

Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier

In this lesson students will examine the impact of the Revolutionary War on soldiers and their families through understanding of the events of the war, as explained in their textbooks, and through the lyrics and music from a popular song of the time period.

National Core Arts Standards: General Music

General Music: Connecting

MU:Cn11.0.5

Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

General Music: Responding

MU:Re7.1.5

Demonstrate and explain, citing evidence, how selected music connects to and is influenced by specific interests, experiences, purposes, or contexts.

California State Content Standards for History/Social Studies

5.6 Students understand the course and consequences of the American Revolution.

3. Identify the different roles women played during the Revolution

4. Understand the personal impact and economic hardship of the war on families, problems of financing the war, wartime inflation, and laws against hoarding goods and materials and profiteering

LESSON SEQUENCE

This lesson should come towards the end of the history/social studies unit on the Revolutionary War. Having some understanding of events that led up to the war, significant events in the war (e.g. Battle of Lexington and Concord) will help students in understanding the context of the war.

1. Listening

- This lesson features the song, “Johnny Has Gone For a Soldier.”
 - The song is based on an old Irish folksong (Siúil a Rúin). It has been around since the 1600s. It became popular in America during the Revolutionary War, and experienced a resurgence of popularity during the American Civil War.
 - There are many versions of this song out there. The lyrics for this lesson are to James Taylor’s version. I’ve chosen this version as it gives a clearer picture of the experience of those left behind by the soldier who has gone off to war.
- Distribute lyrics and listen to the song.

- <https://vimeo.com/26480347> (Official video, shows James Taylor and violinist, Mark O'Conner performing the song)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKZdcdFVQtE> (This version shows illustrations of Revolutionary War battles shown to James Taylor's music)

Johnny Has Gone For a Soldier

There she sits on Buttermilk Hill
Oh, who could blame her cryin' her fill
Every tear would turn a mill
Jonny has gone for a soldier

Me-oh-my she loved him so
It broke her heart just to see him go
Only time will heal her woe
Johnny has gone for a soldier

She sold her rock and she sold her reel
She sold her only spinning wheel
To buy her love a sword of steel
Johnny has gone for a soldier

She'll dye her dress, she'll dye it red
And in the streets go begging for bread
The one she loves from her has fled
Johnny has gone for a soldier

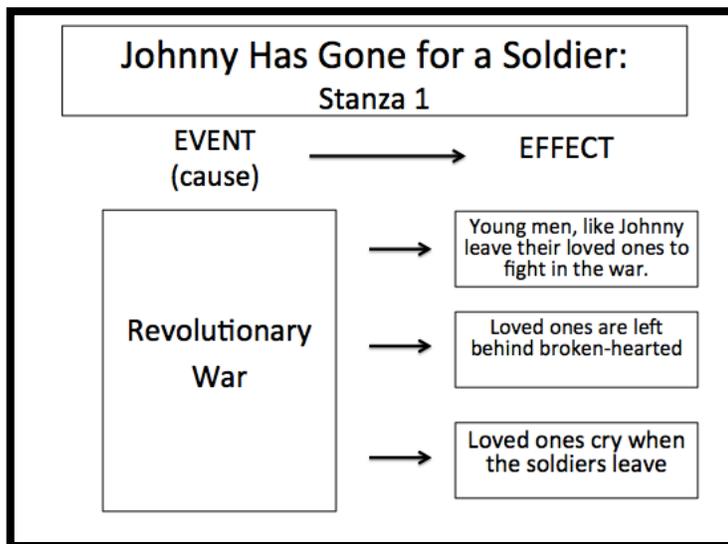
Johnny has gone for a soldier...

(Lyrics @ http://lyrics.wikia.com/wiki/James_Taylor:Johnny_Has_Gone_For_A_Soldier)

2. Analyze Lyrics

- Break class up into 8 small groups.
 - Assign each group a stanza (two groups for each stanza)
 - The group will discuss the stanza and determine what is happening, and how the war has caused it.
 - Students might need help with some of the references in the lyrics.
 - Stanza One
 - “Every tear would turn a mill” – This refers to waterwheels that were used to turn grindstones in grain mills, and operate saws in sawmills. It is figuratively saying that she is so sad, and her tears are so huge, that they could turn the waterwheel at the mill. You might need to show them a picture of a waterwheel.
 - Stanza Three

- “She sold her rock and she sold her reel” -- The rock and the reel are parts of the spinning wheel. The rock is the part on which the raw material (such as wool or flax) is held. The reel is the bobbin or spool onto which the new thread or yarn is wound. Basically it’s saying that she sold her most important tools, maybe even the tools she needs for her job, to buy Johnny a sword.
- Stanza Four
 - “She’ll dye her dress, she’ll dye it red” -- Red was the color of courage in colonial times. This is signifying that she will have to be brave and do whatever it takes to support Johnny in his quest at being a soldier, even if it means she’ll have to beg for food.
- Groups will create a half-multiflow map to show the cause-and-effect relationship of the action in the lyrics and the war.
- Here is an example for the first stanza:



- After the groups have finished their maps, have them meet with the other group that analyzed the same stanza. Ask groups to come to consensus on the effects of the war portrayed in the poem.
 - Groups share with the class.
 - As groups share out, have each student make their own multiflow map that shows all of the effects mentioned in the poem.
3. Analyze music
- Review the elements of music – pitch, tempo, dynamics
 - Listen to an instrumental version of the song
 - If you have Amazon Prime, you can stream these versions free of charge
 - https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00491LO6A?ie=UTF8&*Version*=1&*entries*=0

- https://www.amazon.com/Johnny-Has-Gone-Soldier/dp/B00TJL97X2/ref=sr_1_102?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1452611500&sr=1-102&keywords=johnny+has+gone+for+a+soldier&refinements=p_n_feature_browse-bin%3A625151011
- Here are some links to instrumental versions on YouTube
 - Piano - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JqgabOudCs>
 - Guitar - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNCJRMn4-MU>
- As students listen to the song have them take notes on what they notice about the pitch, tempo, and dynamics.
- After listening come to agreement about what was they noticed about pitch, tempo, and dynamics. Discuss what mood these elements create together. Students should come up with something like “sad.”
- Discuss how the elements of the music and the lyrics work together to create a “picture” of how average people were affected by the Revolutionary War.

4. Extension options

- Point of View
 - Have students listen to versions of the song sung by women. There are many out there. Here are two:
 - (sung by Illinois All-State Choir, 2003)
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9qxmYUh_jo
 - (sung by Ronnie Gilbert – folksinger)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0apcxnl3Ak>
 - In small groups, pairs, or individually have students discuss their difference in the message of the song.
 - Compare and contrast the experience of hearing the song sung in a male voice versus a female voice.
 - Is there any change in having the song in first person that changes the message to any degree?
 - Is there any change in the musical elements hearing it sung in female voices that changes the message?
 - Students may share their discussions by creating a Thinking Map of their choice, verbally sharing, or writing a paragraph describing the differences of experiences of male and female voices.
- Write a New War Song
 - Review an event related to the Revolutionary War such as the Boston Massacre, or the Stamp Act
 - In small groups, pairs, or individually have students create a partial multiflow map showing the effects on average people of the event.
 - Provide a piece of instrumental music that captures the same mood that colonists would have felt based on their experience with the war event.
 - There are many free karaoke tracks out there that are great for this type of application.

- You can offer just one to all students, or have a few to choose from.
- Alternatively you can have students bring in the music (it MUST match the same mood).
- If you have access to technology such as GarageBand students could even create their own melody.
- Write a poem/lyrics that expresses the effects of the event.
 - Students may use the same pattern in their lyrics as those in “Johnny Has Gone For a Soldier” or choose their own pattern.
- Hold a “Revolutionary War Concert” in the classroom in which all the groups share their songs.
 - Songs can be sung or spoken to the music
 - (Option) Students print their lyrics for the class or have one version that can be projected, and teach the whole class to sing the song.

Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier: Stanza 1

EVENT
(cause)



EFFECT

Revolutionary
War



Young men, like Johnny
leave their loved ones to
fight in the war.



Loved ones are left
behind broken-hearted



Loved ones cry when
the soldiers leave