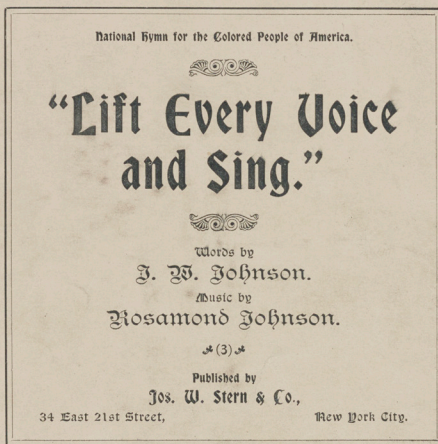


# America in Song, 1814–1900



*America;*

*My country, 'tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,  
Of thee I sing;  
Land where my fathers died,  
Land of the pilgrims' pride,  
From every mountain side  
Let freedom ring.*

## AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet,  
Whose stern, impassioned stress  
A thoroughfare for freedom beat  
Across the wilderness!  
America! America!  
God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self-control,  
Thy liberty in law!

*O say can you see ~~through~~ by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,  
Whose broad stripes & bright stars through the perilous fight  
O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming?  
And the rocket's red glare, the bomb bursting in air,  
gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,  
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free & the home of the brave?*

*On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,  
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,  
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,  
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?*

*Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,  
In full glory reflects now shines on the stream,  
'Tis the star-spangled banner — O long may it wave  
O'er the land of the free & the home of the brave!*

# America in Song, 1814–1900

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED IN 2013, REVISED IN 2024)

*Tim Bailey taught elementary and middle school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s director of curriculum development and instructional design.*

## UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on primary and secondary source materials. These skills will enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate documents and other resources of historical significance.

The four lessons in this unit explore songs written by Americans about America in the nineteenth century. Students will listen to music, read lyrics, and evaluate short historical essays. You will assess students’ understanding through class discussions and activity sheets.

Students will be able to

- Read, explain, and evaluate the lyrics of several patriotic songs (“The Star-Spangled Banner,” “America the Beautiful,” “America” [“My Country ’Tis of Thee”], and “Lift Every Voice and Sing”)
- Analyze and assess historical circumstances, events, and/or situations
- Analyze, assess, and compare the relationship and significance of a primary source with its historical context
- Compare and contrast primary sources
- Explain what historical contexts have prompted patriotic reflections

**NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS:** Four 45-minute class periods


**GRADE LEVEL(S):** 3–5

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- According to the lyrics, what are some American ideals?
- According to the lyrics, what is special about the United States?
- According to the lyrics, what do American people owe to each other?
- According to the lyrics, what do American people owe to their country?
- According to the lyrics, what does the United States owe to each citizen?

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.



CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.2: Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.5: Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.9: Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1D: Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.D: Review the key ideas expressed and draw conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained from discussions.

## MATERIALS

- Source 1: The History behind the Song: The War of 1812 and “The Star-Spangled Banner” by Tim Bailey
- Activity Sheet 1: Critical Thinking Questions: “The War of 1812 and ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’”
- Source 2: Francis Scott Key, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” 1814. Transcribed from a handwritten manuscript by Francis Scott Key in the Maryland Historical Society, [mdhs.org/digitalimage/star-spangled-banner-handwritten](http://mdhs.org/digitalimage/star-spangled-banner-handwritten)
- Activity Sheet 2: In Your Own Words: “The Star-Spangled Banner,” Verse 1
- Source 3: The History behind the Songs “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”) and “America the Beautiful” by Tim Bailey
- Activity Sheet 3: Critical Thinking Questions: “The History behind the Songs ‘America’ (‘My Country, ’Tis of Thee’) and ‘America the Beautiful’”
- Source 4: Samuel F. Smith, “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”), 1831. The transcript is from a copy of the text handwritten on August 4, 1886, by Samuel F. Smith in the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC05508.230.02. For more information, see [gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/my-country-tis-thee](http://gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/my-country-tis-thee) and [gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc0550823002](http://gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc0550823002).
- Source 5: Katharine Lee Bates, “America the Beautiful,” 1893. The transcript is from a printed copy signed by Katharine Lee Bates in the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC07123. For more information, see [gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/america-beautiful-1893](http://gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/america-beautiful-1893) and [gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc07123](http://gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc07123).
- Activity Sheet 4: Compare and Contrast: “America” and “America the Beautiful”
- Activity Sheet 5: Imagining America: Lyrics Create Pictures in Your Mind
- Source 6: The History behind the Song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” by Tim Bailey
- Activity Sheet 6: Critical Thinking Questions: “The History behind the Song ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing’”



- Source 7: James Weldon Johnson (lyricist) and Rosamond Johnson (composer), “Lift Every Voice and Sing: National Hymn for the Colored People of America,” Jos. W. Stern & Co., NY, 1900, Library of Congress Music Division, [loc.gov/item/2021561009/](https://www.loc.gov/item/2021561009/)
- Activity Sheet 7: In Your Own Words: “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” Verse 1
- Activity Sheet 8: Visualizing the Lyrics



## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

# The Origins of Patriotic Songs and the History of Their Reception

by Tikia K. Hamilton, Loyola University Chicago


What historical contexts have birthed patriotic songs about the United States? Why did these songs grow in popularity, circulating long after their origins?

“The Star-Spangled Banner” emerged during the War of 1812. When, on September 13, 1814, the British bombarded Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland, a thirty-five-year-old lawyer named Francis Scott Key witnessed the devastation. Nearly certain of a British victory, Key captured Americans’ defiance and surprise victory in a poem: “Defence of Fort McHenry.” The local press retitled the poem “The Star-Spangled Banner” and, once put to music, the song lyrics gained traction. In 1931 Congress designated “The Star-Spangled Banner” as the national anthem, ensuring that there would be many performance opportunities to complicate and expand upon the song’s meaning. For example, Jimi Hendrix’s 1969 performance at Woodstock captured not only American defiance but the particular angst of young people involved in the anti-war and counterculture movements.

The melody that “My Country, ’Tis of Thee” (or “America”) is set to predates the lyrics familiar to most Americans. In all likelihood, it originated in England during the mid-eighteenth century as “God Save the King” and traveled to the North American colonies in time for the American Revolution. The melody proved adaptable, and in 1831, Samuel Francis Smith composed new lyrics. By the 1840s, the song became a favorite of abolitionists, who revised the lyrics once again: “Sweet land of liberty” became “stronghold of slavery.” This laid the groundwork for later use by the Civil Rights Movement, even as Smith’s lyrics re-emerged as the most commonly used. In 1939, when local segregation ordinances banned Marian Anderson from performing in a building owned by the Daughters of the American Revolution and a White high school, Anderson entranced a racially integrated throng of 75,000 with her version of “My Country, ’Tis of Thee” at the Lincoln Memorial. A new context created new meaning: When an extraordinary African American operatic singer claimed space to sing the song, it became a paean to equality.

Wellesley College professor Katherine Lee Bates composed “America the Beautiful” as a poem in 1893. She was inspired by westward travels and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago (the World’s Fair). With the line “O beautiful for spacious skies,” the poem elucidates the natural wonders of the nation’s vast “fruited plain.” The plains’ counterpart is “alabaster cities” (an allusion all at once to the World’s Fair’s hallmark “White City,” the nation’s urbanization, and racial segregation). The poem was reimagined as an easy-to-sing hymn in 1895, and remained relevant into the next century. For example, the anti-war protesters who marched on the Pentagon in 1967 embraced “America the Beautiful” because it described national qualities unrelated to militarism. Adapting the song’s meanings in the course of performance, Ray Charles united otherwise distinct American musical genres, such as jazz, R&B, and rock when he performed his soulful rendition during the American Bicentennial.

The aim of patriotic songs is to unify the country with a shared cultural touchstone, but Americans have not always agreed about how well such songs accomplish this task. On the one hand, there have been criticisms of particular lyrics. For example, “The Star-Spangled Banner” arguably promotes



militarism with lyrics that praise “bombs bursting in air” and urge that “conquer we must.” Cree folk musician Buffy Sainte-Marie released “My Country, ’Tis of Thy People Are Dying” in 1966 to suggest that “My Country, ’Tis of Thee” was sentimental mythology obscuring Native peoples’ oppression. Other critics have suggested that patriotic songs unfairly demand agreement that the nation is already perfect, even from people who are not treated equally. NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who protested during the national anthem in 2016, was not the first athlete to protest against the government while the anthem played. Tommie Smith and John Carlos were medal-winning sprinters who protested segregation by bowing their heads and raising fists when the national anthem played at the 1968 Olympics.

Among African Americans, the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” holds special significance because its lyrics express not the achievement of equal citizenship, but striving for it. The poet James Weldon Johnson, who was born in Florida to Bahamian and Haitian parents, composed the patriotic song in 1900 along with his brother, J. Rosamond Johnson. They knew that slavery, segregation, lynching, and voter disenfranchisement had limited African Americans’ opportunities, describing “Stony the road we trod / Bitter the chast’ning rod.” However, they were also inspired by the early twentieth-century ethos of hope, cooperation, and will that led to the founding of organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which selected James Weldon Johnson as its executive secretary in 1920. They resolved to be “Out from the gloomy past / Till now we stand at last / Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.” “Lift Every Voice and Sing” became “a definitive part of ritual practices in [Black] schools and churches and civic organizations,” according to historian Imani Perry. When sung today, “Lift Every Voice and Sing”—popularly recognized as the “Black national anthem”—continues to reflect African Americans’ efforts to reinforce the founding principles of democracy and resistance.<sup>1</sup>

*Tikia K. Hamilton is a professor of history at Loyola University Chicago and a former high school teacher. Her forthcoming book, Making a Model System: The Battle for Educational Equality in the Nation’s Capital before Brown, is under contract with the University of Chicago Press.*

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<sup>1</sup> Imani Perry, *May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 12.

# “THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER,” 1814

BY TIM BAILEY

## OVERVIEW

In this lesson the students will closely examine the national anthem of the United States, “The Star-Spangled Banner.” They will read and analyze a concise history of the events that surrounded the writing of the song as well as the first verse. They will employ critical-thinking skills to demonstrate their understanding of the relationship between the song and its historical context by answering questions about the song’s history and restating the lyrics in their own words. The Essential Questions (provided on page 2) may be used at any point throughout the unit to spark student discussion of the lyrics.

*Tim Bailey taught elementary and middle school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s director of curriculum development and instructional design.*

GRADE LEVELS: 3–5

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: Four 45-minute class periods

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on primary and secondary source materials. The four lessons in this unit explore songs written by Americans about America in the nineteenth century.

## MATERIALS

- Source 1: The History behind the Song: The War of 1812 and “The Star-Spangled Banner” by Tim Bailey
- Activity Sheet 1: Critical Thinking Questions: “The War of 1812 and ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’”
- Source 2: Francis Scott Key, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” 1814. Transcribed from a handwritten manuscript by Francis Scott Key in the Maryland Historical Society, [mdhs.org/digitalimage/star-spangled-banner-handwritten](http://mdhs.org/digitalimage/star-spangled-banner-handwritten)
- Activity Sheet 2: In Your Own Words: “The Star-Spangled Banner,” Verse 1

## PROCEDURE

1. Divide the class into critical-thinking groups of three to five students. Students will work with their groups for the next several days.
2. Hand out Source 1, “The History behind the Song: The War of 1812 and ‘The Star-Spangled Banner.’”

3. You may ask the students to read the text individually if they are comfortable with text at this level. If not, “share read” the text with the class. This is done by having the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Then ask the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences, while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
4. Hand out Activity Sheet 1, “Critical Thinking Questions: The War of 1812 and ‘The Star-Spangled Banner.’” Ask the students the first question. Demonstrate to the students how to back up their answer with evidence taken directly from the text of “The War of 1812 and ‘The Star-Spangled Banner.’”
5. The students should work together in their groups to develop an evidence-based answer to each question.
6. Hand out Source 2, the lyrics to “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and either watch a video performance or listen to an audio performance of the song. It would also be useful to have the students sing the song with you or share read it with the students as described in Procedure 3 above. Traditionally, only the first verse of the anthem is sung at events and the students will only be analyzing the first verse in this lesson. You may choose to have them read just the first verse or all four verses.
7. Hand out Activity Sheet 2: “In Your Own Words: ‘The Star-Spangled Banner,’ Verse 1.”
8. Students will closely read the first verse of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” one couplet at a time, and restate each couplet in their own words. For instance, the first couplet could be restated as “Can you still see this morning what made us so proud when the sun was setting last night?” Some of the vocabulary will be unfamiliar, but encourage the students to use what they have learned of the Battle of Baltimore as well as other context clues to decipher the meaning of the verse.
9. Wrap-up: Use the short answer at the bottom of the page to evaluate the students’ understanding of both the song and the events it describes.



# “AMERICA” (“MY COUNTRY, ’TIS OF THEE”), 1831, AND “AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL,” 1893

BY TIM BAILEY

## OVERVIEW

In this lesson the students will closely examine “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”) and “America the Beautiful,” two songs that describe the beauty, majesty, pride, and ideals of the United States. They will read and analyze concise histories about the writing of the songs, compare and contrast the two songs, and analyze the imagery expressed in the lyrics.

*Tim Bailey taught elementary and middle school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s director of curriculum development and instructional design.*

GRADE LEVELS: 3–5

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: Four 45-minute class periods

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on primary and secondary source materials. The four lessons in this unit explore songs written by Americans about America in the nineteenth century.

## MATERIALS

- Source 3: The History behind the Songs “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”) and “America the Beautiful” by Tim Bailey
- Activity Sheet 3: Critical Thinking Questions: “The History behind the Songs ‘America’ (‘My Country, ’Tis of Thee’) and ‘America the Beautiful’”
- Source 4: Samuel F. Smith, “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”), 1831. The transcript is from a copy of the text handwritten on August 4, 1886, by Samuel F. Smith in the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC05508.230.02. For more information, see [gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/my-country-tis-of-thee](http://gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/my-country-tis-of-thee) and [gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc0550823002](http://gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc0550823002).
- Source 5: Katharine Lee Bates, “America the Beautiful,” 1893. The transcript is from a printed copy signed by Katharine Lee Bates in the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC07123. For more information, see [gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/america-beautiful-1893](http://gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/america-beautiful-1893) and [gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc07123](http://gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc07123).
- Activity Sheet 4: Compare and Contrast: “America” and “America the Beautiful”
- Activity Sheet 5: Imagining America: Lyrics Create Pictures in Your Mind

## PROCEDURE

1. The students should return to their critical-thinking groups from the previous lesson.

2. Hand out Source 3, “The History behind the Songs ‘America’ (‘My Country, ’Tis of Thee’) and ‘America the Beautiful.’”
3. Have the students read the short essays to themselves or share read them with the class as described in Lesson 1.
4. Hand out Activity Sheet 3, “Critical Thinking Questions: ‘The History behind the Songs.’” As the students work on the documents, remind them to back up their answers with evidence taken directly from the words of the essays.
5. Hand out Sources 4 and 5, the lyrics to “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”) and “America the Beautiful,” and either watch video performances of the songs or listen to performances of the songs. It would also be useful to have the students sing the songs with you. You may choose to share read the songs as described in Lesson 1.
6. Hand out Activity Sheet 4: Compare and Contrast: “America” and “America the Beautiful.”
7. Students will closely examine the text of the two songs. They should list words and ideas that they find repeated in both songs and put those in the “What Is the Same” column while distinct differences in the two songs should be listed in the “What Is Different” column. After this activity, the groups must determine a central story being told in both songs.
8. Hand out Activity Sheet 5, “Imagining America: Lyrics Create Pictures in Your Mind”
9. Students will carefully read each verse of the songs, describe the picture that each verse creates in their minds and list which words helped bring that picture to life. They may struggle with some of the vocabulary. Let them try to reason out the meanings, but words such as “alabaster” may have to be explained.
10. Wrap-up: Discuss the students’ different interpretations of the songs’ imagery.

# “LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING,” 1900

BY TIM BAILEY

## OVERVIEW

In this lesson the students will closely examine the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” They will read and analyze a concise history of the origins of the song as well as restate the text of the song in their own words.

## MATERIALS

- Source 6: The History behind the Song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” by Tim Bailey
- Activity Sheet 6: Critical Thinking Questions: “The History behind the Song ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing’”
- Source 7: James Weldon Johnson (lyricist) and Rosamond Johnson (composer), “Lift Every Voice and Sing: National Hymn for the Colored People of America,” Jos. W. Stern & Co., NY, 1900, Library of Congress Music Division, [loc.gov/item/2021561009/](https://www.loc.gov/item/2021561009/)
- Activity Sheet 7: In Your Own Words: “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” Verse 1

*Tim Bailey taught elementary and middle school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s director of curriculum development and instructional design.*

GRADE LEVELS: 3–5

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: Four 45-minute class periods

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on primary and secondary source materials. The four lessons in this unit explore songs written by Americans about America in the nineteenth century.

## PROCEDURE

1. The students should return to their critical-thinking groups from the previous lesson.
2. Hand out Source 6, The History behind the Song “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”
3. Ask the students to read the essay to themselves or share read it with the students as described in Lesson 1.
4. Hand out Activity Sheet 6, “Critical Thinking Questions: The History behind the Song ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing.’” Ask the students the first critical thinking question. Remind them to back up their answers with evidence taken directly from “The History behind the Song ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing.’”
5. The students should work together in their groups to develop an evidence-based answer for each question.

6. Hand out Source 7, the lyrics to “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” and either listen to a performance of the song or have the students sing the song with you. You may also share read the lyrics with the class. The students will only be analyzing the first verse in the activity, so you may choose to read only the first verse or all three verses.
7. Hand out Activity Sheet 7, “In Your Own Words: ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing,’ Verse 1.”
8. Students will closely analyze the first verse of “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” two or three lines at a time, and restate those lines in their own words. For instance, the first verse could be interpreted as “Sing so that everyone can hear us. Sing about what we’ve learned from the past and where we are now as we go bravely into the future.” They will conclude the activity by identifying the message in the first verse.

# PATRIOTIC MUSIC, 1814–1900

BY TIM BAILEY

## OVERVIEW

In this lesson the students will use what they have learned about the four patriotic songs in this unit to create a visual representation of two of those songs. They should choose songs that they think contrast with each other to visually capture two different visions of America as portrayed in music.

## MATERIALS

- Source 1: The History behind the Song: The War of 1812 and “The Star-Spangled Banner” by Tim Bailey
- Activity Sheet 1: Critical Thinking Questions: “The War of 1812 and ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’”
- Source 2: Francis Scott Key, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” 1814
- Activity Sheet 2: In Your Own Words: “The Star-Spangled Banner,” Verse 1
- Source 3: The History behind the Songs “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”) and “America the Beautiful” by Tim Bailey
- Activity Sheet 3: Critical Thinking Questions: “The History behind the Songs ‘America’ (‘My Country, ’Tis of Thee’) and ‘America the Beautiful’”
- Source 4: Samuel F. Smith, “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”), 1831
- Source 5: Katharine Lee Bates, “America the Beautiful,” 1893
- Activity Sheet 4: Compare and Contrast: “America” and “America the Beautiful”
- Activity Sheet 5: Imagining America: Lyrics Create Pictures in Your Mind
- Source 6: The History behind the Song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” by Tim Bailey
- Activity Sheet 6: Critical Thinking Questions: “The History behind the Song ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing’”

*Tim Bailey taught elementary and middle school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s director of curriculum development and instructional design.*

GRADE LEVELS: 3–5

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: Four 45-minute class periods

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on primary and secondary source materials. The four lessons in this unit explore songs written by Americans about America in the nineteenth century.

- Source 7: James Weldon Johnson (lyricist) and Rosamond Johnson (composer), 1900
- Activity Sheet 7: In Your Own Words: “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” Verse 1
- Activity Sheet 8: Visualizing the Lyrics

## PROCEDURE

1. You may choose to have students work individually, with a partner, or in a small group.
2. Students should have access to their work from Lessons 1–3.
3. Hand out Activity Sheet 8, “Visualizing the Lyrics.” The students may draw their pictures on the activity sheet or on plain drawing paper.
4. Students will create two different images based on the lyrics of two different songs that they have studied. They should choose lyrics that they think contrast with each other to visually capture two different visions of America as portrayed in lyrics. If you choose, you may tell the students that they can use all the verses of all four songs, even the ones they didn’t closely analyze in “The Star-Spangled Banner” and “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”
5. Under the image students should write the lyrics that the image is based on to create a caption for the image.



## Source 1: The History behind the Song: The War of 1812 and “The Star-Spangled Banner”

by Tim Bailey, The Gilder Lehrman Institute

Less than thirty years after the American Revolution, the United States was once again at war with Great Britain. America declared war on Great Britain in 1812, but by the summer of 1814 neither side was winning. However, in August 1814 the British landed 5,000 soldiers near Washington, DC, the capital of the United States of America, and defeated the American soldiers who were defending the city. The British soldiers burned much of the city, including the White House, and President James Madison and his wife, Dolley Madison, barely escaped.

After destroying much of the nation’s capital, the British soldiers began marching toward the city of Baltimore, Maryland. At the same time the British navy began moving its ships into Chesapeake Bay so that they could attack from the sea while the soldiers attacked from the land. Fort McHenry protected the city of Baltimore. For twenty-five hours the British ships blasted away at Fort McHenry with rockets and cannon shells that burst into flame and showered the fort with hot pieces of metal. Meanwhile, several miles away, an American lawyer named Francis Scott Key was negotiating a prisoner exchange on a British warship. Francis Scott Key watched the battle all through the night, and as the sun rose he saw the British navy sail away from Fort McHenry.

When Francis Scott Key saw the United States flag still flying over Fort McHenry, he knew that the Americans had won the battle. He was so moved by what he had witnessed that he began writing a poem about what he had seen on the back of a letter that he was carrying. Many of the people who read the poem loved it. Soon it was set to music with the title “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Over the years the song gained popularity and was sung at many patriotic and ceremonial events. In 1931 “The Star-Spangled Banner,” a celebration of the American flag, was officially named the national anthem of the United States.



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity Sheet 1: Critical Thinking Questions**  
**“The War of 1812 and ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’”**

Remember to use evidence from the text to answer the questions and write your answers in complete sentences.

1. Why did President James Madison and First Lady Dolley Madison have to flee Washington, DC?

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2. For how long did the British attack Fort McHenry?

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3. How did Francis Scott Key know that the British had lost the battle?

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4. How long after Francis Scott Key wrote his poem did it become the national anthem?

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## Source 2: “The Star-Spangled Banner” by Francis Scott Key (1814)

1. O say can you see, by the dawn’s early light,  
What so proudly we hail’d at the twilight’s last gleaming,  
Whose broad stripes & bright stars through the perilous fight  
O’er the ramparts we watch’d were so gallantly streaming?  
And the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.  
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O’er the land of the free & the home of the brave?
2. On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,  
Where the foe’s haughty host in dread silence reposes,  
What is that which the breeze, o’er the towering steep,  
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?  
Now it catches the gleam of the morning’s first beam,  
In full glory reflected now shines in the stream,  
’Tis the star-spangled banner—O long may it wave  
O’er the land of the free & the home of the brave!
3. And where is that band who so vauntingly swore,  
That the havoc of war & the battle’s confusion  
A home & a Country should leave us no more?  
Their blood has wash’d out their foul footsteps’ pollution.  
No refuge could save the hireling & slave  
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave  
O’er the land of the free & the home of the brave.

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4. O thus be it ever when freemen shall stand  
Between their lov'd home & the war's desolation!  
Blest with vict'ry & peace may the heav'n rescued land  
Praise the power that hath made & preserv'd us a nation!  
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto—"In God is our trust."  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free & the home of the brave.

*From Francis Scott Key, "The Star-Spangled Banner," 1814. Transcribed from a handwritten manuscript by Francis Scott Key in the Maryland Historical Society.*

Activity Sheet 2: In Your Own Words  
"The Star-Spangled Banner," Verse 1

Put each couplet (two lines) into your own words.

1. O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,

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2. Whose broad stripes & bright stars through the perilous fight  
O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?

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3. And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.

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4. O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free & the home of the brave?

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What story is told in the first verse of the national anthem?

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## Source 3: The History behind the Songs “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”) and “America the Beautiful”

by Tim Bailey, The Gilder Lehrman Institute

### “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”)

Samuel Francis Smith was a twenty-four-year-old Baptist seminary student in Massachusetts when he wrote the lyrics of “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”). The patriotic song served as an unofficial national anthem for nearly one hundred years.

In 1831, while studying at Andover Theological Seminary, Smith was asked by composer Lowell Mason to translate some German songbooks. Inspired by one of the German songs—“God Bless Our Native Land” (set to the tune of “God Save the King,” the unofficial national anthem of England)—Smith set out to write an original patriotic song for the United States set to the same melody. The result was what Smith called “America” and what would eventually be better known as “My Country, ’Tis of Thee.” The song was first performed on July 4, 1831, by a children’s choir in Boston.

### “America the Beautiful”

Katharine Lee Bates was a professor at Wellesley College in Massachusetts and had traveled west to teach a summer course in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1893. She and the other professors decided to “celebrate the close of the session by a merry expedition to the top of Pike’s Peak.” At the top, Bates later wrote, she was inspired by “the sea-like expanse of fertile country . . . under those ample skies,” and “the opening lines of the hymn floated into my mind.”

Bates finished writing “America the Beautiful” before leaving Colorado Springs but didn’t think of publishing it until two years later. The poem was first printed in a weekly newspaper, *The Congregationalist*, on July 4, 1895. Her patriotic words were soon set to music, most popularly to composer S. A. Ward’s “Materna,” the tune we use today. Within twenty years, Bates (after revising some of the lyrics in 1904) had “given hundreds, perhaps thousands, of free permissions” for “America the Beautiful” to appear “in church hymnals and Sunday School song books of nearly all the denominations; . . . in a large number of regularly published song books, poetry readers, civic readers, patriotic readers . . . in manuals of hymns and prayers, and anthologies of patriotic prose and poetry . . . and in countless periodicals.”

While Professor Bates was initially surprised by the poem’s success, she later reflected that the “hold . . . it has upon our people, is clearly due to the fact that Americans are at heart idealists, with a fundamental faith in human brotherhood.”

**Activity Sheet 3: Critical Thinking Questions**  
**“The History behind the Songs”**

Remember to use evidence from the text to answer the questions, and write your answers in complete sentences.

1. What is one song that served as America’s unofficial national anthem until 1931?

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2. What inspired Samuel Francis Smith to write “America” (“My Country, ‘Tis of Thee”)?

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3. What inspired poet Katharine Lee Bates to write the opening lines to “America the Beautiful”?

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4. Do you think that Professor Bates became wealthy by selling her very popular song? Why or why not?

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## Source 4: “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”) by Samuel F. Smith (1831)

1. My country, 'tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,  
Of thee I sing;  
Land where my fathers died,  
Land of the pilgrims' pride,  
From every mountain side  
Let freedom ring.
2. My native country, thee,  
Land of the noble, free,  
Thy name I love;  
I love thy rocks and rills,  
Thy woods and templed hills,  
My heart with rapture thrills,  
Like that above.
3. Let music swell the breeze,  
And ring from all the trees  
Sweet freedom's song;  
Let mortal tongues awake,  
Let all that breathe partake,  
Let rocks their silence break,  
The sound prolong.
4. Our fathers' God, to Thee,  
Author of liberty,  
To Thee we sing;  
Long may our land be bright,  
With freedom's holy light,  
Protect us by Thy might,  
Great God, our King.

*From Samuel F. Smith, “America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”), 1831. The transcript is from a copy of the text handwritten by Samuel F. Smith in the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC05508.230.02.*



## Source 5: “America the Beautiful” by Katharine Lee Bates (1893)

1. O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!  
  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!
2. O beautiful for pilgrim feet,  
Whose stern, impassioned stress  
A thoroughfare for freedom beat  
Across the wilderness!  
  
America! America!  
God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self-control,  
Thy liberty in law!
3. O beautiful for heroes proved  
In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved,  
And mercy more than life!  
  
America! America!  
May God thy gold refine  
Till all success be nobleness,  
And every gain divine!
4. O beautiful for patriot dream  
That sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam  
Undimmed by human tears!  
  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!

*From Katharine Lee Bates, “America the Beautiful,” 1893. The transcript is from a printed copy signed by Katharine Lee Bates in the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC07123.*



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity Sheet 4: Compare and Contrast  
"America" and "America the Beautiful"**

Use the chart below to record similarities in and differences between "America" ("My Country, 'Tis of Thee") and "America the Beautiful."

What Is the Same?	What Is Different?

What is the main story that both songs are trying to tell?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity Sheet 5: Imagining America**  
**Lyrics Create Pictures in Your Mind**

**“America” (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”)**

Verse 1: What image is created in your mind? Which words are creating that image?

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Verse 2: What image is created in your mind? Which words are creating that image?

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Verse 3: What image is created in your mind? Which words are creating that image?

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Verse 4: What image is created in your mind? Which words are creating that image?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity Sheet 5: Imagining America**  
**Lyrics Create Pictures in Your Mind**

**“America the Beautiful”**

Verse 1: What image is created in your mind? Which words are creating that image?

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Verse 2: What image is created in your mind? Which words are creating that image?

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Verse 3: What image is created in your mind? Which words are creating that image?

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Verse 4: What image is created in your mind? Which words are creating that image?

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## Source 6: The History behind the Song “Lift Every Voice and Sing”

by Tim Bailey, The Gilder Lehrman Institute

James Weldon Johnson wrote a poem called “Lift Every Voice and Sing” in 1900. He wrote the poem during a very difficult time for many Black communities. Unjust “Jim Crow” laws made it hard for Black people to get a good education, vote, and use their rights as US citizens, or get justice if they were harmed. However, James Weldon Johnson wrote lyrics that combined hope, freedom, and thankfulness to God, hoping to inspire African Americans despite the hardships they faced. “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was first performed as a poem in 1900 by a chorus of 500 Black students in Florida as a celebration of Abraham Lincoln’s birthday. Then, James Weldon’s brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, set the poem to music.

The Johnson brothers moved to New York the following year and largely forgot about the song. However, it was being sung in many Black communities. “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was taped into the back of hymnals in Black churches and taught to people not only in southern states but in other parts of the country. By 1919 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) called “Lift Every Voice and Sing” the “Negro national anthem.”



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity Sheet 6: Critical Thinking Questions:  
"The History behind the Song 'Lift Every Voice and Sing'"**

Remember to use evidence from the text to answer the questions, and write your answers in complete sentences.

1. What were "Jim Crow" laws?

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2. What message did James Weldon Johnson want to give in the hymn "Lift Every Voice and Sing"?

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3. Where was James Weldon Johnson's poem first performed, and why does that make sense?

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4. How did "Lift Every Voice and Sing" become so popular?

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## Source 7: “Lift Every Voice and Sing” by James Weldon Johnson (1900)

1. Lift ev'ry voice and sing  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the list'ning skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.  
Facing the rising sun  
Of our new day begun,  
Let us march on till victory is won.
2. Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chast'ning rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet, with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,  
We have come, treading our path thro' the blood of the slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

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3. God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,  
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;  
Thou who hast by Thy might,  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,  
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand.  
True to our God,  
True to our Native land.

*From James Weldon Johnson (lyricist) and Rosamond Johnson (composer), "Lift Every Voice and Sing,"  
Jos. W. Stern & Co., NY, 1900, Library of Congress Music Division.*

Activity Sheet 7: In Your Own Words  
"Lift Every Voice and Sing," Verse 1

Put the lyrics into your own words.

1. Lift every voice and sing  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;

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2. Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the listening skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

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3. Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.

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4. Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on till victory is won.

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What is the message in the first verse of "Lift Every Voice and Sing"?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Activity Sheet 8: Visualizing the Lyrics

Draw two illustrations. Each drawing should be based on the lyrics of a different song. Under each drawing write the lyrics that inspired your drawing.

Song Title:	Song Title:
Lyrics:	Lyrics: