



Sheet Music from Canada's Past



Music and Canadian Identity

Student Handout 1: Historical Context and Musical Analysis

The early twentieth century was a period in which popular music was a common form of self-expression. Most middle-class families owned a piano, and standard education included at least the rudiments of music, so when the creative muse stirred the housewife, banker or soldier, the result was often a song. The subject of the songs reflected the tastes and events of the time. As such, they are an excellent resource for those looking back in history. This lesson takes a look at music from Canada's past and gives you the opportunity to explore older Canadian sheet music and analyze the issues that gave rise to the music.

Part 1

On your own, answer the following questions about the song your group has chosen. When you have finished, compare and discuss your answers with the other group members.

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?

Part 2

Select a song from the Library and Archives Canada's *Sheet Music from Canada's Past* website and answer the following questions:

Name: _____ Date: _____

7. Title of the sheet music:

8. When published:

9. Read your sheet music through once. Highlight or underline references to areas that suggest a theme.

10. When completed, research the events and social trends and attitudes of the period that relate to the issues in the song. 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?

Compare these attitudes with your own (or those of other Canadians). Also compare events.

Complete the following chart:



Events, Trends and Attitudes

At the time the song was written	In the present day
Event:	Similar/contrasting event:
Event:	Similar/contrasting event:
Trend:	Similar/contrasting trend:
Trend:	Similar/contrasting trend:
Attitude:	Similar/contrasting attitude:
Attitude:	Similar/contrasting attitude:
_____:	Similar/contrasting _____:
_____:	Similar/contrasting _____:
_____:	Similar/contrasting _____:
_____:	Similar/contrasting _____:



Part 3

On your own, complete this music analysis for the song chosen by your group. Once everyone has finished, compare and discuss your answers with the other members of your group.

11. Do you agree with the message of the song? Why or why not?

12. Choose one or two phrases in the song that are interesting to you and explain why.

13. How do the lyrics of this song make you feel?

14. How do you think the public would have reacted to this song at the time it was published?

15. Do you think music such as this would have been important to people of the time (the way television is now)? Why or why not?
