

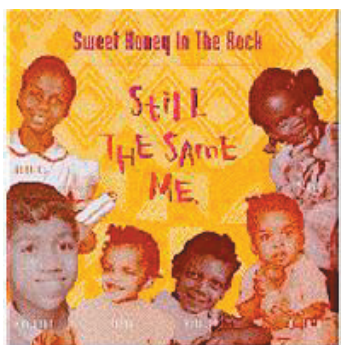
Sweet Honey In The Rock

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Each section includes questions for understanding (at the beginning) and exercises (at the end). These can be used to help students integrate the material presented into subjects they are already studying in the classroom, and are designed to meet some of the requirements of the Reading/Language Arts Framework and Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools.*	
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* Material contained in this Study Guide can be used to implement lessons that meet the Visual and Performing Arts content standards for California public schools. A full list of VAPA standards and content standards for related disciplines such as history and social studies can be found on line at:

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>

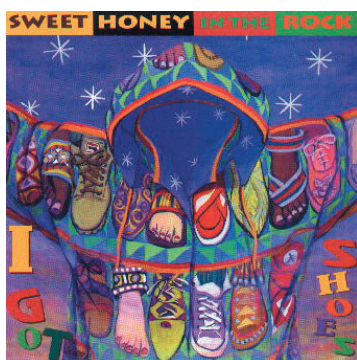
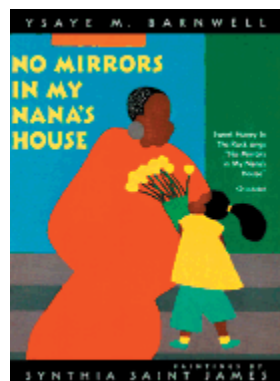


Still the Same Me

Sweet Honey has a long tradition of excellent and unique children's CDs, which this release continues. Highlights include the title track, six improvisations, fun "Nature Song," and peppy "Still Gotta Get Up in the Morning." Includes 20 pages of interviews about childhood (school, food, families, even hair!)- complete with kiddie pictures!

No Mirrors in My Nana's House

A children's book by Ysaye Barnwell with glorious, bright pictures by Synthia Saint James show us how to see the beauty, and accompanying CD of Sweet Honey In The Rock singing the song, tells us how to hear it.



I Got Shoes

This 1994 release for children became an immediate favorite—especially when folks heard the inspiring rap song, "Young and Positive."

Continuum Songbook

Each of the songs in this songbook is accompanied by lyrics, composer's notes and a bio of the Sweet Honey member who composed it. These invite you behind the scenes to hear how the music moved its originator. In addition, Shirley Childress Saxton explains a "sign interpreter's song," Harry Belafonte offers an introduction, and you'll find a history of the traditions Sweet Honey sings out of.



1. Welcome to *SchoolTime*!

Dear Teachers and Students,

On your visit to Cal Performances, you will attend a *SchoolTime* performance by the acclaimed a cappella group Sweet Honey in the Rock on Thursday, April 7 at Zellerbach Hall on the UC Berkeley campus.

This powerful a cappella ensemble performs traditional songs and original compositions that address many critical issues in today's society, including homelessness, work, freedom, justice, and equality. Their work reflects the strong legacy of African American music in America, especially the influence of spirituals.

By using the material provided in this study guide and attending the performance, your students will be able to address the question: ***“How will attending a performance of Sweet Honey in the Rock help us better understand African American musical traditions?”*** Targeted questions and exercises in each section will help focus students' learning about this remarkable ensemble, the songs they sing, and their art form of a cappella singing. Then, you can actively participate if you:

- CONSIDER the history and legacy of the songs being sung.
- LISTEN to the harmonies and how the singers weave them together
- THINK about how the singers communicate with each other and the audience
- OBSERVE how the songs express and communicate opinions about issues that are important to people today.
- REFLECT on what you have learned about AfricanAmerican music in this Study Guide

By observing carefully and participating with your imagination, heart and mind, you'll be on your way to becoming an expert at enjoying the performing arts. You'll find that you'll be inspired, you'll see how songs can communicate many things, and your spirits will soar!

Sincerely,

Laura Abrams
Manager, Education and Community Programs

2. Theater Etiquette

Be Prepared and arrive early

Allow yourself plenty of time to travel to the theater and locate parking. You'll want to arrive early enough to be seated in your seats well before curtain time (when the performance begins).

Be Aware and remain quiet

A theater is a “live” space—you can hear the performers easily, but they can also hear you, and you can hear other audience members, too! Because even the smallest sounds, like rustling papers and whispering, can be heard throughout the theater, it's best to stay quiet so that everyone can enjoy the performance without distractions. If you need to use it, the international sign for “Quiet Please” is to silently raise your index finger to your lips.

Show Appreciation by applauding

Applause is the best way to show your enthusiasm and appreciation. Performers show their appreciation for your attention by bowing to the audience. It's always appropriate to applaud at the end of a performance, and it's customary to continue clapping until the curtain comes down or the house lights come up.

Participate by responding to the action onstage

Sometimes during a performance, you may respond by laughing, crying or sighing. By all means, feel free to do so! Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form. For instance, an audience attending a string quartet performance will sit very quietly, while the audience at a gospel concert may be inspired to participate by clapping and shouting.

Concentrate to help the performers

Performers use concentration to focus their energy while on stage. If the audience watches in a concentrated way, the performers feel supported and are able to do their best work. They can feel that you are with them!



3. Unit-Long Understanding Goals

Questions for Understanding

For Teachers:

The material in this study guide is designed to introduce your students to the artists and work of Sweet Honey in the Rock. You may copy the pages for students to read, or else read these sections together in class.

Questions at the beginning of each chapter set the stage for the *SchoolTime* performance you will see with your class. You can prepare your students for the performance by setting understanding goals and using the exercises provided at the end of each chapter, as well as reinforcing students' comprehension with a post-performance class discussion. By adapting these materials to your class's grade level, you can address grade-appropriate California Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards.



Overarching Questions:

1 How can the music performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock help us understand American society and culture?

2 What are some things that songs can do?

3 How can knowledge of African-American history enhance our understanding of this performance?

Questions for Understanding

About The Artists

Consider these questions as you learn about Sweet Honey In The Rock and their beautiful singing:

1 Who are the performers? What do you think they are trying to express through their music?

2 What is the significance of the group's name?

3 What are some special characteristics of the artists that you might be able to observe at the theater?



Clockwise from left: Louise Robinson, Aisha Kahlil, Arnae, Shirley Childress Saxton, Carol Lynn Maillard, Nitanju Bolade Casel and Ysaye Maria Barnwell

3. About the Artists:

Sweet Honey in the Rock

Sweet Honey In The Rock is the dynamic, all-female, Grammy Award-winning singing group that makes soul-stirring music using the might and majesty of their voices. The group sings a-capella—unaccompanied except for rhythms they create with their bodies and hand-held percussion instruments. The seven African American women who make up Sweet Honey preserve and celebrate African and African American culture through song. Sweet Honey's music **shares** history, **fights** injustice, **encourages** standing up for what you believe in, and **celebrates** freedom, love, and respect for all life in the universe. Their music speaks out against oppression of every kind, and the lyrics of the songs are interpreted in American Sign Language for the Deaf and hard of hearing.

A Sweet Honey In The Rock performance is participatory! This is one concert where you will be on your feet, dancing, playing hand games with your neighbor, and singing with Sweet Honey members. At a Sweet Honey performances, almost every selection gets audience members moving.

For the latest information on Sweet Honey in the Rock,
visit their webpage: www.sweethoney.com

The Ensemble

Founded in 1973, Sweet Honey in the Rock is a Grammy Award-winning African-American female a cappella ensemble with deep musical roots in the sacred music of the black church —spirituals, hymns, gospel—as well as jazz and blues. The Sweet Honey experience is like no other. Six African American women join their powerful voices, along with hand percussion instruments, to create a blend of lyrics, movement and narrative that variously relate history, point the finger at injustice, encourage activism, and sing the praises of love. The music demands a just and humane world for all in eloquent lyrics that are simultaneously interpreted in uniquely expressive American Sign Language.

Meaning in the Name

On February 28, 1927 in Memphis, Tennessee, the blind sanctified singer Mamie Forehand recorded a refrain based on Psalm 81:16. In this passage of scripture, the poet and musician David advised his people that if they would serve the Lord, they would be rewarded by being fed “honey out of the rock...” While Forehand titled her song *Honey in the Rock* and sang those words, random congregations soon added the adjective “sweet” to the title, and the song has come down through history as “Sweet Honey in the Rock.”

Growing up in Southwest Georgia, Bernice Johnson Reagon heard this song sung by quartets, and although she had never sung it herself, it was a song that was constantly playing in her head, she says, as she called together a group of the strongest singers from her vocal workshop with the D.C. Black Repertory Company. It was 1973, and that evening the first song she taught the group was “Sweet Honey In The Rock.”

“After they got the chorus harmony just right, I said, that’s the name of the group, then I had to call my father, a Baptist minister, and ask him the song’s meaning. He told me that it was a sacred parable, and that the parable itself was not found in the Bible, but it told of a land so rich that when you cracked the rocks, honey flowed from them. I can still

remember how comforted I felt about the idea of singing inside of such an active powerful phrase.”

As Sweet Honey evolved into an ensemble of African-American women, so did the group’s understanding of their legacy. The struggle of African-American women for the survival and continuance of their people was similar to a rich land, one in which the rocks contained honey. If the rocks were struck, that honey flowed forth. Reagon noted that the legacy contained still other qualities associated with rocks. “Strength and consistency is always associated with us (sometimes too much), and to add to that an inner quality, to understand that inside that strength was honey—sweet and nurturing—helps to reveal the balance we as African-American women know is there. As a name, Sweet Honey in the Rock has been integral to creating this way of journeying as a singer and cultural activist, and African-American woman.”

Meet Sweet Honey In The Rock

What are your names?



*“A” in
American
Sign
Language*

Aisha Kahlil

My name Aisha Kahlil, was given to me when I was a sophomore in college. I met a Muslim brother who gave me the name, which I adopted when I took *shahada* as a Muslim. Aisha means “alive” in Arabic. Kahlil means “friend.” In Somalia, Aisha means, “What do you desire?”



“Y” in ASL

Ysaye Maria Barnwell

My first name comes from Belgium and was the last name of a violinist and composer whose name was Eugene Ysaye. My father gave me this name because he played the violin and gave violin lessons to me for 15 years. He really wanted me to be a violinist. My last name is Barnwell and it is Irish. There is a city in South Carolina called Barnwell and my father’s family and everyone I have ever met with that name had some connection to South Carolina.



"S" in ASL

Shirley Childress Saxton

In the Deaf Community, we identify one another using our name sign. My name sign is the letter "s" (handshape of a soft fist) with the thumb and index finger side facing and touching the cheek.



"M" in ASL

Carol Maillard

Maillard is French, and my great grandparents came from the French side of a Caribbean island named St Martin. I do like being called by my last name because there are not very many Maillards in the United States and it really seems to fit my energy.



"N" in ASL

Nitanju Bolade Casel

My full name is Clarice Adele Johnson Nitanju Bolade Casel. My parents named me Clarice; it means "clear and bright." Johnson is my father's family name: Nitanju was given to me by a Yoruba Priest who told me this name came to him in a dream. He told me it meant, "to possess and project trust." Bolade is a Yoruba name from Nigeria which means "honor arrives." Casel is the family name of my husband, Tayari.



"A" in ASL

Arnaé

I've asked my mom soooooo many times over the years how she came across my name. She says she doesn't remember; it just "came" to her! Mom was clear that my "e" had to always have an accent across it and that I should not hesitate to make sure people knew that. I look forward to meeting another Arnaé in my lifetime.



"L" in ASL

Louise

Louise means warrior. Renowned warrior. I was named after my mother's best friend, Louise.

*American Sign Language alphabet source illustrations from:
<http://where.com/scott.net/asl/abc.html>*

What was your earliest musical memory?

Aisha

I grew up singing around the house. We used to sing along with my mother and father's records, my father was always humming or singing, and my mother sang in the church choir. There was always music around the house, and I remember singing all the time. My sister and I used to make up performances and perform for the neighbors, and for anniversaries and birthdays. I was always the director, calling the other kids to come and practice.

Ysaye

When I was eight years old, my mother, father, a friend of theirs and I drove from New York City to Los Angeles, CA in our new 1954 Buick. I remember singing "Sipping Cider through a Straw" all the way there and back. I don't remember singing any other songs. It must have driven my parents and their friend crazy!

Shirley

My earliest memory of music is that I wouldn't sing out loud—I was always off key. I've since learned that singing is energizing, and it is expression of one's self—whether sung vocally or in Sign!

Maillard

We had a beautiful upright piano in our house where I lived with both of my grandparents in Philadelphia. It was dark brown and I loved to polish it and spent lots of time pretending I knew everything there was to know about music and composing (that was before I took lessons in the second grade). I would play and play all kinds of melodies and sing and get up and create all kinds of fancy dances. My heart was full of music and drama and stories. I had a wild imagination.

Nitanju

My early music memories are rehearsing/singing in the junior church choir; rehearsing our friends for neighborhood performances; spending most of my allowance on music; and trying to sing like all of the artists; and taking piano lessons. I LOVED the piano! Still do!

Arnaé

My grandmother, Essie Wallace Burton, provided my early musical training. I have distinct memories of sitting underneath her at age two and humming along as she snapped string beans at the kitchen table. My first taught song was “Hush (Somebody’s Calling My Name).” By the time I was three, I was leading that very song with my family singing group. I think of her warmly whenever I hear it.

Louise

My first memories of music are in the church. I was a member of the “number one “ choir, which was for kindergarden - 2nd graders. I had two songs that I led: “Satisfied with Jesus” and “We are Soldiers in the Army.” Although singing, was the first musical experience I had, acting was the main focus of my artistic career.

Founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock, Bernice Johnson Reagon

Singer, composer, scholar, and activist, Bernice Johnson Reagon organized Sweet Honey In The Rock in 1973. She is distinguished professor of history at American University, and curator emeritus at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History. She received a MacArthur Fellowship in 1989.

Reagon is the author of *If You Don’t Go, Don’t Hinder Me* (2001), editor and author of *We’ll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers* (1992), and with Sweet Honey, author of *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey In The Rock ...Still on the Journey* (1993). She was featured in the 1992 Emmy-nominated PBS documentary *The Songs Are Free: Bernice Johnson Reagon with Bill Moyers*. She has served as music consultant, producer, composer, and performer on film projects including the Emmy award-winning, *We Shall Overcome*, *Roots of Resistance*, *Eyes on the Prize*, and the Peabody award-winning *Africans in America* for PBS. In 1994, Reagon served as conceptual producer and host narrator for the Peabody Award-winning radio series *Wade in the Water, African American Sacred Music Traditions*. She curated an exhibition of the same title for the Smithsonian Institution Exhibition Service, and produced a CD anthology recording of sacred songs for Smithsonian /Folkways Recordings.



Visual Art Exercise

Thinking Ahead:

Collecting Data While Attending the Performance

Begin with a class discussion about the program the students will attend. Students can make a list of things to look and listen for during the performance based on the descriptions in this chapter. This will help them recall details when they return to the classroom.

Following the performance, students can use their memories to complete the following exercises. After the performance, students can use their collected perceptions to complete the following visual arts exercise, or a drawing, sculpture or collage of their own choosing.

Make a Poster

Your assignment is to make an advertisement for Sweet Honey in the Rock that will make people want to see their performance.

* What can you say about Sweet Honey in the Rock that will let people know how great they are?

* Choose your visual elements carefully. Besides a picture or photo of the group, what are some other interesting images you can include?

* Remember to include the group's name, the performance date, and the place (venue) so the audience will know where to go!

* Are there other elements that should be on a poster?

Questions for Understanding

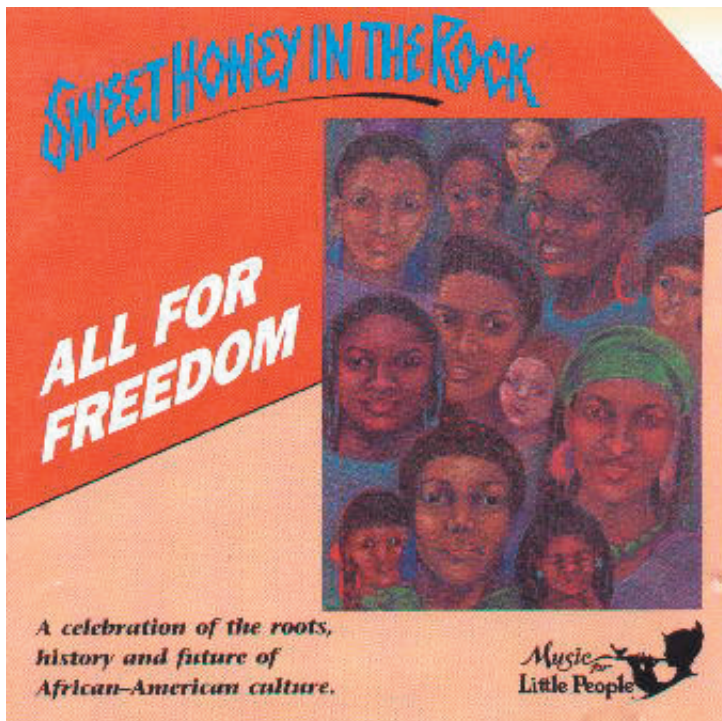
About the Performance

To understand Sweet Honey, you need to listen carefully to the words they sing, as well as how they perform as an ensemble. You will be better prepared for this performance if you can answer these questions:

1 How has Sweet Honey In The Rock adapted African-American musical traditions in their work?

2 What are some of the main themes or ideas this group sings about?

3 How do these artists make music together? What instruments and/or vocal techniques do they use?



The first children's album by Sweet Honey in the Rock includes well-known songs like "Make New Friends" and "Cumbaya" alongside great new songs like "The Little Shekere" and "Everybody Ought to Know." The songs were drawn from Dr. Reagon's extensive experience as a scholar of African-American children's lore from the South and Aisha Kahil and Nitaju Boldae Casel's workshops for younger audiences.

5. About the *SchoolTime* Performance: The Music of Sweet Honey In The Rock



The songs sung by Sweet Honey in the Rock come from the African American musical tradition and are influenced by gospel. The ensemble sings music based on spirituals, blues, gospel, work songs, jazz, and rap. Their songs address many critical issues in today's society, including homelessness, AIDS, work, freedom, justice, and equality.

Song selections for each Sweet Honey in the Rock concert are chosen by a member of the group who is designated as the concert programmer for that performance. As the concert begins, the programmer begins a narrative that sets the stage for the songs that will be sung. Prior to the performance, the other singers do not know the programmer's choice of songs. Even the programmer may not decide until the performance itself, and will take her cues from the mood and composition of the audience, so that every concert experience is fresh and unique.

The Singing Style of Sweet Honey In The Rock

a cappella - (Italian) in the church style

Sweet Honey in the Rock sings in the a cappella style, which means that the sole instrument used for all the melodies and harmonies is the human voice. The only props they use are for rhythm, such as shekeres (gourds with beads surrounding them that produce a rattle sound), rainsticks (a stick with seeds in it that produce a rain-like sound when it's inverted or shaken), and sometimes drums, cowbells, and hand-held rattles.

A cappella singers must have excellent pitch, or the ability to sustain a note, and be able to sing contrasting harmony with other singers. A cappella groups come in all sizes, though the quartet, or group of four singers, is the most traditional version. You may have heard of the barbershop quartet, which was an all-male group that sang songs popular throughout America in the 1920s, '30s and '40s. Sweet Honey in the Rock utilizes six voices in its harmonies. A seventh person signs the lyrics in American Sign Language.



Selected Song Lyrics

Here are some lyrics from the title song composed by Carol Maillard for Sweet Honey's young people's CD, ***Still the Same Me***, which was nominated for a Grammy in 2001.

Still The Same Me

I can change my socks and I can change my hat
And I can even change my mind
I can pretend to be anything
But I'm still the same me on the inside

I imagine I can fly like an eagle in the sky
I can dream I'm a big ol' tiger
But when I open my eyes it's no surprise
Still the same me on the inside...

The universe is a wonderful place
And there's no place I can't try
Happiness is when I do my best
Still the same me on the inside...

Sweet Honey In The Rock has created many albums and songs that appeal to young people. Songs on the following pages are reprinted with permission for educational purposes only. (See page 2 and 14 for descriptions of Sweet Honey's music and publications for young people)

Would You Harbor Me?

Lyrics and music by Ysaye M. Barnwell

Would you harbor me? Would I harbor you?
Would you harbor me? Would I harbor you?

Would you harbor a Christian, a Muslim, a Jew?
A heretic, convict or spy?
Would you harbor a runaway woman or child,
A poet, a prophet, a king?
Would you harbor an exile or a refugee,
A person living with AIDS?
Would you harbor a Tubman, a Garrett, a Truth
A fugitive or a slave?
Would you harbor a Haitian, Korean or Czech,
A lesbian or a gay?

Would you harbor me? Would I harbor you?
Would you harbor me? Would I harbor you?

Young and Positive

By Nitanju Bolade Casel

I am young and I am positive
I am the future, I'm gonna tell it like it is
I won't let anything stand in my way
My eyes are on the prize and they will stay that way.

I've got self respect and a whole lot of pride.
I won't let you pull me down into a negative stride.
Down a dead end street where only trouble lies.
That's not the way to keep my eyes on the prize.

This is the nineties and it's a difficult thing.
To maintain focus on my visions and dreams.
Violence and abuse of drugs
Turns an innocent child into a vicious thug.

Take a close look at this society
At the status of the youth and you will see
A sad situation that is out of hand
Youth are in trouble all over the land.

Don't let this state of affairs bring us down.
We have to work together, change things around
I start every day by taking the time
To remind myself, repeat one more time that

I am young and I am positive
I am the future, I'm gonna tell it like it is
I won't let anything stand in my way
My eyes are on the prize and they will stay that way.

I'll teach you, and you teach me
We'll exchange information on how to be
The best we can be, not anything less
It has nothing to do with how we look or dress

It's not material things that make us who we are
Not the sneakers, not the jewelry, not the clothes,
Or the cars
It's not the job, not the money, nor the status size
That's only momentary pleasure, not a valuable prize

Honesty and truth rank high on my list
Caring and respect for others help to assist me
'Cause I choose to move with love in my heart
For my sisters and my brothers
In every part of the world

You know, it doesn't make sense
To discriminate or believe in hate
Put down another because of their color or race

I must appreciate all the differences of each nationality
I don't want everybody to be like me
Can you imagine everyone exactly the same?
Life would be so boring I would go insane

I love the fact that each person is unique
The way we think, feel, look and express our needs
So let's move up to a positive tip
Ex racism. It's a negative trip!

Another dead end street
Don't even go down there
Let's accept one another and begin to care
Uplift ourselves, enrich our minds
And every day try to find a little bit of time to say:

I am young and I am positive
I am the future, I'm gonna tell it like it is
I won't let anything stand in my way
My eyes are on the prize and they will stay that way.

I don't dis' my elders, they deserve respect
As a matter of fact I do my best to protect
Those who came before me, who struggled and fought
So that I would have a chance to listen up and be taught

I turn off the TV, I open up a book
I use my imagination and try to be aware as I look
And wonder what the future will be
With pollution destroying the land and the seas,
Nuclear war, green house effect
More toxic waste than ever before

“Young and Positive” continued

I need all of you adults to live as if you care
Your greedy style of living is my nightmare
I need a world of clean air I can breathe
Where I can drink the water and enjoy the trees
Recycle all your plastic, bottles and glass

I am young and I am positive
I am the future, I'm gonna tell it like it is
I won't let anything stand in my way
My eyes are on the prize and they will stay that way

Don't leave it up to me to clean up your act
All your oil spills, all the needless deaths
Now you want to leave the planet and
Go somewhere else?
To the moon? Or Mars? You had better beware
You'll do the same thing when you get up there

So just don't forget when you turn around
I'll be standing right behind you with a serious frown
'Cause every time I hear an older person say:
“What's wrong with the young folks of today?”

I want to scream
You know what I mean?
Give us support to fulfill our dreams

When I pick up a paper or turn on the news
I'm rather overwhelmed by the negative views
I would rather hear about the successes of life
Not just the tragedy, not just the strife,
So if nothing else, I must encourage myself
Find a little bit of time to enrich my mind,
'cause

I am young and I am positive
I am the future, I'm gonna tell it like it is
I won't let anything stand in my way
My eyes are on the prize and they will stay that way.

I've got self respect and a whole lot of pride
I won't let you pull me down into a negative stride
Down a dead end street where only trouble lies
That's not the way to keep my eyes on the prize, 'cause

I am young and I am positive.

Aisha Khalil and Ysaye Maria Barnwell



I Remember I Believe

Lyrics and music by Bernice Johnson Reagon

I don't know how my mother walked her trouble down
I don't know how my father stood his ground
I don't know how my people survived slavery
I do remember, that's why I believe

I don't know why the rivers overflow their banks
I don't know why the snow falls and covers the ground
I don't know why the hurricane sweeps through the land
Every now and then
Standing in a rainstorm, I believe.

I don't know why the angels woke me up this morning soon
I don't know why the blood still runs through my veins
I don't know how I rate to run another day
I am here still running I believe.

My God calls to me in the morning dew
The power of the universe knows my name
Gave me a song to sing and sent me on my way
I raise my voice for justice, I believe.



Writing Exercises

Your Own Song

1. Think of a song that makes you feel better when you are upset. Perhaps you could teach it to your class, or tell them the words. How does this song make you feel better?
2. Write your own song! It can be about yourself, your family or something that happened to you.

Writing Exercises

After the performance, think about the *music, movements* and *message* that are part of Sweet Honey in the Rock's performance.

1. Imagine you are one of the performers. Write a journal expressing your experiences and reflections as you travel the world on tour.
2. Write a letter to one of the artists. What would you like to ask her?

Note to Teachers:

These exercises can be adapted to your grade level as appropriate.

Questions for Understanding

African American Music in the United States

Knowledge of the role of music in African American history and culture can help students place the songs of Sweet Honey in the Rock into context. As you listen to the songs, ask yourself:

1 How has music, religion, and the legacy of slavery affected the songs of Sweet Honey in the Rock?

2 How are their stories, emotions, and messages similar to those expressed in the spirituals and other songs of their ancestors?

3 How has learning about history helped you better understand the music of Sweet Honey in the Rock?



6. Reading: The Beginnings of African-American Music in the United States

By Sandra Graham

Slave Songs

When Africans were brought to America as slaves in the 1700s and 1800s, they entered a frightening and dangerous world. They were sold to strangers whom they couldn't understand, because they didn't speak English. And because they came from many different tribes within Africa, they often couldn't even communicate with each other. Many of them were separated from their families. They had to work long hours. They had little food to eat. They weren't allowed to learn how to read, and some owners wouldn't let them practice religion. Masters beat them for not working hard enough or for trying to escape. Imagine how lonely and hopeless you would feel in such a situation.

But one thing did give slaves hope in spite of all these troubles: music, especially singing. Everyone had a voice, and therefore everyone could sing. When slaves sang, they sang together, just as they had back home in Africa. This created a feeling of community among them.



Sandra Graham is Assistant Professor of Music at the University of California, Davis.

Spirituals were an extremely important type of song. You probably know at least a few spirituals, such as “Michael, Row the Boat Ashore”; “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”; “Go Down, Moses;” “Steal Away”; and Deep River. The characters in spirituals come from the Bible, and the stories usually tell about someone who overcomes a big obstacle, like Jonah getting out of the belly of the whale, or David winning his fight against Goliath. These stories were significant to slaves, who identified with Jonah and David and their struggles.

Spirituals are very easy to sing, for a good reason. They were created for a type of religious worship called a camp meeting. Camp meetings were first held in 1800 in Kentucky. People would go to the woods and fields and camp out in tents and attend worship services for several days at a time. They were a way for people who lived on the frontier – who didn’t live near neighbors or a church – to get together and worship. Both whites and blacks attended camp meetings, although they held separate meetings for each group.

Most of the people who attended camp meetings were illiterate: they couldn’t read or write. The songs that they sang during worship had to be easy to remember. Therefore, spirituals usually have lots of repetition, and often have a chorus (a part of the song that repeats after each verse). That way, people could sing them without needing a book. Another thing that made written music unnecessary was the use of call and response. A leader would begin the song (the call), and everyone else would respond (the response).



The lives of African Americans in the rural South remained difficult into the early 20th century, and so spirituals maintained their place of prominence in their communities.

This is an example from a spiritual you probably know. Try performing this in class:

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”

Leader (call): Swing low, sweet chariot,

Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home.

Leader (call): Swing low, sweet chariot,

Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home.

The verse above is called the **chorus**, also called the **refrain**. Note that there are only two different lines of text, so it’s very easy to remember.

Here’s the first verse:

Leader (call): I looked over Jordan, and what did I see?

Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home.

Leader (call): A band of angels coming after me.

Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home.

(sing chorus again)

Because these songs were passed on through oral tradition (they weren’t written down, so people had to learn them from other singers), they didn’t always have a specific number of verses or even specific words. The leader decided what verse to sing, and in what order to sing the verses. One of the advantages of spirituals is that you can make up your own verses very easily – and people often did. That way they could make the spiritual reflect their own lives. As a result, every performance of a spiritual was unique. Every time someone sang the same spiritual, it sounded different.

Try making up your own verse to *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*. You can begin by making it relate to your own life. If you have trouble getting started, try filling in the missing line below:

Leader (call): On my last quiz I got a D,

Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home.

Leader (call): [make up your own line]

Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home. (sing chorus)

Can you come up with a rhyming line? (Suggestions: “Next time I’m aiming for a C/B”; “My teacher wasn’t very happy with me”; “But my best friend is helping me.”) Making up your own additions to a song like this is called improvisation. Another way of thinking about this is “composition during performance.” You can improvise both text and melody. In doing this, you make the song your own. This is what African Americans did with their songs: Every singer made the songs their own, so that spirituals and other types of songs became records of African American lives.

How do you think a song like *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* gave slaves hope? If you look at the words, they talk about a chariot and a band of angels coming to get the singer and take him or her “home.” Where do you think home is? Perhaps Africa, perhaps heaven. Home is a place where there will be no more suffering; the singer will be free and reunited with family and friends.

The Function of Spirituals

Spirituals spread from camp meetings to plantations, and they became part of the everyday lives of slaves until the Civil War. Spirituals were functional songs. This means that they had a specific purpose in society. For example:

1. **WORK.** Singing spirituals made work less boring. It also helped set a rhythm for work that had repetitive actions, like picking or digging. Slave owners liked this because it made the slaves more productive.
2. **WORSHIP.** Even though some owners didn't allow their slaves to worship on the plantation, slaves found ways around this. One way was something called the invisible church. At night, after the owners were asleep, the slaves would go out into the woods (their invisible church) and worship, where no one could see or hear them. Spirituals were an important part of this worship.
3. **ENTERTAINMENT.** At the end of a long day, or during time off on a Sunday, slaves would often sing spirituals for relaxation.
4. **CODE SONGS.** One important function of spirituals was their use in helping slaves escape. Harriet Tubman was a slave who escaped from a plantation in Maryland in 1849 and who worked as an abolitionist (someone who wants to abolish, or get rid of, slavery). She helped over 300 slaves escape north to freedom through the Underground Railroad. This wasn't really a railroad, but a trail of homes owned by other abolitionists who were willing to shelter escaped slaves on their way North. Harriet Tubman's code name was Moses, because, as the Old Testament explains, Moses helped lead his people (the Israelites) out of slavery in Egypt. Therefore the spiritual "Go Down Moses" was a way of alerting slaves that Harriet Tubman was on her way.



If one slave wanted to advise another slave that an escape was planned for that night, he might sing, "Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus." In coded language, "steal away" means "escape," and "Jesus" means the North, or safety. Therefore, spirituals functioned as code songs to hide important messages from the owners.



The Underground Railroad was a perilous journey that people undertook with both hope and desperation.

How were spirituals performed? Although sometimes they were accompanied by banjo or fiddle, when instruments weren't available they were sung unaccompanied, or a cappella (which is how Sweet Honey in the Rock performs their songs). The singers improvised harmonies: they sang pitches that were different

from the melody. (You can try this in class: The teacher can give you a pitch to sing, and then your teacher can sing a different pitch at the same time. This is harmony: two or more different pitches sung at the same time.) In addition, singers often clapped their hands and danced during spirituals.

Until the Civil War, then, spirituals were a communal music in which everyone participated. They were passed along through oral tradition, and each performance was unique due to improvisation. Call and response and repetition made the songs easy to remember. Spirituals had a variety of functions in slave society.

Emancipation/After the Civil War

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the **Emancipation Proclamation**, which freed over 4 million slaves. Even though this was wonderful news for the “freedmen,” it didn’t change their lives right away. Imagine being a slave, and suddenly you are free. You can’t read or write, you have no possessions and no money. What’s worse, suddenly you are homeless because you don’t work on the plantation any longer. What would you do?

You would probably want to get an education, because that would help you get a good job. But that was easier said than done. Schools in the South didn't want African American students. After the Civil War ended in 1865, the government organized a Freedman's Bureau to help former slaves, but it didn't have much money to help with education. So missionary organizations stepped in and started schools for the freedmen, like Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee. Unfortunately, these schools had little money and were always in danger of closing. A teacher at Fisk came up with a solution: He would take a group of 12 students on a concert tour of the North to raise money for the school.

On October 6, 1871, this group – who became known as the Fisk Jubilee Singers – set off on their first tour. They were the very first people to sing spirituals on a concert stage. Before the Civil War, enslaved African Americans sang spirituals in private, not to an audience. But the Fisk Jubilee Singers made the spirituals into concert music, and brought them to a wide audience of both blacks and whites.

This took enormous courage. Because they were black, the young students weren't allowed to ride on certain cars on trains. Sometimes people threatened them or threw rocks at them. Hotel owners turned them away. Newspapers sometimes made fun of them. The students were homesick and missed their friends and families. But their faith and dedication paid off, and eventually they became popular not only in the U.S. but in Great Britain and Germany as well. They sent back large amounts of money to their school, and this financed new buildings.



The Fisk Jubilee Singers brought spirituals to the concert stage. The picture above hangs in the Fisk University Collections in Nashville, Tennessee. It was painted by the British artist Edmund Havel (1835-1908) in 1873 and is entitled "The Jubilee Singers."

After spirituals became popular through concerts, other kinds of African American music emerged, such as the blues, gospel, rhythm and blues, and rap. All of these types of music share certain characteristics that relate to African music.

African Music

Remember that Africa is a continent, not a country. There are almost 3,000 different ethnic groups and about 1,000 different languages. Therefore, we can't really talk about "African music," because there are many different types of music in Africa. Some ethnic groups have just vocal music, others primarily drum music, and others use a variety of instruments like horns, flutes, thumb pianos, and stringed instruments. In some societies a musician can only inherit the role. In others, anyone could be a musician. But despite the great variety of music in Africa, some generalizations can be made about the way it is performed:

- * There is repetition with variation.
- * Movement (dance, gesture) is always present. In fact, most African definitions of music include dance.
- * Voices and instruments overlap, so there are very few silent moments.
- * Call and response is common.
- * Music is communal: everyone participates, whether by singing, clapping, dancing, shouting, or playing an instrument.
- * The voice quality tends to be intense and strong.
- * Africans celebrate a sound texture in which individual voices stand out. If you've ever sung in a school chorus, your director has probably asked you to blend in so you all sound alike. But in African music, it's just the opposite!



A dancer of Le Ballet National du Senegal demonstrates the energetic connection between African music and dance.

When Africans came to America, they may have lost their languages, but they remembered their music. They re-created African song in America, influenced both by their new surroundings (for example, the English language, American music) and their cultural memory of Africa (how the songs were performed). Everything in the list above applies to how the spirituals were first performed, as well as to blues, gospel, rap, and other types of African American music. Listen for these things when Sweet Honey in the Rock performs.

Summary

Music has always been important in helping people get through hard times, as well as in celebrating good times. African American music is especially significant because the music of Africans was taken away from them, along with their liberty, when they were enslaved in America. Spirituals kept the slaves' hopes alive and the code songs helped them escape. Over one hundred years later, in the 1960s, African Americans came back to these same spirituals to help keep hope alive during the **Civil Rights** era. Civil Rights protesters took part in demonstrations to get the same rights as white Americans, such as any seat on a bus, and equal access to education and jobs. Even today, when people go through hard times, they sing spirituals to lift their spirits.

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Hughes, Langston. *Famous Negro Music Makers*. Famous Biographies for Young People Series. New York: Dodd, Mead. Each chapter profiles different African American musicians and the story of their music. Includes chapter on the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

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Glossary

Abolitionist – A person who wanted to abolish, or get rid of, slavery. Abolitionists wanted to make the slaves free.

A cappella – Singing with no instrumental accompaniment.

Call and response – A way of performing a song with a group of people. A leader will sing a line of the song (the **call**), and the group will sing the next line (the **response**). Most spirituals are performed using call and response.



This illustration is from a popular nineteenth-century publication. It shows reformer Wendell Phillips (1811-1884) addressing an April 11, 1851 meeting to protest the case of Thomas Sims, a fugitive slave being tried in Boston. A fiery and persuasive orator, Phillips was a member of the Boston Committee of Vigilance that tried to prevent Sims from being returned to slavery. The attempts failed and on April 13, United States marshals marched Sims to a ship that returned him to Savannah, where he was publicly whipped. However, it was the efforts of Phillips and other abolitionists that eventually helped to set the slaves free.

Camp meeting – A style of worship that began in 1800 on the frontier. People would gather for several days and worship together in tents.

Chorus – The tune and words to the chorus stay the same throughout an entire song. The chorus is usually sung in between different verses. Also called a **refrain**.

Communal music – Music in which everyone in the group or community participates. African and African American music is usually communal.

Ethnic group – A group of people who share a common ancestry, heritage, language, religion, memories, and who live in the same region together. Some ethnic groups in Africa are the Shona, who live in Zimbabwe; the Zulu, who live in South Africa; and the Dagbamba, who live in Ghana.

Functional songs – Songs have different functions, or purposes, in society. For example, “Happy Birthday” is a functional song, because it is sung only when someone has a birthday. It has the purpose of wishing someone happy birthday.

Harmony – The simultaneous sounding of two or more tones, especially when it is pleasing to the ear.

Improvisation – Spontaneous composition, or composition in performance. Instead of making up a song ahead of time, the musician makes it up on the spot, as he or she performs it. Spirituals had a lot of improvisation: Singers might change the words as they were singing, or change the tune, or add new verses, or cut out some of the verses. Improvisation makes music interesting, because each time you hear a song it is different.

Invisible church – Many plantation owners would not allow their slaves to worship in their own way, with singing and dancing. So at night, when everyone else was asleep, the slaves sneaked into the woods and worshipped. The forest and the fields became their “church,” although it wasn’t a real building (and therefore was “invisible”).

Oral tradition – A way of passing along knowledge by word of mouth, instead of through writing. Spirituals were passed on through oral tradition, which meant that people memorized them and then taught them to others.

Spirituals – Songs that were created for worship in the camp meeting. They are easy to remember because the words and tunes are repetitive. Many stories are about overcoming an obstacle, and the characters come from the Bible.

Underground Railroad – A route (not a real railroad) that slaves used to escape to the North and to freedom. The stops along this route were the homes of **abolitionists**, who protected the escapees while they slept during the day. The fleeing slaves traveled by night so they wouldn’t be noticed. Harriet Tubman was an important “conductor” on this railroad, and she helped organize more than 300 escapes.

Vocabulary Exercises

abolitionist	invisible church
a cappella	famous
agriculture	harmony
call and response	improvisation
chorus	lyrics
chariot	oral tradition
Civil Rights Movement	rescue
comforted	slaves
community	spirituals
ethnic group	Underground Railroad

Vocabulary is a gateway to understanding

Use the vocabulary list as appropriate for your grade level for greater understanding of the performance. Be sure to include some things that you have learned about African American history and culture in your vocabulary assignments.

Elementary School grades:

Practice your dictionary skills! Choose some words from the list above and then write sentences with each of the words.

Middle School grades:

In a 5-paragraph essay, use as many of the vocabulary words as you can to describe how the learning about the role of African-American music in the United States is an important factor in understanding the performance of Sweet Honey in the Rock, AND how attending the performance is a good way to become familiar with African American musical traditions.

You can use the ***Class Discussion Questions*** on page 22 to get you started.

7. Teacher *SchoolTime* Evaluation Form

It is important for us to hear about your *SchoolTime* experience. Your comments help us plan future presentations, and provide valuable testimony to our funders about this vital program.

Sweet Honey in the Rock ***SchoolTime* performance, April 7, 2005**

Your School _____ Grade Level _____

Your Name (optional) _____

How many *SchoolTime* performances have you attended in the past? _____

Was this Study Guide useful in preparing your students for the show? If yes, how so? If not, please recommend elements you would use instead.

What was your students' reaction to the performance? Did the class discuss the experience afterwards?

Was the performance useful or appropriate for your curriculum? Was the Study Guide useful in terms of your curriculum? In what ways?

Are the performing arts part of your school's curriculum? ___Yes ___No
Which ones? ___Music ___Dance ___Theater _____ Other (explain)

Cal Performances welcomes and appreciates seeing student work based on performances at Zellerbach Hall! Send to:
Laura Abrams, Cal Performances, 101 Zellerbach Hall, UCB, 94720-4800
eduprograms@calperfs.berkeley.edu.
Thank you!

8. Student *SchoolTime* Evaluation Form

Sweet Honey in the Rock

***SchoolTime* performance, April 7, 2005**

Your School _____ Grade Level _____

Did you know anything about this performance before you came to see it?
How was the performance different from or the same as you expected it to be?

Did you have a favorite part of the show? Explain your favorite part and why you liked it. Was there anything you didn't like?

After seeing the performance, what can you say about the performers?
If you can't think of anything to write, describe their costumes or their skills.

Do you take classes in any of these performing arts, or practice any of them for your own enjoyment?

_____Dance _____Music _____Theater _____Singing

Would you like to? ____Yes ____No

YOUR OPINION COUNTS!

How did you like the show?

We'd love to see your
class work, letters and artwork!

Send materials to Laura Abrams, Cal Performances
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This Cal Performances *SchoolTime* Study Guide was
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