

# Sheet Music from Canada's Past



## Music and Canadian Identity

A teaching strategy for use with the *Sheet Music from Canada's Past* website

In this activity, students will conduct a group analysis of a sample song from the Library and Archives Canada's *Sheet Music from Canada's Past* website, examining and comparing the historical context with Canada today. Following this, students will compose song lyrics on the same theme. Some groups may choose to perform their music as an extension activity.

### Subject/Age

Music and Language Arts; Ages 14+

### Learning Outcomes (WCP) Objectives (QC)

### Learning Outcomes (APEF) Expectations (ON)

### Fine Arts Outcomes (Music):

In completing this activity, students will:

- Describe some aspects of the historical context of music that they sing, play, or listen to
- Explain the function of certain musical forms in daily life

### Social Studies Outcomes (History):

- Ask questions, identify problems, and effectively use historical research methods to investigate topics and issues in history
- Demonstrate an understanding of the elements of Canadian identity

### Language Arts Outcomes:

#### R (Reading):

- Read and demonstrate an understanding of a range of literary and informational texts, both contemporary and from historical periods

#### W (Writing):

- Produce written work for a variety of purposes, with a focus on interpreting and analyzing information, ideas, themes and issues and on supporting opinions with convincing evidence.

#### O/V (Oral and Visual Communication)

- Use listening techniques and oral communication skills to participate in classroom discussions and more formal activities (group research and work, presentation or performance)

### These Language Arts Outcomes correspond to:

- WPC GO - R: 2.2; W: 2.3; O/V: 5.1/4.4
- Quebec objectives - 2.1/2.3 (Reading); 2 (Writing); 2R and



## 6 (Oral)

- APEF GCO - R: 7.3; W: 9; O/V: 2.1

### Student Demonstration of Learning

Students will conduct a group analysis of a sample song from the *Sheet Music from Canada's Past* website, examining and comparing the historical context with Canada today. Following this, students will compose original song lyrics on the same theme. Some groups may choose to perform their music as an extension activity.

### Materials/Resources Required

Computers with access to the Internet  
Adobe Acrobat to read PDF files (available for free at:  
URL: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>)  
Student Handout 1 (Historical Context and Music Analysis)  
Student Handout 2 (Songwriting Guide)  
Assessment Criteria

### Web Links

*Sheet Music from Canada's Past*

URL: <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/sheetmusic/>

*Images Canada*

URL: <http://www.imagescanada.ca/>

*From Colony to Country: A Reader's Guide to Canadian Military History*

URL: <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/military/>

*Canadian War Museum*

URL: <http://www.civilization.ca/membrs/collect/colcwme.html>

*Canada's Digital Collections*

URL: [http://collections.ic.gc.ca/E/SL\\_canadaatwar.asp#W](http://collections.ic.gc.ca/E/SL_canadaatwar.asp#W)

*National Archives of Canada*

URL: <http://www.archives.ca/>

American Library of Congress sheet music resources:

*African-American Sheet Music, 1850-1920*

URL: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award97/rpbhtml/aasmhome.html>

*America Singing: Nineteenth-Century Song Sheets*

URL: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amsshtml/amsshome.html>

*Historic American Sheet Music, 1850-1920*

URL: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award97/ncdhtml/hasmhome.html>

*Music for the Nation: American Sheet Music, 1870-1885*

URL: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/smhtml/smhome.html>

### Instructional Procedures

Students should be aware of the history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.



### **Large-Group Work**

Facilitate a whole-class brainstorm to identify the topics, issues and themes that are the focus of current popular songs.

Possible themes include:

- War/pacifism
- Patriotism
- Social issues such as drugs, poverty or homelessness
- Politics
- Love and relationships
- Remembrance
- Other issues

### **Small-Group Work**

#### ***Task 1***

Students are invited to bring to class audio recordings and printed lyrics of songs from their personal collections that address the above issues. Have students divide up into small groups.

Each group should choose one song from among those brought in by the group members. The group will listen to the song, guided by the following questions:

1. Which theme is being addressed in the song?
2. What opinions are being expressed regarding this theme?
3. Do you think this song reflects today's general societal values regarding this issue?
4. How do your personal opinions resemble or differ from those expressed in the song?
5. What major (historical, political, natural, cultural) events might have influenced the lyricists' point of view?
6. How is language (song lyrics) used to effectively express the song's point of view?

Once the group has finished listening to the song, each member of the group will complete Part 1 of [Student Handout 1](#), and then share and compare answers with the other group members.

#### ***Task 2***

Each group will select a song to analyze from the *Sheet Music from Canada's Past* website. Groups should first brainstorm words that will help in their search. When they have chosen a piece of music, they should print the song and read it once.



Groups will begin their song analysis with research into the historical context of the song, with a focus on the theme of the song (see Part 2 of Student Handout 1). For example:

- Love songs: What were social attitudes toward love, relationships and marriage at the time the song was written? Are there any interesting stories about the love affairs of famous figures at the time?
- War: What conflicts were taking place, or about to take place? What side would the songwriter have been on? What were other major political events of the day?
- Politics: What were the major political movements of the day? Who were the major players on the political scene?
- Social attitudes: What were attitudes on alcohol? Smoking? Other drugs? How were the poor and homeless viewed? How were visible minorities and Aboriginal people treated and viewed?

Students should contrast these events and attitudes with those in their region of Canada today.

### ***Task 3***

Once the research is completed, each group member analyzes the group's chosen song using Part 3 of Student Handout 1. Group members are to share their results when all members have finished.

### ***Task 4***

In the same groups, students will compose original song lyrics on the same theme. They should express their own viewpoints through the lyrics of the song (see Student Handout 2).

The lyrics can be presented to the class either as a performance or a recital. The work could be displayed in a manner appropriate to class resources.

### **Notes on Enriching this Activity**

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