

Topic: Transatlantic Slave Trade

“The Binta Project”

<p>TOPIC DESCRIPTION</p>	<p>Stemming from the 2016 Remake of Alex Haley's <i>Roots</i>, and Kunta Kinte's solace in the original song of his grandmother, “The Binta Project” is designed to introduce students to the enduring power of music and song as a medium for the expression of hope, transferring of culture, sustaining heritage/tradition and method for uniting the various parts of the diaspora. <i>Roots</i> Executive Producer Amir “Questlove” Thompson speaks of the theme as a “recurring motif that will somehow travel through all eras of the movie” and that “somehow this haunting melody will find its way into the psyche of whatever character.” The Binta Project” is based in the project-based learning curriculum, and will allow students to work collaboratively to trace a single song from the shores of West Africa through African-American emancipation, and use a multi-layered approach to analyze the historical events that apply to generational expressions of the song. Students will experience how the series of events will change, however, the resonating power of the single song will serve to unify a culture over several generations.</p>
<p>STANDARDS ALIGNED TO THIS TOPIC</p>	<p>AH1.H.1.2 Use Historical Comprehension to...Analyze visual, literary and musical sources.</p> <p>AH1.H.3.4: Analyze voluntary and involuntary immigration trends through Reconstruction in terms of causes, regions of origin and destination, cultural contributions and public and governmental response.</p> <p>WH.H.5.3 : Analyze colonization in terms of the desire for access to resources and markets as well as the consequences on indigenous cultures, population, and environment (e.g., commercial revolution, Columbian exchange, religious conversion, spread of Christianity, spread of disease,</p>

	<p>spread of technology, conquistadors, slave trade, encomienda system, enslavement of indigenous people, mixing of populations, etc.).</p> <p>NCSS Standards 1. c: Describe ways in which language, stories, folktales, music, and artistic creations serve as expressions of culture and influence behavior of people living in a particular culture</p>
<p>KEY CONCEPTS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Slavery ● Music ● Oral History ● Resistance & Rebellion ● History
<p>OTHER CONCEPTS TO CONSIDER</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Spirituality & Religion ● Pan-Africanism
<p>GENERALIZATIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Music often expresses hope for the future. ● A community's oral history can shape its collective identity. ● Musical expression may prove helpful in better understanding historical context. ● The structure of song can be modified across generations, however, the central themes remain the same. ● In music, song structure may change, however the underlying message often remains the same. ● The conditions of the enslaved can often be heard in their music and song.
<p>OVERARCHING INQUIRY QUESTIONS</p> <p>(Write the number of the resource for each question)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What role has song played in the transition from African to American? ● How does music influence our understanding of the African American experience? ● Why sing in the face of adversity/struggle? ● How has oral tradition reinforced the sense of community among African Americans?

ADDITIONAL
RESOURCES

- Musical Passage: A Voyage to 1688 Jamaica is a site that details one of the earliest documented, written accounts of African music in the Americas. Hans Sloane, well known for his late 17th, early 18th travels, provided one of the transcriptions of authentic African music while journeying to Jamaica. The website not only provides written text of the music, but, after your first click, you can hear the sounds of the kalimba playing through your computer speakers. The website is notable in that it offers an indepth account of Sloane’s initial reasoning for journeying to the island, but it also provides an overview of how he became focused on studying the music of the enslaved, and the interconnectivity of the diverse sounds. The site has an inviting layout with well-positioned images of Sloane’s drawings. This is a great resource for high school students who will be drawn to the media within the Musical Passages site.

<http://www.musicalpassage.org/>

- Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass focuses on the totality of the experience of the enslaved’s transition from bondage to freedom. Douglass’s ability to detail the intricancies of his personal journey always provides researchers with solid information on the transition from slavery to freedom. However, for this project, his ability to convey raw emotion within his deeply contemplative and sophisticated language shines a light on the role of song within the collective spirits of the enslaved. In the excerpt below, he has a particular story that he tells of the significance of the spirituals to the enslaved experience. In the passage, students will experience a singular moment within the lives of African-Americans that resonates on spiritual, psychological and social levels. Most notably, this passage allows the reader to stand beside Douglass outside the “circle” when he explains

that “ I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear.”

<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/abolitn/abaufda4t.html>

- Black Talk: How the Music of Black America Created a Radical Alternative to Western Literary Tradition offers a well-thought examination of the deeply personal and socially connective characteristics of the African-American oral tradition. In the attached excerpt, he focuses on the core of African music and its ability to “[bring] out the individualism in an otherwise destroyed personality.” While the music was important to individual emotional expression, it was equally important as it “became the basis on which a group of individuals could join together, commit a social act, and remain individuals throughout, and this is in the face of overt suppression.” The oral tradition has an interconnectiveness that resonates from the individual to the group, but, as we will see in the project, it resonates across time and history. This, along with so many other reasons, is why we sing in the face of adversity.
- Faith Under Fire: Jay Z's 'Spiritual' Is A Modern Song Of Sorrow
- The article is a 21st century look at the role of the spiritual in expressing sorrow associated with the African-American experience. The article focuses on music mogul Jay-Z’s lyrics in the song “Spiritual” and, aside from his wealth, personalizes his experiences as a vulnerable Black Man who “creates intimacy with listeners by acknowledging mutual terror and mutual isolation. No amount amount of wealth or prestige allows him to forget that he is a black man and the father of a little girl.” A parallel can be drawn to the sense of powerlessness experienced by Kunta Kinte, also a father to a little girl, who he too wants to protect, but also realizes the terror of his experience as a black man in America. This article

	<p>is useful in that it supplements the articles above in the timeless expression of sorrow through song by a modern, African-American icon. Comparing the audio from “Spiritual” with the other songs from the project will also provide for meaningful class discussion of the same theme of singing in the midst of adversity.</p> <p>http://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2016/07/13/485743005/faith-under-fire-jay-zs-spiritual-is-a-modern-song-of-sorrow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">••

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 13-15.

The slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm, for the monthly allowance for themselves and their fellow-slaves, were peculiarly enthusiastic. While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out — if not in the word, in the sound; — and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. Into all of their songs they would manage to weave something of the Great House Farm. Especially would they do this, when leaving home. They would then sing most exultingly the following words: —

"I am going away to the Great House Farm!
O, yea! O, yea! O!"

This they would sing, as a chorus, to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do.

I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. The mere recurrence to those songs, even now, afflicts me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. If any one wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance-day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence, analyze the sounds that shall pass through

the chambers of his soul, — and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because "there is no flesh in his obdurate heart."

I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. At least, such is my experience. I have often sung to drown my sorrow, but seldom to express my happiness. Crying for joy, and singing for joy, were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery. The singing of a man cast away upon a desolate island might be as appropriately considered as evidence of contentment and happiness, as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same emotion.