methods to solve this problem.

4. Have students report out on how much gold John Brown would have received. Resolve any differences in answers so that the class has a common understanding of how much gold Brown had to purchase supplies and weapons.

Have students save their calculations. This answer will be used in the next lesson.

Extension

The study of gold is interesting to students. Their experience with gold is usually with jewelry, which is light-weight. Students may be interested in constructing a cube that represents a ton of gold. Go to <http://www.finfacts.ie/Private/currency/goldmarketprice.htm> to find the dimensions of a ton of gold. Let students figure out how to construct this cube.

They can also determine how much a ton of gold would cost on today's market by going to <http://www.22karatjewelers.com/goldprice.htm> which will provide the price of gold and silver updated each hour. This site gives the cost of gold in **US dollars per ounce**. Some mathematical conversions will be necessary prior to finding the cost of a ton of gold in US dollars.

This site also provides the cost of other precious metals which younger students may find interesting. These students can use a bar graph to compare today's price of gold, silver, palladium, and platinum. Allow students to return to this site over several days to chart the price change over time for these metals.

Social studies teachers can use the site, <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-the-historical-price-of-gold.htm>, to examine the change in price of gold over time. Are there historical events that might have affected the price of gold? What caused the jump in price from 1975-1980? You can find historical information at

<http://www.finfacts.ie/Private/currency/goldmarketprice.htm> along with yearly highs and lows.

So What Can I Buy for \$600 in Gold?

Background

This lesson examines the purchasing power of \$600 in gold that John Brown was given. His purpose was to obtain pikes and other weapons to take to Kansas in order to fight the Missouri Border Ruffians and keep Kansas a free state.

Students will compare the purchasing power of \$600 in gold in Brown's day to the purchasing power today using their calculations from the previous lesson *\$600 in Gold*.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to

1. Compare the purchasing power of \$600 in gold today and in the 1850s;
2. Calculate today's purchasing power from historical amounts of money.

Standards

Kansas State Standards

Mathematics

4NC3

4A1

5NC4

5A1

5A2

6A2

7A5

Missouri State Standards

Mathematics

4AR2A

6,7AR2A

6NO3D

Materials

Answers to the problems in the lesson, *\$600 in Gold*.

Access to computers linked to the WWW for these sites:

Cost of living index for other years:

<http://www.minneapolisfed.org/Research/data/us/calc/hist1800.cfm>

Information about pikes:

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/collection/object.asp?ID=508>

Cost of today's spear points:

http://www.by-the-sword.com/acatalog/Pole_Weapons_and_Spears.html

Time

1 class period

Procedure

1. In the lesson, *\$600 in Gold*, students determined how much gold John Brown was given to purchase pikes and other weapons. Tell them that they will continue to compare the costs in 1858 to those in 2007 by looking at the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The CPI is an index that tracks the changes what an urban consumer pays for select goods and services.

Using a formula incorporating the CPI from the year you want and this year, you can do a direct conversion. Using 1858 as an example, go to the chart at <http://www.minneapolisfed.org/Research/data/us/calc/hist1800.cfm>. This chart has the CPI (annual average) for years from 1800 to 2007. Find the CPI for 1858 (26) and that for 2007 (615.2).

Insert it into this formula:

$$2007 \text{ Price} = 1850 \text{ price} \times (2007 \text{ CPI}/1858 \text{ CPI})$$

Use our example of John Brown's \$600 of gold, find the equivalent price in today's dollar.

$$2007 \text{ Price} = \$600 \times (615.2/26)$$

$$2007 \text{ Price} = \$600 \times 23.66$$

$$2007 \text{ Price for the same amount of Gold} = \$14,196$$

That was quite a gift to John Brown!

2. Have students solve this problem:

If a pound of sugar costs \$2.50 today, what would it have cost in 1858?

$$2007 \text{ Price} = 1850 \text{ price} \times (2007 \text{ CPI}/1950 \text{ CPI})$$

$$\$2.50 = 1850 \text{ price} \times (615.2/26)$$

$$\$2.50 = \text{price} \times 23.66$$

$$\$0.11 = 1850 \text{ price for pound of sugar}$$

3. Have students select an item that they have recently purchased. It can be food, clothing, an iPhone or anything they choose. Using the formula, find out what it would have cost in 1858 – if it had been available. Share these results with the class.

4. John Brown wanted to use his money to purchase pikes (Pikes are similar to spear heads.). He ordered 1000 pikes at \$1/pike from Charles Blair, a blacksmith in Collinsville, Connecticut. (See <http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/collection/object.asp?ID=508>) for information on pikes.)

Find out what the cost of a pike would be today (today's costs for spear heads – comparable to pikes - can be found at http://www.by-the-sword.com/acatalog/Pole_Weapons_and_Spears.html) Costs range from \$45 to \$90 per

spear point without the pole. Ask students how many spear points John Brown would be able to purchase if he had today's equivalent of \$600?

Extension

Students can talk with several adults about the cost of living when they were the students' age. Students can ask the adults to think about the cost of an item in the year in which they were your age. Using that price and the CPI chart, calculate what that item might cost today. Then check the cost of the item to see how close your calculations are to the actual price.

Conversely, students can select an automobile that they are interested in. They can calculate what it would have cost when their parents or another adult was their age. Then the students should ask the adults if they remember what an automobile cost when they were the students' age. Students should check their calculations against the adult's memory of the cost. Students may share with the adults what they found when they calculated the cost. If there are differences, discuss where they may have occurred.

Older students can extend their learning through this activity. Tell students to assume they will be graduating from high school and are getting ready to set up an apartment. Tell them they have \$500 (in 1858 dollars). Within that budget they will have to pay rent at \$500/month (2007 dollars), buy food, pay utilities at \$150/month (2007 dollars), and that the money will have to last for 3 months until they get a job with income.

Students should make out a budget. They can work in a group and then share their reasons for making the budgeting choices they did. Students should be assessed on their ability to convert the money into 2007 dollars and stay within their budget. They should not be assessed on their ability to anticipate everything they will need but this should be included in the discussion.

For teachers: You may want to investigate this link to find out how teachers in 1853 taught these mathematics skills. A link to a common book used in school mathematics classes in 1853 is at <http://tides.sfasu.edu:2006/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/EastTexRC&CISOPTR=312&REC=17>.

Blow Ye the Trumpet

Background

The opera, *John Brown*, begins with “Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow.” This hymn had special significance to John Brown. In this lesson students will examine this hymn and find how the composer has used it in the opera.

Objectives

After completing these lessons, students will be able to identify the uses of one genre of music in another as represented by study of the hymn, *Blow Ye the Trumpet*.

Standards

Kansas

Music

6I21

9I31

Missouri

Fine Arts

AP1A4-5

IC1A4-5

Materials

Copy of the libretto for *John Brown*

Copy of the words for *Blow Ye the Trumpet*

WWW access:

Words and music for *Blow Ye the Trumpet* and other Wesley hymns.

<http://gbgm-umc.org/UMhistory/wesley/> Click on <hymns>, then <*Blow Ye the Trumpet*>.

Time

1-2 class periods

Procedure

1. Tell students that *Blow Ye the Trumpet* was an important hymn for John Brown. He sang it to his children before bedtime every night. Your students may have found references to it as they have researched various aspects of Brown’s life in other lessons.

2. Have them listen to the music of *Blow Ye the Trumpet* at the Web site, <http://gbgm-umc.org/UMhistory/wesley/hymns/>. Click on <hymns>, then <*Blow Ye the Trumpe*>t. (One verse and refrain of the music is accessible at this Web site. You may want to repeat it several times so that the students can follow along with the words as the music is played. If you have the equipment, record it and put it on continuous loop so that students can listen to it continuously. Sheet music or a hymnal may be available that has the hymn so that you can play it for the students.)

Ask them what form this is written in. Students may recognize the hymn form. This hymn was written by John Wesley, who wrote many of the hymns that are sung in Protestant churches today.

3. Hand out the words to the hymn. The words are also found at this Web site and are included in this lesson. Have the students read the words and briefly discuss what they could have meant to John Brown knowing his deep feelings about slavery. Allow the students to read/sing the words as you play the music.

Blow Ye the Trumpet

Blow ye the trumpet, blow!
The gladly solemn sound
Let all the nations know,
To earth's remotest bound:

Refrain

The year of jubilee is come!
The year of jubilee is come!
Return, ye ransomed sinners, home.

Jesus, our great high priest,
Hath full atonement made,
Ye weary spirits, rest;
Ye mournful souls, be glad:

Refrain

Extol the Lamb of God,
The sin atoning Lamb;
Redemption by His blood
Throughout the lands proclaim:

Refrain

Ye slaves of sin and hell,
Your liberty receive,
And safe in Jesus dwell,
And blest in Jesus live:

Refrain

Ye who have sold for naught
Your heritage above
Shall have it back unbought,
The gift of Jesus' love:

Refrain

The Gospel trumpet hear,
The news of heavenly grace;
And saved from earth, appear
Before your Savior's face:

Refrain

4. Give the *John Brown* libretto to the students. In small groups of 3-4 students, assign groups to look at either Scene 1 or Scene 2. Search for all references and uses of *Blow Ye the Trumpet* in this opera. (References can be found on pages 1, 15, 25, 32, and 38.)

When the students think they have found all references, have them discuss these questions:

1. How does the composer/librettist use this hymn in the opera?
2. What is he trying to tell the listener through its use?
3. Where do you think it is used most effectively?

Have students report on their findings by rotating questions among the groups that were examining Scene 1 and Scene 2.

5. Have students think of examples of words from other songs being used in ways other than those for which they were originally written. One example is the use of words from popular songs in commercials – “Like a Rock,” “Everyday is a Winding Road.” Another is the use of familiar tunes set with new words. The tune for the *Star Spangled Banner* was an old English drinking song. The tune for *John Brown's Body* is the same as *Battle Hymn of the Republic* and the children's song, *John Brown's Baby Has a Cold Upon His Chest*. Discuss the effectiveness of the use of these songs in a new context. Do they portray the desired message?

Make a list of all of the examples of songs being adapted and adopted for other uses. Leave the list posted so students can add to it each day when they discover other uses as they go through their day. Revisit the list when new songs are added. Let the student who added a new example report on it.

Extension

Tell the students that they are advertising agents. Their job is to sell a product and they are trying to decide what music or words from current music would best represent this product. You can provide a product for them or they can create one for themselves.

Allow them to share their product and accompanying music with the class or make a display to highlight their advertising.

Music of the Opera

Background

Students who are attending the opera will benefit from some familiarity with the major themes or pieces of music they will hear. This lesson focuses on two musical selections that will prepare students for their visit. The focus is on the emotions elicited by listening to music from the opera and putting this music into the context of the action taking place.

Objectives

Upon completion of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify two musical selections from the opera;
2. Identify the emotions elicited by the composer of these two selections.

Standards

Kansas

Music

6I21

Missouri

(No correlating standards)

Materials

Internet access with speaker capabilities or student access to computers

Musical excerpts from the opera from www.kcopera.org. Click on <Our Season>, then click on <John Brown>, scroll down to bottom for list of musical selections.

John Brown Libretto

Time

1 class period prior to viewing the opera

Procedure

1. Ask students to think about the music they enjoy. Ask them to think of a song that is upbeat – that makes them happy. Then have them describe the music – tempo, major or minor key, the story it tells, or other characteristics they can think of.

Then ask them to do the same with music that makes them pensive or sad. Have them discuss how the characteristics of music can promote feelings or put the listener in a certain mood.

2. Tell students that they will listen to two clips of music from the opera, *John Brown*. At the beginning of Act II, Scene I, a slave that John Brown had helped escape sings “Daniel.” (It is pronounced “Dan-u-el” in the piece. Alert students to listen for this pronunciation.)

Prior to any explanation of the clip, play this clip, “Daniel,” that you can retrieve from www.kcopera.org. Click on <Our Season>, then click on <John Brown>, scroll down to bottom for list of musical selections. Have students listen to it. Ask the students what

feeling or emotion they felt as they listened to the music. Have them explain what gave them this feeling. (This is a hymn of rejoicing at having been freed.) Accept all of the student's contributions. Do not tell them what the song is about.

3. Pass out the words to the musical selection from the libretto. Have students listen to it again as they follow along with the words. Ask them if the words matched the feelings they got when listening to the music. Have them explain their answers.

Have them evaluate if they think the words and music match. Ask students if the words and music elicit the same feelings together as when experienced separately.

4. Do the same activity with another clip from the opera, "The Songs of the Slave" found at www.kcopera.org. Click on <Our Season>, then click on <John Brown>, scroll down to bottom for list of musical selections. These words can also be found in Act II, Scene I of the libretto.

5. Replay these two clips if you have time prior to students' viewing of the opera. Before they attend the opera, alert them to notice within the opera what was occurring just before and just after these two selections. Ask them to think about how these selections fit the mood of the scene in these two places in which they occur in Act I.

6. Debrief when students return to the classroom.

Extension

More advanced music students can take part of the libretto that they find interesting and compose music to reflect the mood and intent of the scene.

Younger students can continue this lesson while listening to musical selections with which they are familiar and analyzing them for the feelings elicited and the match between the words and the music.

What Is an Opera?

Background

Many students who attend *John Brown* may have little experience with opera, and therefore may think that opera is not meant for them or is something they cannot understand. As *John Brown* shows, opera is accessible to everyone, and is an art form everyone can enjoy and understand.

This lesson and the students' attendance at *John Brown* show that elements of opera appear in the performance arts they already are familiar with, and that opera is very similar to what they know about. In this lesson students work together using their own organizing skills to determine how opera is similar to and different from other performance arts.

Objectives

Upon completion of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify opera as a performance where the story is told through music and acting;
2. Compare and contrast opera and its characteristics with music concerts, stage plays, movies, television and real life.

Standards

Kansas State Standards

Music

6I21

8I21

9I31

9I33

Theatre

6.B.1.1

Missouri State Standards

Fine Arts

AP1B4-5

AP1B6-8

HC1A4

HC1C6-8

Materials

Board or flip chart(s)

Markers

Note cards

Pads of paper

Pens/pencils/crayons

WWW sites:

Opera San Jose Study Guide

<http://www.operasj.org/WIOstudyguide0708.pdf>

Wikipedia Opera Entry
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opera>

Arts Central Guide
<http://www.artscentral.co.uk/DisplayPage.asp?pageid=7592>

Time

1 class period prior to viewing the opera
10 minutes after students attend the opera

Procedure

1. Write the word, "Opera" on the board. Ask the students what the word means. Write responses. As suggestions coalesce around musical theatrical productions (with whatever other features and characteristics – be prepared for large horned women and boring long choruses in foreign languages, among other descriptions), ask what other types of musical or theatrical productions there are.

Possible answers may include "stage plays," "musicals," "movies," "music concerts," "shows on television," "church choirs," "dance recitals," "singing in the shower," or other examples. Write them on the board or have each student who answers write them on the board. Include "opera" among them.

2. Ask the students what characteristics these different types of musical or theatre productions have. Your prompts or student answers could include such concepts as costumes, lighting, singing, movement, and musical instruments. Additional possibilities are theatres, audiences, a conductor, live or not live, spoken or all-sung or both.

3. Have each student think about one type of musical or theatre performance and to list the characteristics it has. What do they see and hear in a performance? Give the students 5 minutes to write their responses on a sheet of chart paper and have them post their sheets on the board or walls when they are done.

4. Break the class into groups of about six students each. Tell the students you would like them to come up with a scheme to organize the theatrical production types and elements so that they will be able to show and report which production types contain which elements and how they are related to each other. Each group is to use a minimum of five types of theatre or musical productions, including opera, and come up with ways that they are similar or different. Tell them they have 15 minutes to do this. (Prompts/possibilities may include charts, lists, cross-tabs, pictures or diagrams.) You may want to predetermine what materials to use based on what you have available and what works best for you and your students.

5. Have each group report out, showing how they have come up with a solution to the problem.

6. Before the end of the class period and before going to the opera, return to the question of "What is an opera?" Say that you would like the students to answer the question when they return based on their experience at the performance, considering the discussions and

ideas the groups have come up with when talking about theatre and other performances. When they return, you would like each group to think about where opera falls in the organizational charts/lists they created. Does their experience confirm what they thought or change where opera should be?

An alternative would be to ask for a few volunteers to serve as class researchers to investigate the questions at the opera and report back to the class after the performance.

Following the opera performance:

7. After the opera, have the groups report back. They will have seen that *John Brown* contained live performances of a story told through singing and music (with minimal spoken words), using costumes, lighting, dance/movement, sound, the stage, and (perhaps) the audience to complete the art work. A brief discussion can place opera among the other music/theatrical production types they have considered.

Extension

More advanced students can research opera types, more-specific characteristics of opera (usual singing roles), or Lyric Opera of Kansas City in building their understanding of how opera fits among the other performance art types.

Younger students forego the group session and all be given the assignment of looking for the various characteristics of music/theatre productions when they see *John Brown*. In a period after the performance students can share what they saw and build a consensus on what the definition of opera is based on their observation.

Becoming a Composer, Creating an Opera

Background

On one level, creating an opera – choosing and developing a story and writing words and music, – is an extremely difficult task requiring varied skills and craft. At the same time, the basic features of creating an opera are the same ones that go into any creative endeavor.

This lesson stimulates students to conceptualize how an opera such as *John Brown* is composed and what kinds of experiences and skills are needed to do it. Information shared by the opera's composer, Kirke Mechem, is included in the lesson, offering a real-life connection both to the opera the students are seeing and to the idea of writing an opera.

Lyric Opera of Kansas City has provided the audio interview from the text within this lesson online at their site. If you have access to the Web, listening to Mr. Mechem's own words will raise the interest level of your students. If you do not have access to the Web, you can use transcribed sections of the interview contained in this lesson.

Objectives

Upon completion of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Recognize that creating an opera, as with other artistic creations, combines personal life experience with developing technical skills;
2. Identify various skill sets needed in order to create an opera.

Standards

Kansas State Standards

Music

8I21

9I33

Theatre

6.B.1.1

Missouri State Standards

Fine Arts

AP1A4-5

AP1B4-5

AP1B6-8

HC1C6-8

Materials

Board or flip chart(s)

Markers

WWW sites:

Lyric Opera of Kansas City Web Site with an interview with Kirke Mechem:

www.kcopera.com/About/johnbrowneeducation.html

Description of “How to Write an Opera”:

<http://www.techlearning.com/showArticle.php?articleID=20900611>

Metropolitan Opera “Stories of the Opera”:

<http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/history/stories/>

James MacMillan: Composing an Opera:

<http://www.soundjunction.org/jamesmacmillancomposinganopera.aspa?NodeID=134>

Richard Wagner: Opera Composer:

<http://www.lucidcafe.com/library/96may/wagner.html>

Jeffrey Brody on Composing for Longwood Opera:

<http://longwoodopera.org/past/composing.html>

Shulamit Ran on Writing an Opera:

<http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/970612/ran.shtml>

Time

1 class period

Procedure

1. Introduce the lesson by saying it is going to be about what it takes to write an opera. Ask for a volunteer to play an imaginary composer.
2. Have the composer make up a name. Tell the class that they are the composer’s “muses.” Ask if anyone knows what a muse is. If no one shares a definition, have a student quickly look it up and read a definition. Establish that a muse, in effect, is an imaginary guide (from the ancient Greeks) who helps an artist or musician or writer create a sculpture or piece of music or other kind of work of art.
3. Say that the composer is destined to be a great composer of operas, and it is the muses’ job to help plan the composer’s life to achieve this goal. What kind of a life, family, background, education, etc. will the composer need to become a composer? Ask for discussion and suggestions.
4. Have the “composer” write the suggestions on the board as they are made.

5. Possibilities may include:

Supportive parents	Good teachers	Discipline (to practice and compose)
Parents who are musicians	Musical ability	Money to go to school
Musical instruments at home	Long, strong fingers	Friends who like music
Inspiration	Ambition	Desire to be heard
Self-confidence	Good hearing	A peaceful home life
A creative home setting	Patience	A friendly neighborhood
Genius	Writing ability	Good story-telling skills

Ability to work with others
Hearing
Luck

Good timing
A musical instrument

Dramatic sense
Organizational ability

6. Ask for ideas about prioritizing the list. What is most important? What is second? Have the muses vote or use other tactics to stimulate discussion and consensus on what the future composer will need *in what order* to become a composer of opera.

7. Tell the class that Kirke Mechem, the composer of *John Brown*, offers an example of how an opera composer develops and creates an opera. Say that Mr. Mechem talked recently about their class and what they would be talking about, and that his story may offer some information. First, say that when he heard they were in middle school and were going to talk about opera, he said:

Play Audio Clip 1: Mechem's reflections on opera when he was of middle-school age

"When I was that age I hardly knew opera existed. I'll be 82 in two weeks."

8. An Interview with Kirke Mechem (August 6, 2007).

Students can read the interview, or selected students can read it and report to the group on how Mr. Mechem's life and composing methods correspond to the muses' expectations. Another option is to read a section at a time and compare it to the muses' recommendations. Note how the recommendations are similar to or how they differ from Mr. Mechem's story. (Highlights especially relevant to this specific lesson are bolded, but we recommend reading or listening to the entire interview whenever possible.)

a. Introduce this clip by telling students that first Mr. Mechem talks about his life as a young boy.

Play Audio Clip 2: Kirke Mechem's youth

Question: Have you always been interested in music?

Kirke Mechem: "**My earliest memory is of my mother playing the piano.** She loved Chopin best of all. She also played some Gershwin and Bartok, some modern pieces. She played a lot of Impressionistic pieces by Debussy and Ravel, but played the classics mostly. In addition to Chopin she played Bach, Beethoven, and some Brahms.

"So that was the language I learned immediately, just the way you learn a spoken language. I do think music is a language, so just as you learn English by hearing it, you learn the language of music by hearing it. Whether you can write music is something else, but a lot of people can speak without being able to write much."

Question: From your early contact with music through your mother, did you jump in and become a musician?

Kirke Mechem: **“No, not at all. My father was a writer and was interested in sports, and so was I, and I was good at sports. All my friends were in sports and none were in music. But I still heard music all the time.**

“My parents would have to offer me a football helmet if I practiced the piano for six months, and then offer me a baseball glove if I practiced another six months. This went on until I had all the sports equipment and then I stopped.

b. In the following clip Mr. Mechem remembers his teen years.

Play Audio Clip 3: Kirke Mechem as a teenager

“When I was a teenager, my friends and I became interested in popular music. Popular music was a lot more like classical music then, especially big band music. We heard it on the radio and at dances, and I learned to play it on the piano by ear.

“In order to do this I had to learn about chords. I would buy sheet music of the pieces I had learned to play, then try to see how they were written down. I could already read music [from taking piano lesson when I was younger]. I could see how songs were arranged for the piano in a simple way. The structure was usually the same – 32 measures long, eight measures repeated and then a middle part, called a bridge, in a different key, and then it would go back to the original key again. So I said, well, I can do that, and I started writing songs. They were pretty bad, but I didn’t know it. They even played some of them on the local radio station, WIBW in Topeka. I was totally self-taught at that point — high school.

c. This clip describes Mr. Mechem’s adulthood as it relates to music and composing.

Play Audio Clip 4: Kirk Mechem as an adult

“Then I was drafted into the Army during World War II. Eventually, when the war was over and I was waiting for my discharge, I was transferred into Special Services in order to write songs for USO shows. I was learning all the time about harmony, and wrote many songs and a musical comedy. I wrote my own lyrics because I was trained as a writer. I had been editor of my high school paper and junior high school paper. I had actually gotten a job while I was still in school as assistant sports editor of the *Topeka Daily Capital*.

“The GI Bill made it possible for me to go to a big expensive school like Stanford. I majored in English but playing on the tennis team was more important at first. I was still writing songs on the sly. As a sophomore I decided to take a harmony course. In that course all the rollers seemed to fall into place — like on a slot machine everything came up cherries. It was all so easy for me. I felt that music was really for me; it turned me on. I just did what they later called “following your bliss.”

“However, I had no confidence that I could become a professional musician. I was writing stories in creative writing classes. My choral director at Stanford, Harold Schmidt, advised me to go to Harvard and study with two eminent composers,

Randall Thompson, a great choral composer whose niece I later married, and Walter Piston, who had written the standard harmony and counterpoint books. So I went to Harvard to get a Master's degree. **When I got the degree I wanted to compose and conduct, but I realized I still had a lot to learn. I looked for a job that wouldn't be full time. I had never learned to play the piano very well or to hear a score in my head without playing it. I felt that I could if I practiced enough. I also began learning to play the viola.**

"I got a job at Menlo College for \$50 a month and room and board. I conducted the glee club, and a pep band for the football games, and I was the tennis coach. But that gave me a lot of free time and I practiced four or five hours a day on the piano. I wrote a piano suite and choral and violin pieces. During that time Harold Schmidt hired me to be his assistant choral director at nearby Stanford.

"After three years, I was told it was time to move on. My mentor told me he wanted me to go to Europe for a year. That was the real eye-opener. I could go to a symphony, opera, chamber music every night. This changed my life. For the first time I was able to spend my mornings composing. I wrote a piano trio there (piano, violin and cello), and it was better than I thought it was going to be. I had it played by some friends and got a recording. Some Viennese friends heard it and said I should be a full-time composer. Maybe I could really do it!

"While I was still in Vienna I received a telegram from Harvard asking if I would take a post conducting and teaching there, and I turned it down. I knew what it would mean: I would be teaching the basic courses. I also knew I would be on trial for the first few years. I was 32 years old. Either I was going to be a composer and teach on the side, or I was going to be a teacher and conductor and do a little composing on the side. By this time, that was a no-brainer.

"I've never regretted turning down that job. My wife and I came back to this country and I took part-time teaching jobs for years until I was doing well enough to become a full-time freelance composer.

d. Mr. Mechem reflects on how he became a musician.

Play Audio Clip 5: Kirke Mechem's reflections

"That's not the way to become a musician at all — unless you have a certain knack for composing the way I did. There's no other reason why I should be a composer. It's certainly not my early training. It's not anything except a great love for music, which I got from my family and that strong desire to keep on writing music, no matter what.

Question: Did the course you take help you in some way in your composing, even if it wasn't the quickest route to a musical career?

"For writing operas and writing choral music, maybe you do need a varied background in the humanities and an interaction with people in different ways, as I did, for instance, in working on a newspaper, and being in sports all my life. That sort

of thing may give you a better chance to be able to re-create the emotions of different kinds of people, as you must in opera.

A good opera composer makes you feel that his or her music exactly describes a character better than words can. In *La Bohème* you know these people much more deeply because of what they sing and how they sing it. It's not the words so much as the music they sing and the instrumental music that accompanies it that gives their character depth and uniqueness. When I'm looking for a subject for a new opera, I look for a story that has many good characters, varied characters, because I know then I can write varied music to it. So possibly it did help me to have more than a strictly musical background.

e. Mr. Mechem discusses John Brown

Play Audio Clip 6: The Opera – John Brown

Question: Why did you choose to write an opera about John Brown?

Kirke Mechem: **“That’s easy. My father was the director of the Kansas State Historical Society, and a fine poet and a playwright. It was only natural for him to write a play about John Brown. He entered it in a national competition and it won. His play about John Brown was put on NBC in a national radio hook-up. It was a fine play. So I grew up being interested in John Brown.**

“When I lived in Vienna all operas everywhere in Europe were sung in the language where the opera was performed. So in Vienna a Mozart opera was sung in German, not in Italian, and the audience was all native Viennese (who spoke German). They were constantly laughing and having a great time. I finally got what opera is all about. It’s about emotions: humor or tragedy — a story that makes you laugh or brings you to tears. I saw that opera was like our musical theatre in the United States, except the music was a lot better. It was not only songs; the action also took place in music, which for a musician was just great fun. That’s what turned me on to opera.

“I decided I’d like to write an opera. Naturally I first thought of John Brown [because of my father’s play.] John Brown is a larger-than-life character. And when Frederick Douglass, former slave and the greatest African-American of the 19th century, gives one of his moving speeches it is great drama. And there is a touching love story: one of John Brown’s sons, Oliver, falls in love with a girl who is a pacifist. Think of the conflict there! Think of this man and his son who believe that slavery is so terrible you *have* to fight against it, while pacifists believe you should *never* fight, no matter what. That gave a focus, a dramatic controversy to solve.”

f. Mr. Mechem talks about how he writes an opera.

Play Audio Clip 7: How Kirke Mechem writes an opera

Question: In opera, do you write the music first or do you write the words first?

Kirke Mechem: **“In most songs, the lyrics are written first and then the music is written. But sometimes the music is written first, then words invented to fit the melody. But with an opera the story has to come first. The words are in the libretto (“little book” in Italian). The composer tries to write music that exactly fits the words and the emotion of what’s happening. For example, if a guy’s angry, you’re not going to write nice, slow, soft music for him. And if he’s talking about love to his girlfriend, you’re not going to write very fast, angular, dissonant music, either. The guy wouldn’t get to first base.**

“So the job of music in opera is to heighten the feeling, the emotion of the words.”

Question: Do you start at the beginning of the story and work through?

Kirke Mechem: “The fact that I did a lot of writing before going into music is a big advantage. An opera libretto doesn’t have to be written by a great poet. But you have to be a competent writer and know opera. I have always started with plays or novels. **With my father’s play, even though I changed it a lot, I had to start from the beginning.**

“First I had to do a lot of reading about John Brown. I realized my ideas about him were a lot different from my father’s.”

g. Advice for students from Mr. Mechem.

Play Audio Clip 8: Advice for students

Question: What advice would you give students interested in becoming a composer and involved in music?

“A decision to become a composer should come later. **A composer should become a good musician. I really wish I had practiced the piano more. Train yourself, your fingers and your ear, learn about the structure of music, harmony, counterpoint, musical forms. You must learn an instrument really well.** If you don’t get that experience when you’re young, you’ll never get the speed you need. Take it from me! Practice, practice, practice is what it takes to get that speed. By practicing an hour a day when you’re young you can accomplish more than by practicing four hours a day in your twenties and thirties. Don’t waste your youth; it is the only time you will ever have to easily learn skills like playing an instrument or learning foreign languages. I don’t mean that you should devote all your time to learning. But is an hour a day such a burden? Music is not always a very good vocation, but it’s the best avocation in the world.

9. After Kirke Mechem’s interview is shared in some way with the students, ask for a discussion of the muses’ plans for their composer matched or differed from his life story. Concluding points may include that there are different routes to composing an opera, but that a good grasp of musical technique is necessary. Also, it helps to be a writer of words as well as a writer of music, to strongly connect the two in one strong work of art.

In the end, as Mr. Mechem points out, there were other ways he could have proceeded that may have been easier, but his love of music carried him through everything he faced, and his having many varied experiences helped him understand people in a way that made writing opera, perhaps, easier for him. Finally, for him, opera is not some odd kind of music that is very different from popular music or classical music or musical theatre: all music is united by being a language in which people can share their feelings and experiences.

Extension

More advanced students can research whether great works of opera are more likely to be original stories or taken from earlier stories.

If they are interested in becoming a composer, students can study the lives of other composers and see how they prepared for their art.

Younger students can discuss a story they would like to see made into an opera, based on criteria they develop (such as big, bold characters, exciting story line, different point of view/conflicts).

Resources

The following resources can be used to support, supplement and extend the lessons in this unit.

Books

Berlin, I., Favreau, M., and Miller, S.F. (Eds.). (1998) Remembering slavery. New York: The New Press. (Book and audio recording)

Carlton, E. (2006). Patriotic treason. New York: Free Press.

Peterson, M.D. (2002). The legend revisited: John brown. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

Reynolds, D. S. (2005). John brown: Abolitionist. New York: Vintage Books.

Wahlman, M.S. (2001). Signs and symbols: African images in African American quilts. Atlanta: Tinwood Books.

Web Resources

To access these sites, you may have to reduce the extensions on the URL and go in earlier in the site if the pages do not come up immediately.

The Children of John Brown of Harpers Ferry

www.geocities.com/Heartland/Park/9580/jbfamily.html?200731

Information about Owen Brown – Last survivor of John Brown’s Raid

<http://kinnexions.com/album/kinnorth/brownj.htm>

Pictures of the important sites, paintings, tombstones, etc., of John Brown

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Park/9580/brown.html?220731>

Resources for high school first amendment rights lesson

http://www.highschooljournalism.org/Teachers/Lesson_plans/Detail.cfm?lessonplanid+378

Resource on rights and responsibilities of Students

<http://learingtogive.org/lessons/>

North Elba Farm information

<http://www.nyhistory.com/gerritsmith/nelba.htm>

<http://www.adkhistorycenter.org/jbweb/noelba.html>

Cemetery at North Elba

http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~frgen/essex/north_elba/john_brown.htm

West Virginia Historical Society collection
<http://www.wvculture.org/HiStory/wvhs2101.html>

John Brown: Road of an Abolitionist
<http://www.wvculture.org/HiStory/wvhs1321.html>

John Brown Memorial Park in Osawatomie – Kansas Historical Society
<http://www.kshs.org/places/johnbrown/index.htm>

Links to articles in the Valley Spirit (PA) – a newspaper covering Harper’s Ferry – Primary Source (These articles have very small print. You can copy them, paste them into a word file and increase the font size so that they can be read!) This is an excellent series of articles covering Harpers Ferry and the aftermath.
<http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/jbrown/spiritlhtml>

The Valley of the Shadow – This is an excellent site for insights into life during the time of John Brown through the Civil War focusing on two communities. There are options to search original source documents such as letters, diaries and wills during that time that refer to Brown and events surrounding his life. This is a strong site for original source documents and provides insights into how people sent news about family and life when only letter-writing was available. Check John J. Sibert to Mary Anna Sibert, December 8, 1859, Augusta County: B.S. Brooke to John T. Blake, November 14, 1859, Augusta County: Cyrus Alexander to John H. McCue, December 12, 1859, William McCue to John McCue, December 25, 1859, N. Sargent to Alexander H. H. Stuart, October 24, 1859, Augusta County: Diary of Joseph Addison Waddell (1855-1865. Also search the newspapers. Great site!
<http://valley.vedh.virginia.edu/>

Maps, drawings and photographs
<http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/jbrown/pics.html>

Lincoln’s speech defining Republican positions in relationship to John Brown’s actions
<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/cooper.htm>

Library of Congress site – search for John Brown
www.loc.gov

John Brown’s Body – history and lyrics; links to other songs of the era.
http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/songs/john_brown.html

Pictures and prints
<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/picamer/paBrown.html>

Frederick Douglas brief biography
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aap/douglass.html>

Brown’s speech to the court after Harpers Ferry
<http://education.ucdavis.edu/NEW/STC/lesson/socstud/railroad/Benet.htm>

Underground Railroad information

<http://education.ucdavis.edu/NEW/STC/lesson/socstud/railroad/Brown.htm>

Brief biography of John Brown

<http://www.civilwarhome.com/johnbrownbio.htm>

History of John Brown

http://afgen.com/john_brown1.html

Kennedy Farm House where the plan for Harpers Ferry was devised. QuickTime tour of the house. Cool site!

<http://www.johnbrown.org/toc.htm>

Harpers Ferry Raid

<http://www.wvculture.org/History/jnobrown.html>

Bleeding Kansas information

http://www.territorialkansasonline.org/cgiwrap/imlskto/index.php?SCREEN=bio_sketches/brown_john

Excerpts from letters – Brown and family

http://www.territorialkansasonline.org/cgiwrap/imlskto/index.php?SCREEN=personalities&topic_id=151&search=Brown,%20John,%201800-1859

Information about Brown's picture

<http://www.npg.si.edu/exh/awash/brown2.htm>

Pictures of places important in John Brown's life

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/hafe/jbfort.htm>

John Brown's trial, surrounding issues. Letters from jail, interviews, trial report and testimony, links to images, maps and chronology, Thoreau's plea and Lee's report, other links. Great site!

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/johnbrown/brownhome.html>

Information about the number and distribution of free Negroes in the US 1619 – 1860

<http://www.answers.com/topic/free-negroes-1619-1860>

Kansas-Nebraska Act

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kansas_Nebraska_Act

Information about "The Browns" – genealogy information

<http://www.kancoll.org/articles/browns.htm>

Underground Railroad Quilt Code

<http://educ.queensu.ca/~fmc.may2004/Underground.html>

Quilt code information

<http://www.osblackhistory.com/quilts.php>

John Brown Historical Association of Illinois

<http://www.pubtheo.com/page.asp?pid=1063>

Eyewitness description of hanging of John Brown

http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1955/2/1955_2_4.shtml