



dance music theater

# Cal Performances

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

*SchoolTime 07/08*



## Study Guide

### **Sweet Honey in the Rock**

Friday, April 4, 2008 at 11 a.m.

Zellerbach Hall



## About Cal Performances and *SchoolTime*

The mission of Cal Performances is to inspire, nurture and sustain a lifelong appreciation for the performing arts. Cal Performances, the performing arts presenter of the University of California, Berkeley, fulfills this mission by presenting, producing and commissioning outstanding artists, both renowned and emerging, to serve the University and the broader public through performances and education and community programs. In 2005/06 Cal Performances celebrated 100 years on the UC Berkeley Campus.

Our *SchoolTime* program cultivates an early appreciation for and understanding of the performing arts amongst our youngest audiences, with hour-long, daytime performances by the same world-class artists who perform as part of the main season. Teachers have come to rely on *SchoolTime* as an integral and important part of the academic year.



### Cal Performances Education and Community Programs Sponsors

Cal Performances' Education and Community Programs are supported by American Express Company Foundation, California Arts Council, California Mortgage & Realty, Design Community & Environment, Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Orton Development Inc., Sharon & Barclay Simpson, Pacific National Bank, The Wallace Foundation, Bernard E. & Alba Witkin Charitable Trust, and The Zellerbach Family Foundation.

# Welcome

March 19, 2009

Dear Educator and Students,

Welcome to *SchoolTime*! On **Friday, April 4, 2008**, at **11:00 a.m.**, you will attend the *SchoolTime* performance **Sweet Honey in the Rock** 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 freedom, justice, peace and equality. Their work reflects the strong legacy of African American music in America, especially the influence of spirituals.

The information included here explores the work and art of this remarkable singing group, providing a context for the performance. Your students will learn about the history of African American song traditions, the art form of *a cappella* singing, and some songs written by the members of Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Your students can actively participate at the performance by:

- **OBSERVING** the many ways the singers communicate the message of the song
- **LISTENING** to the harmonies as the performers weave their voices together
- **THINKING ABOUT** how the singers communicate with each other and the audience
- **REFLECTING** on what you have learned about African American music and the power of song to communicate powerful messages

We look forward to seeing you at the theater!

Sincerely,



Laura Abrams  
Director, Education  
& Community Programs



Rica Anderson  
Education Programs Administrator

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# 1 Theater Etiquette

**Be prepared and arrive early.** Ideally you should arrive at the theater 30 to 45 minutes before the show. Allow for travel time and parking, and plan to be in your seats at least 15 minutes before the performance begins.

**Be aware and remain quiet.** The 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! Even the smallest sounds, like rustling papers and whispering, can be heard throughout the theater, so it’s best to stay quiet so that everyone can enjoy the performance without distractions. 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 return their appreciation for your attention by bowing to the audience at the end of the show. It is always appropriate to applaud at the end of a performance, and it is 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.** These artists use concentration to focus their energy while on stage. If the audience is focused while watching the performance, they feel supported and are able to do their best work. They can feel that you are with them!

**Please note:** *Backpacks and lunches are not permitted in the theater. Bags will be provided for lobby storage in the event that you bring these with you. There is absolutely no food or drink permitted in the seating areas. Recording devices of any kind, including cameras, cannot be used during performances. Please remember to turn off your cell phone.*





## 2 About the Performance

### Guiding Questions:

- ♦ What will you experience at a Sweet Honey in the Rock concert?
- ♦ How do the artists use their songs to effect social or political change?
- ♦ What is the role of the sign language interpreter in Sweet Honey in the Rock's performance?

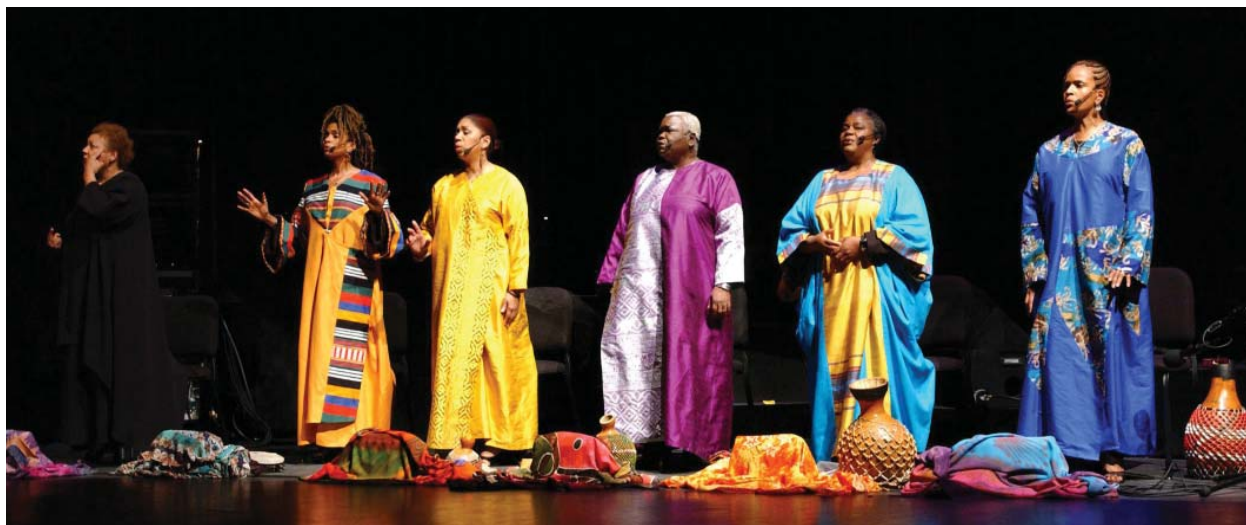
Founded in 1973 by Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, Sweet Honey In The Rock is a Grammy Award-winning African American female *a cappella* ensemble with deep musical roots in the sacred music of the black church – spirituals, hymns, gospel – as well as jazz and blues. The Sweet Honey experience is like no 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 speaks out against oppression and exploitation of every kind. The sextet, whose words are simultaneously interpreted in uniquely expressive **American Sign Language**, demands a just and humane world for all. After 30 years of leading and singing with the ensemble, Dr. Reagon retired from Sweet Honey in February 2004.

Rooted in a deeply held commitment to create music out of the rich textures of African American legacy and traditions, Sweet Honey in the Rock possesses a stunning vocal prowess that captures the complex sounds of blues, spirituals,



traditional gospel hymns, rap, reggae, African chants, hip hop, ancient lullabies, and jazz improvisation. Sweet Honey's collective voice, occasionally accompanied by hand percussion instruments, produces a sound filled with soulful harmonies and intricate rhythms.

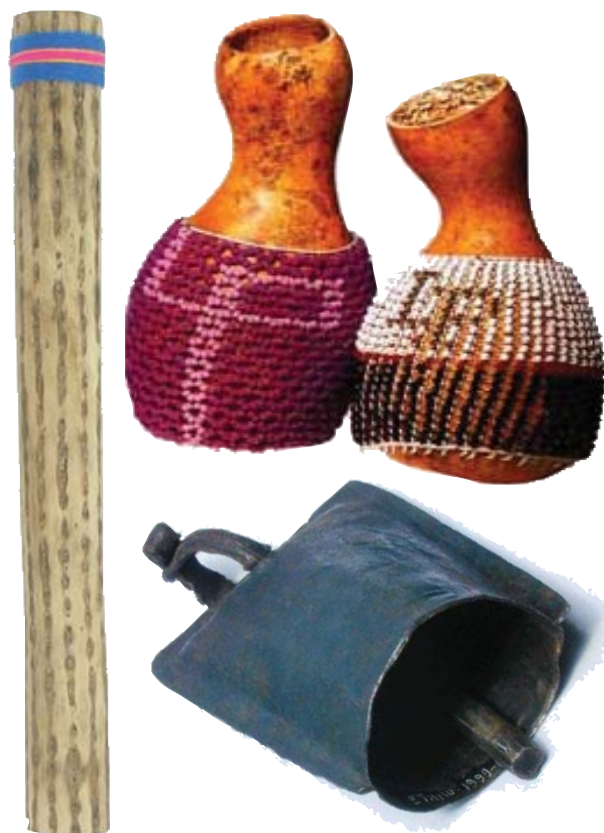
During both good and bad times, Sweet Honey in the Rock has brought their inspiring music to communities across the United States and around the world, raising the voice of hope, love, justice, peace and resistance. Sweet Honey in the Rock invites audiences to open their minds and hearts and think about who we are and what we do to one another and to our fellow creatures on this planet.



## Singing Style

Sweet Honey in the Rock sings in the *a cappella* style, which means the human voice is the sole instrument used for all the melodies and harmonies. The only instruments used are for rhythm, including **shekeres** (gourds with beads netted on the outside to produce a rattle sound), **rainsticks** (a stick with seeds inside that make a rain-like sound when the stick is inverted or shaken), drums, **cowbells** and hand-held rattles.

*A cappella* singers must have excellent pitch, and be able to sing contrasting harmony with other singers. *A cappella* groups come in all sizes, though the quartet is the most traditional version. Sweet Honey in the Rock currently utilizes five voices in its harmonies. A sixth performer simultaneously signs the lyrics in American Sign Language.



Clockwise from left: rainstick, shekeres and cowbell

# 3 About the Artists

## Sweet Honey in the Rock

### Guiding Questions:

- ♦ What personal experiences have influenced the artists?
- ♦ What kinds of messages can be communicated through in music?
- ♦ How are Sweet Honey In The Rock's songs like conversations?

### The Ensemble

Sweet Honey in the Rock is a dynamic, all-female, Grammy Award-winning singing group that makes soul-stirring music using the might and majesty of their voices. While preserving and celebrating African and African American culture through song, Sweet Honey's music also shares history, fights injustice, encourages standing up for your own beliefs, and celebrates freedom, love and respect for all life in the universe.

### 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. She called together a



group of the strongest singers from her vocal workshop with the Washington, D.C. Black Repertory Company. 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 asked him the song's meaning. He told me that it was a sacred parable (a simple story illustrating a moral or religious lesson), 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."

As a name, Sweet Honey in the Rock speaks clearly to the journey of the group as singers, cultural activists, and African American women.



## Meet Sweet Honey in the Rock *What are your names?*

### 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?”

### 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.

### 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.



### 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.

### Nitanju Bolade Casel



My full name is Clarice Adele Johnson Nitaju Bolade Casel. My parents named me Clarice; it means “clear and bright.” Johnson is my father’s family name. Nitaju 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.

### Louise Robinson



Louise means warrior, “renowned warrior.” I was named after my mother’s best friend, Louise.



Sweet Honey In The Rock performing with Big Lovely in 2003

### ***What is 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 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; trying to sing like all of the artists; and taking piano lessons. I LOVED the piano! Still do!

#### **Louise**

My first memories of music are in the church. I was a member of the "number one" choir, which was for kindergardeners through second 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.



**Bernice Johnson Reagon**  
***Founder of Sweet Honey In The Rock,***  
***composer, singer, scholar, music***  
***producer, author, public speaker and***  
***activist***

For over four decades, Bernice Johnson Reagon's multi-faceted career has taken her from the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement in her birthplace of Albany, Georgia to her pioneering work as a scholar, teacher and artist in the history and evolution of African American culture.

Reagon's contributions as a scholar and composer are reflected in her numerous publications and productions on African American culture and history, as well as in her academic service as Professor Emeritus of History at The American University in Washington, DC and as Cosby Professor of Fine Arts at Spelman College, Atlanta, GA. Founder of the Smithsonian Institution's Program in African American Culture, she served as principal scholar, conceptual producer, and host of the path-breaking and Peabody Award-winning radio series *Wade*

**Bernice Johnson Reagon**

*In The Water: African American Sacred Music Traditions*. Currently, Reagon holds the position of Curator Emeritus at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.

In 1973, Reagon founded Sweet Honey In The Rock and led the group until her retirement in 2004 after 30 years of performing and recording. In addition to her highly acclaimed publications and recordings, Reagon has received numerous honors in recognition of her work, including the MacArthur Fellowship (1989), the Heinz Award for the Arts and Humanities (2003), and the 1995 Presidential Medal for her contribution to public understanding of the humanities.



# 4 Selected Song Lyrics\*

## Guiding Questions:

- ♦ How can songs contain powerful messages?
- ♦ What are some of the political and social issues the songs discuss?

## African Musical Traditions:

Sweet Honey in the Rock has created many albums and songs that appeal to young people. The songs included here were composed by members of the group. By providing the lyrics, we hope to provide your students with a more complete understanding of the ensemble's musical mission and values.

### ***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?

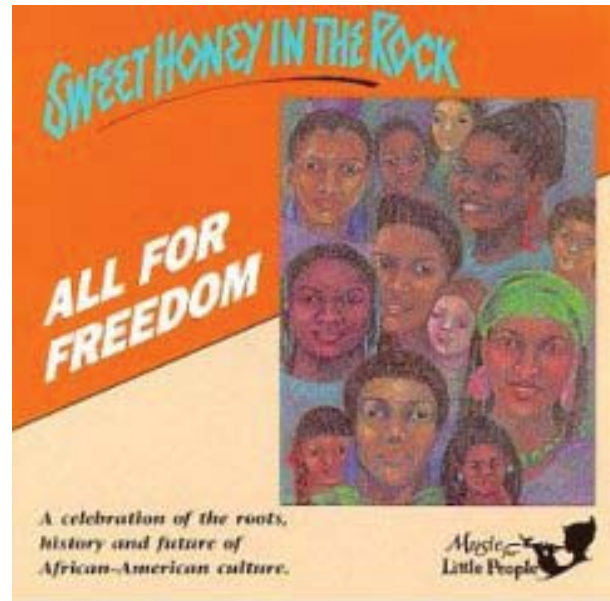
Would you harbor a Tubman, a Garrett, a Truth

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?

\* Lyrics used with permission.  
For educational purposes only.



### ***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

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

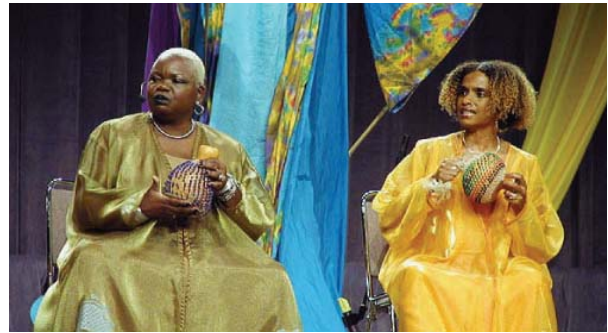
So just don't forget when you turn around  
I'll be standing right behind you with a serious  
frown  
'Cause every time I hear an older person say:  
"What's wrong with the young folks of today?"

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.



# 5 About the Art Form

By Sandra Graham, Ethnomusicology, UC Davis

## Guiding Questions:

- ♦ What are some of the characteristics of African American music?
- ♦ What is oral tradition?
- ♦ How has the origin of African American music served to shape and impact it today?

## Slave Songs

When Africans were brought to America as slaves in the 1700s and 1800s, they entered a frightening and dangerous world.

However, one thing gave slaves comfort in spite of the many hardships they endured: 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.

Spirituals were an extremely important type of song. You may know a few spirituals, such as “Michael, Row the Boat Ashore,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” or “Go Down, Moses.” The characters in spirituals come from the Bible, and the stories usually tell about someone who overcomes a big obstacle.

Spirituals are 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. There they would take part in the dances and song rituals of



their homeland, as well as sing new songs of faith, pain and hope to the God of their inherited faith, Christianity. Camp meetings were a way for people who lived on the frontier—who didn’t live near neighbors or a church—to get together and worship.

Most of the people who attended camp meetings could not read or write. The songs that they sang during worship had to be easy to remember. Therefore, spirituals usually have a lot 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).

Because these songs were passed on through oral tradition (they weren’t written down, but were learned 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.

## 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. These were functional songs, meaning 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. Code songs are songs that have hidden messages.

## Harriet Tubman's Code Song

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 more than 300 slaves escape to freedom in the North. 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.



Harriet Tubman



## Performance of Spirituals

Although sometimes musicians performed spirituals accompanied by banjo or fiddle, when instruments weren't available, spirituals were sung unaccompanied, or *a cappella*. The singers improvised harmonies, singing pitches that were different from the melody, as well as clapping their hands and dancing.

There are two kinds of spirituals:

- **Sorrow songs** are sung slowly and mournfully, and told of the heavy burden of slavery and the belief that a better day was coming.

- **Jubilees** are up-tempo songs celebrating victory and joy through reference to biblical figures like Samson or David who had overcome tremendous hardships.

### Sorrow Song

#### Hear De Lambs A Cryin'

You hear de lambs a crying  
hear de lambs a crying  
hear de lambs a crying  
Oh, shepherd, feed-a my sheep

### Jubilee

#### Let me Ride

I'm a soldier, let me ride (1)  
I'm a soldier, let me ride  
I'm a soldier, let me ride  
low down your chariot let me ride

Been converted	(2)
Got my ticket	(3)
Trouble's over	(4)
In the Kingdom	(5)

In today's African American churches, the congregation most often sings spirituals and hymns. Some of the songs are traditional, the lyrics and melody passed down from hundreds of years ago. Sometimes the lyrics are new but the tune is from a familiar song. Together, church singers "raise" a song. This means that when a song leader begins a song, other voices from the congregation need to join in so that the song's depth of emotion and beauty is fully expressed.

## Characteristics of African Musical Traditions

When Africans came to America, they may have lost their languages, but they remembered their music. They re-created African song in America, influenced by their new surroundings and their cultural memory of Africa. Everything in the list below applies to how 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.

- 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.

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 up their spirits.

Left: 1863 Lithograph of a former slave freed by the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution



Bernice Johnson Reagon speaking in the 1970s

“

I grew up in a region that had developed a strong sacred-music singing tradition, in a Black Baptist community in Dougherty County, Georgia. For our first eleven years, our church, Mt. Early Baptist, had no piano. Like most of the rural churches in that region, we did all of our singing unaccompanied except for our feet and hands; to this day I am an *a cappella* singer. I still know the songs I sang as a child and have hundreds of songs I have collected as a scholar.

”

Sweet Honey in the Rock's Founder Bernice Johnson Reagon, from her book, *We Who Believe in Freedom*

# 6 Historical Context

Developed by Rhonda Benin and Elouise Burrell

## Slavery in the United States

Between the years of 1518 and 1806, African men, women and children were captured and sold into slavery. The African people were members of many different tribal groups such as the Ashanti, Mandinka, Ewe, Fons, Fulani, Ibo, Hausa, Ibibio, Yoruba, Seke, Efik, Awikam, Kromen, Susu, Jolof, Gabon, Kru, etc. These people were stolen from their homelands, brought on slave ships from the west coast of Africa to the New World continents of North and South America and the Caribbean. Once captured, these African men, women and children were chained together and packed into the bottom of large ships in the most miserable conditions.

The Middle Passage was the cruelest part of this 5-to-12 week journey from Africa to the New World. African people suffered through terrible living conditions, lack of space and food, diseases and physical violence aboard these slave ships. Over eighteen million African people were captured. One-third did not survive the voyage.

In the United States, slavery was legal in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. In 1861, these Confederate states seceded from the Union over economic differences, with slavery being a major issue, and the American Civil War began. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the **Emancipation Proclamation**, which freed the slaves in the Confederate states.



Slaves lived on large plantations where they provided free labor while working in the cotton, tobacco and rice fields. Men, women and children worked from sunup to sundown with no pay. The slave masters were often cruel and treated the slaves as if they were not human beings. Family members were sold and separated. Slaves were not allowed to read or write, to speak their native languages or practice any of their African customs. Those caught disobeying, were either mutilated, beaten, sold or killed. The slave master outlawed the playing of the drum which was a primary instrument for West African people in communication, celebration, praise and rites of passage activities or events. In Africa, the drum could send messages from one village to another. The slaves, in turn, shifted the outlawed drum patterns and rhythms to their voices, hands and feet, allowing them to maintain many musical traditions of their homeland and tribes. These early song forms would later become the source of American popular music.

## The Civil Rights Movement

The African-American Civil Rights Movement refers to a set of noted events and reform movements in the United States aimed at abolishing racial discrimination against African Americans between 1954 to 1968, particularly in the South.

For years, the church had been the center of black communities. Many familiar spirituals were used as “Freedom Songs” by protesters who sang them “as is” or wrote new lyrics to further emphasize the political message of their protest. For instance, “We Shall Overcome,” derived from a spiritual known either as “I’ll Overcome Some Day” or “I’ll Be All Right.”

While spirituals originated as a means of communication among slaves, the civil rights movement adopted many spirituals as anthems for the purpose of communicating a message of social justice. These songs inspired courage in the face of danger and bound separate groups of protesters into a unified movement with a common purpose and language.

## Spirituals As a Tool Of Non Violence

**Non-violence** is a moral philosophy that rejects the use of violence in efforts to attain social or political change, and instead embraces other means such as disobedience or the power of persuasion. The term nonviolence has come to cover a range of techniques used for trying to achieve social change without the use of violence, as well as the underlying political and philosophical reasoning for the use of these techniques.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King on the five-day march to Montgomery Alabama, March 25, 1965.

## Making a Difference: Civil Rights Leaders

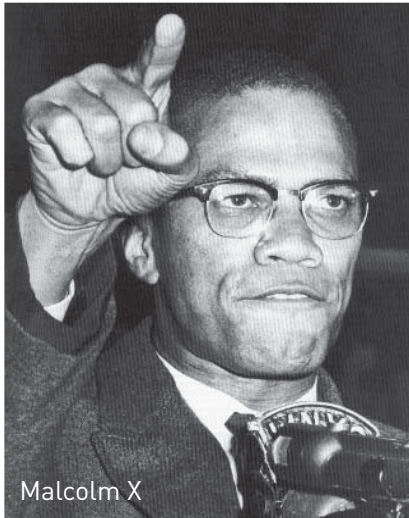
**Rosa Parks:** A college-educated seamstress who effectively launched the first peaceful protest of the civil rights movement. The protest began when Parks boarded a Montgomery, Alabama city bus on December 1, 1955, and refused to give up her seat to a white man who was looking for a seat because the “white” section of the bus was full. Police arrested her for defying the city’s law, prompting outraged black residents to start the Montgomery bus boycott later that year which lasted for over 381 days.

**Malcolm X:** A prominent civil rights leader who quickly became the national voice for the black nationalist Nation of Islam in the early 1950s. The son of a civil rights leader, Malcolm Little converted to Islam while serving a prison term in the 1940s. He then changed his





Rosa Parks



Malcolm X



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Howard Sochurek/LIFE

surname to “X” to represent the heritage and identity of the black people lost during centuries of slavery. A dynamic speaker, Malcolm X espoused self-reliance, militancy, and independence for blacks, in contrast to Martin Luther King Jr.’s doctrine of love, nonviolence, and integration. Malcolm X’s view of the civil rights movement changed, however, while he was on a holy pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964. When he returned, he broke away from with the Nation of Islam and, with nonviolent organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), began working toward racial integration. In a tragic turn of events, rivals within the Nation of Islam assassinated him in 1965. Although his career was cut short, Malcolm X’s early views and opinions greatly influenced the “black power” movement that began in the late 1960s.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.:** A civil rights leader during the 1950s and 1960s who fought to protect the rights of black people in the South. King rose to national fame after he took charge of the Montgomery Alabama bus boycott in 1955. An amazing speaker, he came to lead the civil rights

movement. He hoped to desegregate the South and protect black peoples’ political rights through love and nonviolence and peaceful protest.

He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, which boosted global awareness of the civil rights movement and put pressure on the federal government to address racial inequality in the United States. However, King’s efforts were cut short when he was assassinated in 1968.

### **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**

A civil rights organization founded in 1960, after the highly successful **Greensboro sit-in**, staged with the goal to organize students on campuses across the country. The SNCC was one of the most active groups of the Civil Rights Movement and participated in nearly every major peaceful campaign.

Aware of the inspirational power of protest songs, the SNCC published books of protest songs and formed singing groups such as the SNCC and **CORE Freedom Singers**. These groups performed around the country and made recordings of their music.

# 7 Learning Activities

## Songs of Protest: Sound Awareness Lesson, Grades 3-12

*Developed By Melanie DeMore*

### Opening Song

Begin this unit by teaching a song that serves as a bridge between cultures or one that expresses community.

### Examples:

***Shahidu/Hine Ma Tov*** (How good it is when brethren come together in peace)

This piece is in Arabic and Hebrew.

### ***Dog Dog***

This song asks a simple question: If dogs can get along with each other, what's our problem?

### **DOG DOG**

Dog Dog, Dig ogg,  
A-digga dog dog, (repeat 4x)

If my dog loves your dog  
And your dog loves my dog,  
And my dog loves your dog,  
And your dog loves my dog  
Then why can't we  
Sit under the apple tree

### Assignment:

Have each student find a song that speaks about social change or an incident that sparked a change in social awareness and bring the lyrics to class.

### Song Selection Examples:

Select 4 or 5 lyric examples from the class selections. Here are a few suggestions:

- How many roads must a man walk down, before you call him a man? (*Blowin' in The Wind*)
- I'd hammer out danger, I'd hammer out a warning... (*If I Had a Hammer*)
- Imagine there's no heaven.... (*Imagine*)
- Paved paradise and put up a parking lot... (*Big Yellow Taxi*)
- Marchin' up to Freedom Land... (*Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around*)

### Sample Discussion Questions

What is the writer trying to say?

What is the literal meaning?

What is the figurative meaning?

Perhaps the most important question is this: Of all the songs they've chosen, are there any that need never be sung again?

## I Have A Dream Activity, Grades 2-12

Have students watch the video of Martin Luther King's famous "I have a Dream" speech from August, 1963. (Available online at: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1732754907698549493>)

Ask students to think of how they would like to see the world change for the better.

Encourage students to write these ideas down, beginning each sentence with, "I have a dream..."

Students may read their "dreams" out loud, with the class responding "I have a dream" after each sentence read.

## Make Up Your Own Verse, Grades 2-12

### 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.

*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.

Using the song *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, students can make up their own verses. A good starting point is to have students write a verse that relates to their own life.

If you need a place to start, have students fill in the blanks with a rhyming line for the lyrics 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)

**Teacher Note:** Suggestions for lyrics, “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.

Demonstrate the American Sign Language for “Coming for to carry me home,” so that students can sign along with their choral response. An online ASL dictionary is at:

<http://www.aslpro.com/cgi-bin/aslpro/aslpr>

### Questions for Students

- 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?
- Are there any coded words in your verse? If so, what is their significance?

## Research and Performance Activity, Grades 3-12

Look up and write out 2-3 sentences defining terms from the Civil Rights Vocabulary below using an encyclopedia. Using important people and events from the civil rights movement as inspiration, write and perform a short skit based on one of the terms.

### Civil Rights Vocabulary

Birmingham Campaign  
Civil Rights Act of 1964  
Greensboro sit-in  
Jim Crow  
De facto Segregation  
Million Man March  
Twenty-Fourth Amendment

## Making an Instrument: Shakers

*adapted from:* <http://www.projects-for-kids.com/music-projects/musical-shaker.php>

Create a musical shaker similar to a maraca or an African shaker. A shaker makes a pleasant sound and is excellent for setting a rhythm with less emphasis than a drum.

1. Take a cardboard tube of any length and seal one end with paper and tape.
2. Fill the tube about one quarter full with dry rice or beans.
3. Seal the other end with paper and tape.
4. Now decorate the shaker with bright colors and designs.
5. Shake.

*Experiment:* Try making a shaker out of different materials and see how the sound changes. For example, try a container made out of plastic, glass, or metals. Beads of different materials and sizes make good fillers with different sounds. See if you notice a connection between materials and the distinct sounds they make.

### ***Sweet Honey In The Rock*** ***Discography***

**SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK**  
Flying Fish 1976

**B'LIEVE I'LL RUN ON...**  
Redwood 1978

**GOOD NEWS**  
Flying Fish 1981

**WE ALL...EVERYONE OF US**  
Flying Fish 1983

**THE OTHER SIDE**  
Flying Fish 1985

**FEEL SOMETHING DRAWING ME ON**  
Flying Fish 1985

**BREATHS**  
Flying Fish 1988

**LIVE AT CARNEGIE HALL**  
Flying Fish 1988

**ALL FOR FREEDOM**  
Music For Little People 1989

**IN THIS LAND**  
EarthBeat! 1992

**STILL ON THE JOURNEY**  
EarthBeat! 1993

**I GOT SHOES**  
Music For Little People 1994

**SACRED GROUND**  
EarthBeat! 1996

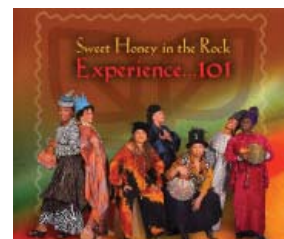
**SELECTIONS**  
Rounder 1997

**...TWENTY-FIVE...**  
Rykodisc 1998

**STILL THE SAME ME**  
Rounder Kids 2000

**THE WOMEN GATHER**  
EarthBeat! 2003

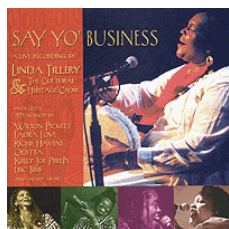
**EXPERIENCE 101**  
Grammy Awar Nominated, 2007



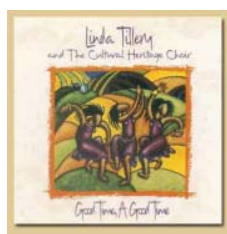
**Sweet Honey In The Rock**  
**[www.sweethoney.com](http://www.sweethoney.com)**



## For Your Listening Pleasure



Linda Tillery & the Cultural Heritage Choir  
Say Yo Business



Linda Tillery & the Cultural Heritage Choir  
Good Time, A Good Time

## Message Music of the 60s & 70s

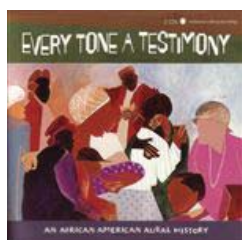


Stevie Wonder  
Greatest Hits

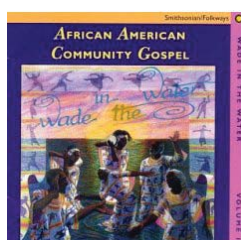


Marvin Gaye  
What's Going On

## Music Compilations



Every Tone A Testimony  
An African American Aural History



Wade in the Water, African American Sacred Music Traditions  
(Smithsonian Folkways Recordings)

## Institutes of Black Culture

### The Underground National Railroad Freedom Center

[www.freedomcenter.org](http://www.freedomcenter.org)  
50 East Freedom Way  
Cincinnati, Ohio

### The African American Museum and Library at Oakland

[www.oaklandlibrary.org/AAMLO](http://www.oaklandlibrary.org/AAMLO)  
659 14th Street  
Oakland, CA 94612

### Center for Black Music Research

[www.cbmr.org](http://www.cbmr.org)  
623 South Wabash Suite 600  
Chicago, Ill

## References:

*Black Popular Music in America*, Arnold Shaw (1986)

*Black Songs: The Forge and the Flame*, John Lovell, Jr. (1972)

*Spirituals Triumphant Old and New*, Edited and arranged by Edward Boatner (1927)

*Slaves Songs of The Georgia Sea Islands*, Lydia Parrish (1992)

*The African Slave Trade*, Basil Davidson (1980)

# 8 Glossary

**A cappella** – (Italian) In the church style; only voices, no instruments.

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

**American Civil War** – War (1861-65) between northern and southern states of United States.

**American Sign Language (ASL)** – A language developed for those who are hearing impaired or deaf, it uses hand signals and motions to communicate words.

**Black Power** – A movement that grew out of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Black Power calls for racial equality and independent development of political and social institutions for African Americans and emphasizes pride in African American culture.

**Blues** – A style of expressive music from southern African American nonreligious songs.

**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.

**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.

**Congregation** – A group of people gathered together for religious worship.

**Continent** – Seven great masses of land on earth; Africa, North America, South America, Asia, Australia, Europe and Antarctica.

**Contrasting** – A difference, especially a strong dissimilarity, between things being compared.

**Civil Rights** – Rights to personal liberty established by the 13th and 14th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution and certain Congressional acts, especially as applied to an individual or a minority group. The rights to full legal, social, and economic equality extended to African Americans.

**Discrimination** – Treatment or consideration of, or making a distinction in favor of or against, a person or thing based on the race, class, or category to which that person or thing belongs rather than on individual merit.

**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.

**Gospel** – a genre of religious *a cappella* music originating with black slaves in the US that features call and response.

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

**Hymn** – A song of praise or thanksgiving to a god or nation.

**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. Improvisation makes music interesting because the song is different each time you hear it.

**Jazz** – A type of music born in America that combined African drum rhythms, African American spirituals, and blues with European classical and marching music.

**Lyrics** – Words that are sung or spoken in a song or poem.

**Melodies** – Arrangement of musical notes to create a distinct sound.

**Metaphor** – One thing conceived as representing another, like a symbol.

**Middle Passage** – The most difficult leg of the 5-to-12 week journey from Africa to the New World.

**Nation of Islam** – A religious and cultural organization founded in 1931 in the United States, upholding Islamic principles and favoring political, social, and economic independence for African Americans.

**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.

**Percussion** – Striking or tapping a musical instrument or object to produce sounds.

**Pitch** – A note or musical tone.

**Plantation** – An estate in a tropical area cultivated by workers living on it.

**Quartet** – A group of four singers.

**Secede** – Formally withdraw from being a member in an organization, association, or alliance.

**Segregation** – To require, often with force, the separation of a specific racial, religious, or other group from the general body of society.

**Sextet** – A company of seven singers or musicians.

**Shahada** – The Islamic profession of faith

**Slave** – A person who is owned by another person.

**Slavery** – The owning and keeping of slaves as a practice.

**Slave master** – A person who owned slaves.

**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.

**Rap** – A type of music developed especially in African-American urban communities and characterized by spoken or chanted rhyming lyrics; rhythm and poetry.

**Reggae** – Popular music of Jamaican origin having elements of calypso and rhythm and blues.

**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. The fleeing slaves traveled by night so they wouldn't be noticed. Harriet Tubman was an important "conductor" on this railroad.

# 9 California State Standards

## English Language Arts Standards

3.4 Define how tone or meaning is conveyed in poetry through word choice, figurative language, sentence structure, line length, punctuation, rhythm, repetition, and rhyme.

## History - Social Science Content

5.4 Students understand the political, religious, social, and economic institutions that evolved in the colonial era. Describe the introduction of slavery into America, the responses of slave families to their condition, the ongoing struggle between proponents and opponents of slavery, and the gradual institutionalization of slavery in the South.

3.4 Students understand the role of rules and laws in our daily lives and the basic structure of the U.S. government.

6. Describe the lives of American heroes who took risks to secure our freedoms (e.g., Anne Hutchinson, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Jr.).

## Music Grades K-12

### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

**Processing, analyzing, and responding to sensory information through the language and skills unique to music**

Students read, notate, listen to, analyze, and describe music and other aural information, using the terminology of music.

### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

**Creating, performing, and participating in music**

Students apply vocal and instrumental musical skills in performing a varied repertoire of music. They compose and arrange music and improvise melodies, variations, and accompaniments, using digital/electronic technology when appropriate.

### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

**Understanding the historical contributions and cultural dimensions of music**

Students analyze the role of music in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting cultural diversity as it relates to music, musicians, and composers.

### 4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

**Responding to, analyzing, and making judgments about works of music**

Students critically assess and derive meaning from works of music and the performance of musicians according to the elements of music, aesthetic qualities, and human responses.

### 5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

**Connecting and applying what is learned in music to learning in other art forms and subject areas and to careers**

Students apply what they learn in music across subject areas. They develop competencies and creative skills in problem solving, communication, and management of time and resources that contribute to lifelong learning and career skills. They also learn about careers in and related to music.



## *The Music of Sweet Honey in the Rock*

### *Sweet Honey in the Rock*

Sweet Honey in the Rock is a group of six African-American women singers who create their music with only the melodies and harmonies of their voices (a style called *a capella*) and a few simple rhythm instruments like shekeres (gourds with beads attached on the outside to produce a rattle sound), rainsticks (a stick with seeds inside that make a rain-like sound when the stick is turned upside-down or shaken), drums, cowbells and hand-held rattles. Joining the singers is an interpreter who translates all the words of their songs into American Sign Language.

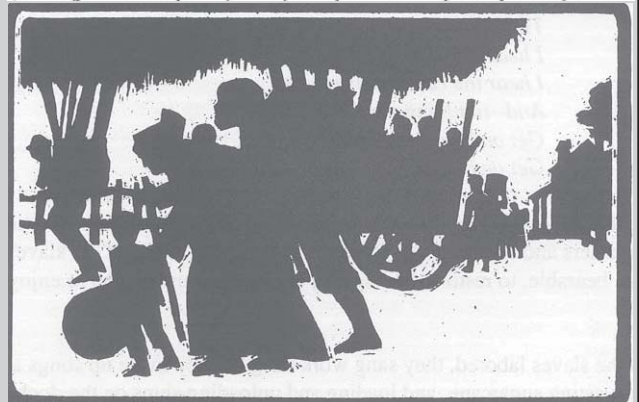
The group celebrates African and African American culture through song, and most of what Sweet Honey in the Rock performs comes from spirituals, hymns, gospel, jazz and blues music. Sweet Honey in the Rock uses their music to inspire us to learn from history, fight unfairness, stand up for what we believe, and celebrate freedom, love and respect for all life in the universe.

### *The Music of Spirituals*

with text adapted from *Slave Songs* by Sandra Graham

Most of the songs you will hear Sweet Honey in the Rock perform are called Spirituals. Spirituals are folk songs that describe personal religious experiences. The music, with its chants, rhythms and harmonies traces its origins to Africa.

Music has always been important in helping people get through hard times, as well as in celebrating good times. Music was especially important in the lives of African Americans because when Africans were brought to America as slaves, their traditional music, as well as their freedom, was taken from them. Spirituals kept the slaves' hopes alive, and the hidden messages in the code songs helped them escape.



Over one hundred years later, in the 1960's 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, from being able to sit in any seat in a bus or restaurant, to getting equal education and job opportunities. Even today, when people go through hard times, they sing spirituals to lift up their spirits.

## *The Role of Spirituals*

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

- **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.

- **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.

- **Entertainment.** At the end of a long day, or during time off on a Sunday, slaves would often sing spirituals for relaxation.

- **Code Songs.** One important function of spirituals was their use in helping slaves escape. Code songs are songs that have hidden messages.

## *Spirituals in Performance*

There are two kinds of spirituals:

- Sorrow songs are sung slowly and sadly, telling of the heavy burden of slavery and the belief that better days were coming.

- Jubilees are up-tempo songs that celebrate victory and joy by telling stories from the Bible of figures like Samson or David overcoming hardships.

## *African American Music*

Spirituals, as well as blues, gospel, rap, and other types of African American music share many of these musical traits:

- 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.

- Intense and strong voices.

Be sure to listen for these things when see Sweet Honey in the Rock perform!







This Cal Performances *SchoolTime* Study Guide was written, edited and designed by Laura Abrams, Rica Anderson and Nicole Anthony. Additional material by Rhonda Benin, Elouise Burrell, Melanie DeMore and Sandra Graham. Copyright © 2008 Cal Performances