

# More than Meets the Eye: Signal and Map Songs of the Underground Railroad

#### Resource ID#: 61821

#### Primary Type: Lesson Plan

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**More than Meets the Eye: Signal and Map Songs of the Underground Railroad**

This lesson helps elementary chorus students in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade learn about special music from our our history that was sung to share important information among the people who needed help and the people who provided help along the *Underground Railroad*. We are also learning how to read a musical score in an octavo format.

**Subject(s):** NGSSS: Music

**Grade Level(s):** 3, 4, 5

**Intended Audience:** Educators 

**Suggested Technology:** Computer for Presenter

**Resource supports reading in content area:** Yes

**Freely Available:** Yes

**Keywords:** music, elementary, chorus, Underground Railroad, octavo, American, history, performance, ensemble

**Instructional Component Type(s): Lesson Plan** , Assessment , Instructional Technique, Learning Goal

**Instructional Design Framework(s):** Direct Instruction , Learning Cycle (e.g., 5E)

**Resource Collection:** [iCPALMS](file:///C%3A%5CResources%5CPublicPreviewResourceCollection.aspx%3FResourceCollectionId%3D3)

#### LESSON CONTENT

* **Lesson Plan Template:** General Lesson Plan
* **Learning Objectives: What should students know and be able to do as a result of this lesson?**

**Learning Goal** Posted on the wall for the Unit)**:** We are learning about special music from our history that was sung to share important information among the people who needed help and the people who provided help along the *Underground Railroad*. We are also learning how to read a musical score in an octavo format.

**Success Indicators** (Posted with the Learning Objective)**:** I can:

* + Follow my words and music (soprano or alto; Part I or Part II) in the score (octavo).
	+ Identify significant words and phrases in the lyrics that provided important information to those who heard the music.
	+ Consider how to change the expressive qualities in the music to reinforce the lyrics.

**Lesson/Unit Objective(s)** (Posted on the wall for the Lesson)**:**

* + To discover the hidden messages often embedded in American music.
* **Guiding Questions: What are the guiding questions for this lesson?**

**Essential Question:** When is a song more than a song?

* + What secrets or hidden meanings do you think you might have uncovered in these song lyrics?
	+ Why are they secret and why are they included in this song called "(Follow) The Drinking Gourd?"
	+ How will your new knowledge about the song's lyrics affect how you'll sing the song or those lyrics?
	+ If you were in danger or captivity, how might you feel when you heard this song?
* **Prior Knowledge: What prior knowledge should students have for this lesson?**
	+ The ensemble will have rehearsed each of these two pieces enough that the basic pitches and rhythms have been mastered.
	+ 3rd-grade students will have prior experience “tracking” songs in other chorus music and in their general music books, although generally in easier unison, rounds, and some two-part songs. 4th- and 5th-grade students will have more experience with tracking.

**Vocabulary/Significant Text:**

* + Octavo
	+ Score
	+ Underground Railroad
	+ Conductor
	+ Passenger
	+ Safe house
	+ Signal song – sung to alert others *(“Get On Board, Little Children”)*
	+ Gospel train
	+ Fare
	+ Second class
	+ Get on board
	+ Map song – lyrics gave directions *([Follow]“The Drinking Gourd”)*
	+ First quail
	+ Drinking gourd
	+ Old man
	+ Freedom
	+ Riverbed / road
	+ Dead trees – show you the way
	+ Peg Leg Joe
	+ Left foot / peg foot
	+ Rivers described
	+ Two hills
	+ Other side
	+ “When the sun comes back”
	+ Stars in the Heavens
* **Teaching Phase: How will the teacher present the concept or skill to students?**

**Bell Activity: Word Detectives!**

* + As the students arrive and set up for rehearsal, the music for “Drinking Gourd” will be playing in the background.
	+ The posted “Bell Activity” will direct students to review the text on the page given to them as they arrived and to A) circle words and phrases they don’t understand and B) underline words and phrases they believe could have hidden or secret meanings. The text of “Drinking Gourd” has been extracted from their music and double-spaced to make it easier to read, analyze, and mark.
	+ As the room settles and students appear to have completed most or all of the Bell Activity, ask the students what secrets they think they might have uncovered in these lyrics. See “Vocabulary/Significant Text” for assistance.
	+ Discuss the significant words and phrases, and then see whether any students know why these hidden meanings might have been included in a song. Transition to a brief discussion of the Underground Railroad, using the vocabulary at the left and making it clear that this was a name for helping more than 100,000 African Americans escape slavery in the 1800s, rather than an actual “railroad” with trains. Make certain the students understand all words and phrases circled and underlined in the text.
	+ Share with the students a wall map of the US and Canada to see where the Underground Railroad helped people go, discussing the significance of the rivers, the “conductors,” and the symbols used along the way.

**Vocal Warm-ups—Preparing to Sing**

* + Prepare the students to sing in unison and two-part vocal exercises, reinforcing use of the child’s head voice, using lyrics and rhythms from “Drinking Gourd” and “Get on Board” to help them prepare specifically for these songs.
	+ Review segments of “Drinking Gourd” by singing them, as needed musically. Then, ask the students to consider how their new knowledge about the lyrics might change the dynamics of specific phrases. Invite students to share ideas, listen from beside the conductor, and share with the chorus how the selected dynamics reinforced or worked against the meaning of the lyrics.
	+ Play two contrasting recordings of the “Drinking Gourd.” Ask the students to compare the two performances, using correct music vocabulary as they share their thoughts with the group.
	+ Sing “Drinking Gourd” in its entirety and ask the students to consider how those words might have affected them if they were in danger and wanted to escape to safety.
	+ Transition to “Get On Board…,” which is a “signal song.” Rehearse a segment, as appropriate and needed, asking students to track their assigned part in the newest section. Explain to the students that this song was also significant to the Underground Railroad, as it helped the slaves know when the plans were all made and it was time for them to go (“get on board”).
	+ Talk about the vocabulary included in this music, which is less specific than that of the map song previously sung.
	+ Conclude with a fuller performance of “Get On Board, Little Children,” including use of the train whistle, again reinforcing that the idea was to make others think the song was about a train, but that it was not. Wander throughout the ensemble as the students sing, allowing them to sing a cappella, so you can observe how well various students are tracking, particularly those you’ve noted having difficulty in the past.
* **Guided Practice: What activities or exercises will the students complete with teacher guidance?**

**Bell Activity: Word Detectives!**

* + Discuss the significant words and phrases, and then see whether any students know why these hidden meanings might have been included in a song. Transition to a brief discussion of the Underground Railroad, using the vocabulary at the left and making it clear that this was a name for helping more than 100,000 African Americans escape slavery in the 1800s, rather than an actual “railroad” with trains. Make certain the students understand all words and phrases circled and underlined in the text.
	+ Share with the students a wall map of the US and Canada to see where the Underground Railroad helped people go, discussing the significance of the rivers, the “conductors,” and the symbols used along the way.

**Vocal Warm-ups—Preparing to Sing**

* + Prepare the students to sing in unison and two-part vocal exercises, reinforcing use of the child’s head voice, using lyrics and rhythms from “Drinking Gourd” and “Get on Board” to help them prepare specifically for these songs.
	+ Review segments of “Drinking Gourd” by singing them, as needed musically.
	+ Sing “Drinking Gourd” in its entirety and ask the students to consider how those words might have affected them if they were in danger and wanted to escape to safety.
	+ Transition to “Get On Board…,” which is a “signal song.” Rehearse a segment, as appropriate and needed, asking students to track their assigned part in the newest section.
	+ Conclude with a fuller performance of “Get On Board, Little Children.” Wander throughout the ensemble as the students sing, allowing them to sing a cappella, so you can observe how well various students are tracking, particularly those you've noted having difficulty in the past.
* **Independent Practice: What activities or exercises will students complete to reinforce the concepts and skills developed in the lesson?**

**Bell Activity: Word Detectives!**

* + The posted “Bell Activity” will direct students to review the text on the page given to them as they arrived and to A) circle words and phrases they don’t understand and B) underline words and phrases they believe could have hidden or secret meanings.
	+ As the room settles and students appear to have completed most or all of the Bell Activity, ask the students what secrets they think they might have uncovered in these lyrics. See “Vocabulary/Significant Text” for assistance.

**Vocal Warm-ups—Preparing to Sing**

* + Ask the students to consider how their new knowledge about the lyrics might change the dynamics of specific phrases. Invite students to share ideas, listen from beside the conductor, and share with the chorus how the selected dynamics reinforced or worked against the meaning of the lyrics.
	+ Play two contrasting recordings of the “Drinking Gourd.” Ask the students to compare the two performances, using correct music vocabulary as they share their thoughts with the group.
	+ Sing “Drinking Gourd” in its entirety and ask the students to consider how those words might have affected them if they were in danger and wanted to escape to safety.
	+ Transition to “Get On Board…,” which is a “signal song.” Rehearse a segment, as appropriate and needed, asking students to track their assigned part in the newest section.
* **Closure: How will the teacher assist students in organizing the knowledge gained in the lesson?**
	+ Conclude with a fuller performance of “Get On Board, Little Children,” including use of the train whistle and again reinforcing that the idea was to make others think the song was about a train, but that it was not. Wander throughout the ensemble as the students sing, allowing them to sing a cappella, so you can observe how well various students are tracking, particularly those you’ve noted having difficulty in the past.

#### ASSESSMENT

* **Formative Assessment:**
	+ The primary method of formative assessment in a multi-grade elementary chorus of vastly differing skills, knowledge and experience is observation, which requires a keen eye and a well-trained ear, which is part of a choral music educator's extensive training.
	+ It is highly recommended that the choral teacher primarily rehearse the chorus a cappella, which allows him/her to move throughout the ensemble to observe and listen for a variety of things: singing posture, tracking correctly in the music, pitch accuracy, tone, use of head voice, dynamics, and more. As students become accustomed to their teacher's movements, they will be quite comfortable with his/her feedback, whether it's a reinforcement or suggestion for improvement. This also allows the teacher to consider seating changes to place students needing vocal assistance next to or in front of students who are more accurate and/or vocally stronger.
	+ Occasional recording (audio-only!) of rehearsal segments allows students to focus on hearing their sound, articulation, dynamics, and more, providing them with an opportunity to offer positive feedback on what they sang well and what could be improved in the next effort. This is an activity that has to be taught over time, if it's to be positive and worthwhile. It's also best if the ensemble recording and playback is done on high-fidelity equipment, so the students hear what you have heard from the front of the ensemble!
* **Feedback to Students:**
	+ The giving, receiving, and applying of feedback is an on-going process for students and teachers in performance ensembles. See the section on Formative Assessment for further ideas on how to provide feedback to individual students during the rehearsal.
	+ Providing "false positives" or generalized comments, such as "good," to a run-through of a section or song does not help students. Rather, it confuses them and makes them curious as to why they need to continues to rehearse. Furthermore, students who know that it wasn't "good" or that you have provided a "false positive" will become discouraged and/or begin to doubt the teacher's skills and knowledge!
	+ Student-to-ensemble feedback gives students ownership and helps them be very engaged singers! This can be done by occasionally inviting students forward to make performance choices and direct the ensemble or to stand beside the director to listen and subsequently provide feedback and direct/listen again.
* **Summative Assessment:**
	+ Although many will argue that performance is THE summative assessment, it is ONE form of summative assessment, and it's very important to students to finally receive the emotional feedback for which they've been waiting, often for months. Few will argue the importance of performance to a student's growth. Performances teach students about the polish of a "public presentation": public behavior, good manners, and reaching a goal as a team. As they prepared for performance, they also gained skills in delayed gratification and the process of revision for improvement, something common to performance classes, but difficult to acquire cheerfully in most other content areas.
	+ Other forms of summative assessment in an elementary music ensemble are notes written in response to a review of their recorded performance, in which they identify what was performed particularly well (i.e., as planned) and what they think can be improved upon for their next performance (as a chorus or as an individual). It's possible to have other written or small-group singing assessments, but teachers need to balance the limited amount of time for rehearsal (often only once each week) and the importance that the singing experience be joyful, as the BODY is the INSTRUMENT, making singing a very personal and personalized experience!
	+ Teachers may choose to have their elementary chorus experience the Music Performance Assessment (MPA, either for comments-only, or for a grade. This includes a performance of three prepared songs, followed by a brief coaching from a choral musical educator trained and certified to act in this capacity; and an ensemble sight-reading experience suited to the ensemble's experience level, followed by comments and suggestions by a trained choral music educator.

#### ACCOMMODATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

* **Accommodations:**
	+ Elementary Chorus is a VERY inclusive class for students of ALL abilities. Students with certain identified learning disabilities and an IEP may need a "chorus buddy" to assist them with various tasks, as appropriate. When handled appropriately, most children will vie for the privilege of being a student's buddy.
	+ If needed, teachers can include the Access Points associated with the course benchmarks and standards. For this lesson, nearly all students will be able to manage the tasks.
	+ Some music may need to be enlarged for students with vision issues; other accommodations and adaptations can be addressed, as needed.
* **Extensions:**
	+ These two songs are excellent concert pieces and may also be used as part of Black History Month activities.
	+ The DVD and book may be used to further explain the Underground Railroad; the Internet is rich with excellent resources, particularly via the Smithsonian Institute.
	+ This concept can be extended to non-American, non-western music, as well.
* **Suggested Technology:** Computer for Presenter
* **Special Materials Needed:**
	+ Arrangement of “Get On Board, Little Children,” such as the one arranged by Greg Gilpin (Choristers Guild, CGA 1248)
	+ Train whistle
	+ Text of “… Drinking Gourd,” extracted from their chorus music
	+ Arrangement of “The Drinking Gourd,” such as the one arranged by Andre Thomas (Heritage) or an arrangement of “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” such as one arranged by Rollo Dilworth (Hal Leonard); by Valerie Showers Crescenz (BriLee Music); or by Jay Althouse (Alfred)
	+ Optional: “Follow the Drinking Gourd” (DVD) – produced by Reading Rainbow (GPN) and as seen on PBS; and/or the book on which this TV program was based
	+ Two contrasting recordings of “Drinking Gourd” – perhaps a publisher’s recording of the selected arrangement and the Smithsonian’s recording of Pete Seeger singing this music

#### PUBLIC REMARKS

***By Author/Submitter***

* These two songs are excellent concert pieces and may also be used as part of Black History Month activities. They may also be used to satisfy a portion of Florida's mandated instruction.

#### SOURCE AND ACCESS INFORMATION

**Name of Author/Source:** Linda Lovins

**Is this Resource freely Available?** Yes

**Access Privileges:** Public

**License:** Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported

#### ****Related Standards****

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| **Name** | **Description** |
| [MU.3.C.1.2:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/4026) | Respond to a musical work in a variety of ways and compare individual interpretations.

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| **Remarks/Examples:** e.g., move, draw, sing, play, gesture, conduct |

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| [MU.3.C.1.4:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/4028) | Discriminate between unison and two-part singing. |
| [MU.3.S.2.1:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/4033) | Identify patterns in songs to aid the development of sequencing and memorization skills.

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| **Remarks/Examples:** e.g., parts of a round, parts of a layered work |

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| [MU.4.C.1.2:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/4053) | Describe, using correct music vocabulary, what is heard in a specific musical work.

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| **Remarks/Examples:** e.g., movement of melodic line, tempo, repeated and contrasting patterns |

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| [MU.4.S.2.1:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/4062) | Apply knowledge of musical structure to aid in sequencing and memorization and to internalize details of rehearsal and performance. |
| [MU.4.H.3.1:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/4077) | Identify connections among music and other contexts, using correct music and other relevant content-area vocabulary, and explore how learning in one academic area can help with knowledge or skill acquisition in a different academic area.

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| **Remarks/Examples:** e.g., movement, form, repetition, rhythmic patterns/numeric patterns, fractions, vibrations/sound waves |

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| [MU.5.C.1.2:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/4083) | Hypothesize and discuss, using correct music vocabulary, the composer's intent for a specific musical work.

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| **Remarks/Examples:** e.g., title, historical notes, quality recordings, instrumentation, expressive elements |

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| [MU.5.S.2.1:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/4093) | Use expressive elements and knowledge of musical structure to aid in sequencing and memorization and to internalize details of rehearsals and performance. |
| [MU.5.H.3.1:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/4109) | Examine critical-thinking processes in music and describe how they can be transferred to other disciplines.

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| **Remarks/Examples:** e.g., reading, writing, observing, listening, evaluating, embellishing, revising |

 |
| [LACC.3.RI.2.4:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/5759) | Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 3 topic or subject area. |
| [LACC.4.RI.2.4:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/5769) | Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 4 topic or subject area*. |
| [LACC.5.RI.2.4:](http://www.cpalms.org/Public/PreviewStandard/Preview/5779) | Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 5 topic or subject area*. |