

Patriotic Music of the Great Depression

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This lesson is aimed at 7th grade students studying the effects of the Great Depression. In this lesson, students will read the lyrics, and hear the music from two of our nation's enduring patriotic anthems. The students will learn the duality of their history, and complete two writing assignments that analyze each piece of work.

This lesson plan addresses the following Sunshine State Standards:

SS.A.1.3.1. understands how patterns, chronology, sequencing (including cause and effect), and the identification of historical periods are influenced by frames of reference.

SS.A.1.3.2. knows the relative value of primary and secondary sources and uses this information to draw conclusions from historical sources such as data in charts, tables, graphs.

SS.A.5.3.2. understands ways that significant individuals and events influenced economic, social, and political systems in the United States after 1880.

SS.C.1.3.2. understands major ideas about why government is necessary and the purposes government should serve.

SS.C.2.3.1. understands the history of the rights, liberties, and obligations of citizenship in the United States.

SS.C.2.3.2. understands that citizenship is legally recognized full membership in a self-governing community that confers equal rights under the law; is not dependent on inherited, involuntary groupings; and confers certain rights and privileges (e.g., the right to vote, to hold public office, and to serve on juries).

Directions: Have students in the class say or sing "God Bless America"; Ask what the message of the song is. Provide them with the lyrics to the entire song. Most are unfamiliar with the first verse. Have them discuss the words to the entire song. What is it about? Play the song for the class.

As a class, read "The Story of 'God Bless America'". Afterward the students should work solo and complete the worksheet "Questions About 'God Bless America'". Review their answers.

As before, have students say or sing "This Land Is Your Land". Ask what the message is in the song? Using the audio book of "This Land Is Your Land", play the song for the students. Have them follow along with the lyrics. Discuss how their perception of the song may have changed now that they've heard the entire song.

Read as a class "God Blessed America For Me". Afterward, the students should work solo and complete the worksheet "Questions About 'This Land Is Your Land'". Review their answers.

For homework, have them complete the Depression Era Patriotic Songs worksheet.

God Bless America

By Irving Berlin

While the storm clouds gather far across the sea,

Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free.

Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,

As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer:

God bless America, land that I love,

Stand beside her and guide her

Through the night with a light from above.

From the mountains, to the prairies,

To the oceans white with foam,

God bless America,

My home sweet home

The Story of "God Bless America"

The United States Senators sang it on the steps of the Capitol that fateful day, September 11, 2001, another "day that will live in infamy." It was sung at the reopening of the stock market the following Monday, and Canadian soprano Celine Dion sang it at the two-hour fundraiser "America: A Tribute to Heroes" on September 21. The song was God Bless America, and on NBC's Saturday Today show, after mentioning the national anthem and Willie Nelson's rendition of America the Beautiful, it was reported that Ms. Dion sang, "the song that galvanized the American spirit." In the days and weeks that followed the horrendous events of September 11, it was indeed God Bless America that was on the lips of Americans everywhere.

Today's younger generations may not be familiar with the origin and history of the song Irving Berlin considered his most important composition. It was written during the First World War, for an army camp show where Berlin was stationed: Camp Yaphank on Long Island. The show's producers rejected it as too jingoistic (overly patriotic), so Berlin placed it in a trunk of rejected manuscripts.

There it lay for twenty years, until Ted Collins, manager of popular singer Kate Smith, approached Irving Berlin for a new patriotic song for Kate to introduce to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Armistice that ended World War I. Berlin had recently returned from a trip to England, during which he was saddened to see signs of another war in the making. He was more thankful than ever to come back to his peaceful adopted homeland (his family had come to America from Russia when Irving was a small boy), so he was motivated to answer Collins' request, on Kate's behalf.

After several days of futile attempts to write a new patriotic song, Berlin remembered the one he had written in 1918. He asked his secretary to retrieve it from the trunk, and he made a few changes to the lyrics. One was from "Stand beside her and guide her/ To the right with a light from above" to "through the night," since "right wing" and "left wing" had taken on political connotations in the interim. The line "From the mountains to the prairies/To the oceans white with foam" had originally been "From the green fields of Virginia to the gold fields out in Nome", a decided improvement!



Kate Smith was the No. 1 popular songstress in America in 1938, and her weekly Kate Smith Hour was heard by many millions of radio listeners that Thursday, November 10. The new anthem electrified the nation and Kate sang it on nearly every broadcast from that point on. She eventually recorded the song on March 21, 1939, and that version has been reissued countless times over the years.

The lyrics were read into the official Congressional Record, and there was a movement to make the song our national anthem. Kate addressed Congress, imploring its members not to do that. She argued that the Star Spangled Banner was written during a battle (Francis Scott Key wrote it during the War of 1812), and that it was appropriate for that song to be our national anthem. The original manuscript of the song now resides in the Library of Congress.

God Bless America was sung at both the Democratic and Republican national conventions in 1940, and again at the Republican national convention in Philadelphia July 31, 2000, the convention that nominated George W. Bush as our 43rd President. At the latter a videotape of Kate singing it on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1957 was played. Although it was recorded by Bing Crosby, Barry Wood, Gene Autry, and Horace Heidt's orchestra around the same time that Kate recorded it, God Bless America was destined to be associated with Kate Smith forever, giving her a certain immortality, as well as a guaranteed standing ovation at all of her concerts.

In 1940 Irving Berlin established the God Bless America Foundation, with all royalties from its performance earned by either Berlin or Miss Smith going to the Boy and Girl Scouts of America. That agreement exists to this day. All royalties from a current artist's recording of God Bless America go to the same fund. To-date, it has raised more than \$6,000,000. These organizations were chosen, to quote the contract, because "the completely nonsectarian (not favoring any particular religion) work of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts is calculated to best promote unity of mind and patriotism, two sentiments that are inherent in the song itself."



When Warner Brothers made the movie "This Is The Army" in 1943, the film's song writer, Berlin, insisted that there be a scene in which Kate herself re-created her radio introduction of God Bless America. She sang it complete with the seldom-heard verse. When she died in 1986, that clip was played as part of nearly every television obituary.

Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Questions About "God Bless America"

1. Using context clues, explain what 'galvanized' means.
2. Why did Irving Berlin feel it was necessary to make changes to the lyrics of God Bless America before he gave it to Ted Collins?
3. Explain what Irving Berlin was thankful for that led him to honor Ted Collins' request.
4. Using context clues, explain what 'electrified' means.
5. What did Irving Berlin hope to promote to the youth of America by donating the royalties from God Bless America to the Boy and Girl Scouts of America?

This Land Is Your Land
By Woody Guthrie

As I was walking that ribbon of highway
I saw above me that endless skyway,
I saw below me that golden valley,
This land was made for you and me.

(Chorus)

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York Island,
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters,
This land was made for you and me.

I've roamed and rambled and I followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond desert,
And all around me, a voice was sounding:
This land was made for you and me.

When the sun came shining, and I was strolling
And wheat fields waving and dust clouds rolling,
As the fog was lifting, a voice was chanting
This land was made for you and me.

As I went walking, I saw a sign there
And on the sign it said "No Trespassing"
But on the other side it didn't say nothing –
That side was made for you and me

In the shadow of the steeple , I saw my people
By the Relief Office, I seen my people --
As they stood hungry, I stood there asking
Is this land made for you and me?

Nobody living can ever stop me
As I go walking that freedom highway
Nobody living can ever make me turn back
This land was made for you and me.

At the bottom of his manuscript, Woody Guthrie wrote the following:

*All you can write is what you see.

God Blessed America
By Woody Guthrie

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York Island,
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters,
God blessed America for me.

As I went walking that ribbon of highway
And saw above me that endless skyway,
And saw below me the golden valley, I said:
God blessed America for me.

I roamed and rambled and followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond desert,
And all around me, a voice was sounding:
God blessed America for me.

Was a high wall there that tried to stop me
A sign was painted said: Private Property,
But on the back side it didn't say nothing --
God blessed America for me.

When the sun come shining, then I was strolling
In wheat fields waving and dust clouds rolling;
The voice was chanting as the fog was lifting:
God blessed America for me.

One bright sunny morning in the shadow of the steeple
By the Relief Office I saw my people --
As they stood hungry, I stood there wondering
If God blessed America for me.

3. Facism can be defined as: A political system that glorifies the nation, minimizes individual rights, and operates through a harsh central government (usually run by a dictator), that tightly controls all economics, political, and social behavior.

Fascists can be defined as: people who believe that fascism is an appropriate form of government.

Please explain in the space provided what you think Woody Guthrie means by the sticker he placed on his guitar that reads "This Machine Kills Fascists".



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4. At the bottom of his manuscript for This Land is Your Land, Woody Guthrie added the asterisked comment: "*All you can write is what you see." What do you think he meant by this?

Woody Guthrie wrote "This Land is Your Land" as an angry response to "God Bless America". Given the struggles of the Great Depression, what do you think he was angry about?

Works Cited

This Land is Your Land; Audiobook available on iTunes. Written lyrics adapted from this complete version.

God Bless America, as performed by Kate Smith; available on iTunes. Written lyrics adapted from this version.

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