



# SLAVERY

by Another Name

## HEAR OUR VOICE

**GRADE LEVEL:** 9–12

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### OVERVIEW

This activity guide focuses on examining the use of music and poetry to reveal the hopes and frustrations of those impacted by forced labor. Students will interpret field hollers and a chain gang song. Students will also analyze songs from popular artists of the early twentieth century who produced music about the changing work dynamics as the country moved further into the industrialization period.

### BACKGROUND

In the early 1900s, dramatic stories of the abuse and wretched conditions of convict laborers began to be publicized through trials and newspaper accounts. The egregiousness of the violence and corruption of the system began to turn public opinion against convict leasing. Though many citizens and politicians wanted to abolish convict leasing, the problem of the expense and difficulty of housing convicts remained. Chain gangs developed as a popular solution to that problem.

Chain gangs were groups of convicts forced to labor at tasks such as road construction, ditch digging, or farming while chained together. Some chain gangs toiled at work sites near the prison, while others were housed in transportable jails such as railroad cars or trucks. The improvements they made to public roadways had significant impact on rural areas, allowing planters to more quickly and more easily transport their crops to market.

Chain gangs minimized the cost of guarding prisoners, but exposed prisoners to painful ulcers and dangerous infections from the heavy shackles around their ankles. An individual's misstep or fall could imperil the entire group, and chains prevented individuals from moving away from aggressive or violent prisoners. Chain gangs eventually gave way to work gangs — groups of prisoners who worked off-site and under guard, but not in chains.

Though individual blacks faced serious retribution for challenging peonage or Jim Crow, convict workers protested in all the ways they could. As during slavery, songs were an effective way to transmit information about oppression and offer encouragement. In chain gangs and prison yards, workers sang folk songs that described and protested working conditions. Spirituals and the blues captured the frustrations of living under Jim Crow and

were meant to comfort and inspire. Poetry, art, and literature were used to describe inequalities and move the public to action.

For additional background, visit the following from the *Slavery by Another Name* Theme Gallery:

**Chain Gangs:**

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/chain-gangs/>

**Voices of Protest:**

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/voices-protest/>

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What does music tell us about history, people, culture, society, and the times in which it was written?
2. Why is music a useful medium to explore the history of a time?
3. What role has music played in America's changing labor landscape after the Civil War?
4. How have marginalized people used music to exert their voices?

## ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

Music is a central part of our culture and a universal expression of human emotion. Music has played a diverse role in history, including a vital position within the changing labor dynamics in America. Most importantly, it has served as both a portal and archive to disseminate and capture the struggles, frustrations, and daily life of people who at some point, found their voices silenced.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

### ACTIVITY: WORK SONGS

**Materials:**

- The John and Ruby Lomax 1939 Southern States Recording Trip  
<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/lomaxbib:@1%28field+hollers%29>

This is a collection of field hollers and work songs stored at the Library of Congress

that were recorded in 1939 in the South, many within Southern prisons and labor camps.

- Field Hollers and Work Songs
  - Thinking about Poems as Historical Artifacts | The Library of Congress  
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/tools/docs/poems.pdf>
1. Prepare to view “Descendants,” by facilitating a discussion using the pre-viewing questions. Provide background on the clip for students. After viewing, continue the discussion using the post-viewing questions.
  2. Explain to students that one way that marginalized people such as slaves and forced laborers exerted their voices was through song, which was usually performed while working. One form of work music was the field holler, which emerged before the Civil War during slavery and was usually performed solo.
  3. Tell students that they are going to listen to a few field hollers and that they will have to listen carefully. Play the first two field hollers from “The John and Ruby Lomax 1939 Southern States Recording Trip.” Ask students for their opinions and to describe what they hear. Tell students that these were recorded at a prison farm in Arkansas.
  4. Continue the discussion by introducing poetry and ask students to define poetry. What makes a poem a poem?
  5. Inform students that they will examine work music as poetry in the oral tradition. Explain to students that due to the fact that many former slaves were not taught to read and write, there are not many written records of poetry during this era and that these examples of work can be considered interesting representations of poetic forms.
  6. Distribute “Field Hollers and Work Songs.” As a class, analyze the first song: “Makes a Long Time Man Feel Bad.” Inquire about its meaning, themes presented, language, and intent. Encourage students to markup the song with their initial thoughts.
  7. Divide students into small groups. Distribute “Thinking about Poems as Historical Artifacts” and assign a song to each group to analyze.
  8. Before each group shares its analysis, play their song from “The John and Ruby Lomax 1939 Southern States Recording Trip.” Then have each group share their analyses.

9. Facilitate a discussion about the connection between poetry, music, work, and collaboration.

## ACTIVITY: PRISON BLUES

### Materials

- Prison Songs: The Angola Blues |Western Folklife Center  
<http://www.westernfolklife.org/Deep-West-Radio-Documentaries/prison-songs.html>  
This segment, which aired on NPR, discusses the work of John and Alan Lomax, a father and son folklorist team that captured a number of songs performed by prisoners in Southern prisons in the first half of the 1900s. The segment also discusses the long musical tradition at Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola.
  - “Rosie” | YouTube  
This song was recorded by Alan Lomax at Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEHFDKXM2y0&feature=related>
  - “Early in the Mornin’” | YouTube  
This song was recorded by Alan Lomax at Parchman Farm, the Mississippi State Penitentiary.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsiYfk5RV\\_Q&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsiYfk5RV_Q&feature=related)
1. Prepare to view “Chain Gangs or Convict Leasing?” by facilitating a discussion using the pre-viewing questions. Provide background on the clip for students. Continue the discussion using the post-viewing questions.
  2. Have students listen to “Prison Songs: The Angola Blues.” If time is limited, play the audio until 2:50. Continue the discussion about the connection between prison, music, and labor and the documentary work of Alan Lomax.
  3. Next tell students that they are going to listen to prison songs. Play “Rosie.”
  4. After listening, ask students for initial impressions. Then inquire about the role that music played in the lives of prisoners. Also point out the rhythm of the music and its use in helping prisoners, especially those who had to work together, to stay in sync.
  5. Then play “Early in the Mornin’.” Facilitate a similar discussion.
  6. Divide students into groups and have them brainstorm ways that they work with others to accomplish a shared goal or task. This can be in school, at a job, on a sports team, and so on.

7. Have the groups develop a song and rhythmic dance that demonstrates collective work and that incorporates lyrics, instrumentation, and movement.
8. Have groups perform their songs for the class.

## ACTIVITY: THE HISTORY IN MUSIC

### Materials

- “Chain Gang” by Sam Cooke | YouTube  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2XHYKWLGTg>
  - Lyrics to “Chain Gang” by Sam Cooke | MetroLyrics  
<http://www.metrolyrics.com/chain-gang-lyrics-sam-cooke.html>
  - “Chain Gang Blues” by Ma Rainey | Kazaa  
<http://www.kazaa.com/#!/Various-Artists/It%27s-All-About-The-Blues/Chain-Gang-Blues>  
This is a sample of the song.
  - Lyrics to “Chain Gang Blues” by Ma Rainey  
<http://www.lyricsdrive.com/chain-gang-blues-lyrics-ma-rainey.html>
  - “Trouble” by Joshua White | YouTube  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUDmP1T97iA>
  - Lyrics to “Trouble” by Joshua White  
<http://members.home.nl/zowieso/blues/josh%20white%20lyrics.html#Trouble>
  - Thinking about Songs as Historical Artifacts | The Library of Congress  
[http://www.loc.gov/creativity/hampson/workshop/historical\\_artifacts/songThink.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/creativity/hampson/workshop/historical_artifacts/songThink.pdf)
1. Prepare to view “Reflections on Dreams,” by facilitating a discussion using the pre-viewing questions. Provide background on the clip for students. After viewing, continue the discussion using the post-viewing questions.
  2. Next, explain to students how popular artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century began to sing about the work conditions that existed.
  3. Introduce Sam Cooke as a soul artist who recorded a song about chain gangs. Play “Chain Gang” by Sam Cooke.
  4. Distribute Lyrics to “Chain Gang” by Sam Cooke to analyze.

5. Discuss the song as a class.
6. Divide students into groups and give each group either Lyrics to “Chain Gang Blues” by Ma Rainey or Lyrics to “Trouble” by Joshua White to interpret. Have students complete the “Songs as Historical Artifacts” worksheet.
7. Then, play the songs for the class. Have each group share their analyses with the class.
8. Facilitate a discussion about what can be learned about history from music and what students learned about history — particularly America’s changing labor dynamic — from the music.

## **MULTIMEDIA CLIPS**

### **Descendants**

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/classrooms/english-media-literacy>

This video clip features Sharon Malone and Tonya Groomes, both of whom are descendants of forced laborers. Groomes is a descendant of Green Cottenham, a young man who was charged with vagrancy and forced into labor, only to die shortly afterward. His story is featured in the film and also provides the primary arc for Douglas A. Blackmon’s book *Slavery by Another Name*. In this clip, the two women discuss the need to know their history and why it’s important to give voice to their forgotten ancestors.

### **Pre-Viewing Discussion Questions**

1. Who speaks for you?
2. In what ways do you exert your voice?

### **Post-Viewing Discussion Questions**

1. Why did Tonya Groomes say she felt there was no one to speak for the forced laborers?
2. What may have prevented the forced laborers from speaking for themselves?
3. How can silenced voices impact communities?

### **Chain Gangs or Convict Leasing?**

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/chain-gangs/video-chain-gangs-or-convict-leasing/>

This video clip discusses the differences between chain gangs and convict leasing.

### **Pre-Viewing Discussion Questions**

1. Have you ever seen prisoners working outside of a prison? If so, where?
2. What's a chain gang? Have you seen one before? If so, where?
3. What role do you think music plays in labor and work?
4. Have you ever sung in a group? How does it feel to do that?
5. Why are songs especially important to disempowered groups?

### **Post-Viewing Discussion Questions**

1. How does convict leasing differ from chain gangs?
2. Are there similarities between chain gangs and present-day prison labor?
3. Why might convicts be able to sing something they might not say?

### **Reflections on Dreams**

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/storycorps-stories/video-reflections-dreams/>

The following excerpt is from a StoryCorps oral history that features Sam Pollard, the director of *Slavery by Another Name*, as he discusses his interest in studying music from different cultures.

### **Pre-Viewing Discussion Questions**

1. What is the purpose of music?
2. What are some things that you have learned about history through music?

### **Post-Viewing Discussion Questions**

1. What is ethnomusicology?
2. How does Pollard connect ethnomusicology with studying the past?
3. What can music tell us about a particular time in history?
4. What can we learn from music that we can't learn from other historic sources?

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Josh White and the Protest Blues by Elijah Wald | *Living Blues Magazine*

<http://www.elijahwald.com/joshprotest.html>

*Gandy Dancers*, a film by Barry Dornfeld and Maggie Holtzberg-Call | FolkStreams

<http://www.folkstreams.net/film,101> (entire film is available for streaming)

## **STANDARDS**

### **Common Core State Standards**

Reading Standards for Literacy in History and the Social Studies

Standards 1 to 3: Key Ideas and Details

Standards 4 to 6: Craft and Structure

Standards 7 to 9: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

<http://www.corestandards.org/>

### **IRA/NCTE National Standards for English Language Arts**

Standard 1; Standard 3

<http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Books/Sample/StandardsDoc.pdf>

### **National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies**

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, Change

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards>

### **National Standards for History**

ERA 6: The Development of the Industrial United States (1870–1900)

Standard 2B; Standard 3A; Standard 3B

<http://www.nchs.ucla.edu/Standards/>

### **Historical Thinking Standards** (National Center for History in the Schools)

Standard 2; Standard 3; Standard 4

<http://nchs.ucla.edu/Standards/historical-thinking-standards-1/overview>



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ SECTION: \_\_\_\_\_

## FIELD HOLLERS AND WORK SONGS

### **Makes a Long Time Man Feel Bad**

It makes a long-time man feel bad (repeat twice)  
It's de worst old feelin' that I ever had

My mother she won't write to me  
She won't write no letter, she won't send no word  
It makes a long-time man feel bad,  
Jes' workin' my way back home.

Alberta she won't write to me  
She won't write nor neither send me word  
That makes a long-time man feel bad  
Lord I had a fine gal one time

Workin' my way back home

Most sho'ly my mother must be dead.  
She won't write menno letter, she won't send me no word  
Lord, it makes a long-time man feel bad.

Well, I had five gals at one time,  
I wrote till I wrote myself down.

### **Yonder Comes Dat Ole Evil Sergeant by Frank Brown**

Yon comes dat ole evil Sergeant, gonna number us all  
Ev'y day dat I roll, pardner, sick enough to die  
Go 'way, Sergeant, an' leave me 'lone  
I'm gonna do better from dis day.  
I'm gonna roll so studdy an' roll so long  
Boys, I'm gonna write to dat ole Gov'ner and tell him cut-a my time

(Look out, Oh Sir) —  
The way I'm feelin' gonna lose my mind.

### **Twenty-One Summers by Jose Smith**

I got a wife an' baby waitin' fer me  
Tell her I got twenty-one summers, I won't never go free  
(Note: in practicing before recording he gave: "she can't depend on me")  
I got twenty-one summers most too long  
Got me rollin' down an' I can't go home.  
Spoken: (I'm gone, man; which way, boys? Down through there)  
I got twenty-one summers, I won't ever go free  
Spoken: (Where? right down there on that —)  
I got a woman in Louisiana lookin' out for me..

### **I Stole Good Business by Eugene Shelton**

Hannah, Hannah, won't you open this do'  
I got you some mo' dresses —  
Stick 'em up —  
I stole dat jewels, silks an' satin  
Standin' hollerin' cryin' Let go  
I stole good business 'cause I got to work for you.  
If I hada knowed like I do, I would not been here a-workin' for yo  
Because you believe in workin'  
Boys, I'm sorry that I done wrong I stole that rooster 'cause he's away from home  
'Cause he stole, good business