



Smithsonian Folkways

The Underground Railroad: A Musical Journey to *Follow the Drinking Gourd*

A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson

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Summary:

The following is designed for middle school orchestra (also easily adaptable to middle school general music) students including experiences in creative musical activities and the historical and socio-cultural impacts of slavery on African and American cultures.

Suggested Grade Levels: 6-8

Country: United States

Region: North America

Culture Group: African American

Genre: Spirituals

Instruments: Voice

Language: English

Co-Curricular Areas: History

National Standards: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9

Prerequisites: None

Objectives

- Sing *Follow the Drinking Gourd*
- Identify characteristics of slave life and the Underground Railroad, including the importance of the Big Dipper
- Learn *Lande Ngombele* for performance and cultural discussion

Materials:

- Smithsonian Folkways, "Follow the Drinking Gourd" by Pete Seeger and Ed Renehan from *Fifty Sail on Newburgh Bay* (Cat. # FW05257_205)
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/pete-seeger-and-ed-renehan/fifty-sail-on-newburgh-bay/american-folk/music/album/smithsonian>
- Smithsonian Folkways, *Every Tone a Testimony* by Various Artists (Cat # SFW47003)
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/every-tone-a-testimony/african-american-spoken-history-poetry-prose/album/smithsonian>

- Smithsonian Folkways, “Mutomboko and Luwendo” by Various Artists from *Ceremonial, Topical, and Dance Songs the Luba of the Democratic Republic of Congo* (Cat. # ILAMTR039)
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/ceremonial-topical-and-dance-songs-from-the-luba-of-the-democratic-republic-of-congo/world/music/album/smithsonian>

Lesson Segments:

1. **Musical and Cultural Significance of *Follow the Drinking Gourd***
(National Standards 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9)
2. **Call and Response in *Lande Ngombele*** (National Standards 1, 2, 3, 6, 9)
3. **Motivic Improvisation** (National Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9)

1. Musical and Cultural Significance of *Follow the Drinking Gourd*

- **Objectives:**

- Sing *Follow the Drinking Gourd* and relate the words of the song to a trip on the Underground Railroad
- Identify a typical underground railroad route on a United States map
- Identify the Big Dipper – Drinking Gourd – constellation and discuss its significance for the African American slaves
- Compare modern-day slavery to slavery of African Americans

- **Materials:**

- Internet availability for Smithsonian Folkways, “Follow the Drinking Gourd” by Pete Seeger and Ed Renehan from *Fifty Sail on Newburgh Bay* (Cat. # FW05257_205) and *Every Tone a Testimony* by various artists (Cat # SFW47003)
- Internet availability for the National Geographic Online, *The Underground Railroad*.
- Children’s book - *Follow the Drinking Gourd* by J. Winter, (1992). New York: Dragonfly Books
- Book - *Stitching stars: The story of Harriet Powers* by M. E. Lyons, (1997). New York: Aladdin

- **Procedure:**

- **Day One:**

- a. Teacher reads the book *Follow the Drinking Gourd* to the students
- b. Identify and locate on stellar map the Big Dipper - Drinking Gourd Listen to “Follow the Drinking Gourd” by Pete Seeger and Ed Renehan from *Fifty Sail on Newburgh Bay* (Cat. # FW05257_205)
- c. Students sing *Follow the Drinking Gourd*
- d. Students identify Underground Railroad route from the coded words in the song – locate on a United States map –

- e. Students take a trip on the Underground Railroad via National Geographic Online

○ **Day Two:**

- a. Students sing *Follow the Drinking Gourd*
- b. Listen to portions of Frederick Douglass' autobiography "The Underground Railroad and the Fugitive Slave Law" by Ossie Davis from *Autobiography of Frederick Douglass, Vol. 2* (Cat. # FW05526_103)
- c. Students discuss what the slaves might have experienced in the Old South
- d. View the Freedom Quilts in *Stitching stars: The story of Harriet Powers* by M. E. Lyons
- e. Students identify images on the quilts and what they may have represented to the artist
- f. Students research additional songs sung by the slaves of this period– students chose a song, sing it then transpose it for their orchestra instruments; students should be prepared to play one at the next class; see the links below for resources for additional songs:
 - 1. *Every Tone a Testimony*
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/every-tone-a-testimony/african-american-spoken-history-poetry-prose/album/smithsonian>
 - 2. Reading Rainbow lesson plan for *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, freely available online
 - 3. Third grade song collection of slave songs – *Songs of Slavery*, freely available online

○ **Day Three:**

- a. Sing and play new songs discovered from the last lesson.
- b. Students discuss modern-day slavery after reading *The Slave in the Garage* by M. Fischer
- c. Students discuss the similarities and the differences between African American slavery of the New World and modern-day slavery
- d. Students work in small groups of three or four and write one verse of lyrics for a modern-day version of *Follow the Drinking Gourd* for present day slaves

Assessment: How is the plight of modern-day slaves the same as the African American slaves? How is it different?

2. Lesson Plan on Call and Response in *Lande Ngombele*

- **Objectives:**

- Give students a cultural context of the folk song *Lande Ngombe* of the Democratic of Congo (formerly Zaire)
 - Learn the context of the motive as it relates to “following Ngombe”
 - Perform the melody, harmony, and percussion parts
 - Improvise upon the melody of *Lande Ngombe* during rhythmic ostinato
- **Materials:**
 - *World on a String* method book by Terese Volk and Ramona Holmes, 2001, Alfred Publishing
 - Recording of *Lande Ngombe*
 - Smithsonian Folkways, “Mutomboko and Luwendo” by Various Artists from *Ceremonial, Topical, and Dance Songs the Luba of the Democratic Republic of Congo* (Cat. # ILAMTR039)
 - String Instruments
 - African drums: a double bell, banana bell, shekere, and conga drum (or use traditional percussion available)
- **Procedure:**
 - **Day One:**
 - a. Students sight-read and become familiar with the melodies and harmonies in *Lande Ngombe*
 - b. Students learn cultural context of piece being a typical song of the Kikongo people that is sung at weddings, parties, and other social gatherings
 - c. Students learn that “Ngombe” is a person’s name, and that the words are “teasing, implying a fickleness of love” (Volk, 2001)
 - **Day Two:**
 - a. Students play through the melodies and harmonies in *Lande Ngombe* again
 - b. All students learn the double bell and shekere parts on their own instruments in notes of a D Major chord, volunteers play on double bell and shekere
 - c. Different sections of the orchestra take turns performing the two percussion parts
 - d. Different sections of the orchestra call a rhythm, while another responds
 - **Day Three:**
 - a. Students begin with call and response in melody/harmony (as written in score)
 - b. Students read through rhythms again as a large group
 - c. Ensemble members take turns improvising upon the melody during a call or response as different sections of the orchestra continue the rhythmic ostinati
 - d. Student volunteers perform on double bell and shekere

Assessment: Can the students discuss the cultural significance of the tune? Can they play the percussion parts and improvise?

3. Motivic Improvisation

- **Objectives:**

- Improvise motives for the story events of a trip on the underground railroad
- Play the orchestral arrangement of *Follow the Drinking Gourd*
- Identify the motives in the orchestral arrangement of *Follow the Drinking Gourd*
- Create and perform a piece of program music based on this trip

- **Materials:**

- *Follow the Drinking Gourd (orchestra arrangement)* by Carrie Gruselle
- Folk melody *Follow the Drinking Gourd* including the lyrics notated in the correct staff and range for each instrument in the ensemble
- African drums – djembes, congas – and other appropriate percussion instruments.
- Roll of large paper – 36” x 18”

- **Procedure:**

- **Day One:**

- a. Students play the melody of *Follow the Drinking Gourd* in unison from handout
- b. Half the orchestra sings the melody and half play; switch parts
- c. In groups of two or three students create improvised motives based on the story events from the melody and a trip on the Underground Railroad.
- d. Each group identifies, develops and revises musical story events for use at the next class.
- e. Practice portions of Gruselle’s orchestra arrangement of *Follow the Drinking Gourd*

- **Day Two:**

- a. Practice Gruselle’s *Follow the Drinking Gourd*
- b. Students identify motives from the piece and describe the story events these motives bring to mind
- c. In groups, students organize their story events with the corresponding student-created motives. Encourage students to map out their program music with non-traditional notation such as pictures, drawn cues or abstract symbols.
- d. Make percussion instruments available to the groups for added rhythmic interest.

- e. Sing the folk melody – remind the students they can use this melody either in its entirety or short portions of it in their piece.
- o **Day Three:**
 - a. Listen to Marsalis' *Follow the Drinking Gourd*
 - b. Are there motives present in this music? Can you imagine the life of an African slave? What in this music represents this mind picture?
 - c. In groups practice their created piece from day 1 & 2; revise and edit as needed. Prepare to perform their piece.
 - d. Draw the final completed piece in pictorial or abstract notation on a large piece of paper
 - e. Practice Gruselle's *Follow the Drinking Gourd*

Assessment: Groups share their pieces with the entire ensemble. Members of the ensemble audience identify the motives and describe the story events. Members of the group reflect on the performance and write a response to the following question: What musical portions of the piece best described the story?

Resource List

- *Every tone a testimony*. Washington, DC: Folkways Records. Retrieved August 31, 2008 from <http://www.folkways.si.edu/every-tone-a-testimony/african-american-spoken-history-poetry-prose/album/smithsonian>
- Fischer, M.A. (May, 2008). The slave in the garage. *Reader's Digest*.
- Gruselle, C.L. (Arr.). (2003). *Follow the drinking gourd* [string orchestra]. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing.
- Imeyrial (2008). *Songs of Slavery*. Melissa, TX: TeacherTube. Retrieved on August 31, 2008
- Lyons, M. E. (1997). *Stitching stars: The story of Harriet Powers*. New York: Aladdin.
- Marsalis, W. (1997). Follow the drinking gourd. On *Blood on the Field* [CD]. New York: Columbia.
- National Geographic Online. *The Underground Railroad*. Retrieved July 27, 2008.
- Ossie, D. (1966). The underground railroad and the fugitive slave law. On *Autobiography of Frederick Douglass: Vol. 2*. Washington, DC: Folkways

Records. Retrieved July 27, 2008, from <http://www.folkways.si.edu/ossie-davis/autobiography-of-frederick-douglass-vol-2/african-american-spoken-american-history-oral-history-biography/album/smithsonian>

- Reading Rainbow Episode #96. *Follow the Drinking Gourd*. Baltimore, MD: GPN Educational Media. Retrieved August 31, 2008.
- Seeger, P. & Renehan, E. (1976). Follow the drinking gourd. On *Fifty sail on Newburgh Bay*. Washington, DC: Folkways Records. Retrieved July 27, 2008, from <http://www.folkways.si.edu/pete-seeger-and-ed-renehan/fifty-sail-on-newburgh-bay/american-folk/music/album/smithsonian>
- Silber, I. & Silverman, J. (1960). *Songs of the Civil War*. New York: Columbia University.
- Volk, T. M., & Holmres, R. (2001). *World on a string* (method book). Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing.
- Winter, J. (1992). *Follow the drinking gourd*. New York: Dragonfly Books