

## American Songfest | Lesson Plan

Why are patriotic songs important in expressing and preserving American values and history?

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Students will recognize the significance of patriotic songs in American culture and history and understand how these songs express and preserve American values, pride, and unity.

### Learning Objectives:

- Recognize the melodies and lyrics of patriotic songs such as "You're a Grand Old Flag," "My Country 'Tis of Thee," "America the Beautiful," and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."
- Describe the historical and cultural significance of each song and the symbolism within their lyrics.
- Discuss the themes of patriotism, freedom, and national pride expressed in these songs and relate them to cultural literacy and national identity.
- Promote unity and national pride through singing and discussion.

### Song Index:

- **"You're a Grand Old Flag"**: Written by George M. Cohan in 1906. It was introduced in his stage musical "George Washington, Jr." and quickly became one of the most popular patriotic songs in the United States, celebrating American pride and the symbolic significance of the flag.
- **"My Country 'Tis of Thee"**: Also known as "America." It was written by Samuel Francis Smith in 1831 and set to the melody of the British national anthem, "God Save the King."
- **"America the Beautiful"**: Written by Katharine Lee Bates in 1895, with music composed by Samuel A. Ward. The song praises the natural beauty of the United States and highlights themes of patriotism and national pride.
- **"Battle Hymn of the Republic"**: Written by Julia Ward Howe in 1861 during the American Civil War, inspired by the Book of Revelation in the Bible. It became a powerful anthem for the Union, blending themes of justice and divine retribution.

**Educational Standards:** CCRA.R.1, CCRA.R.2, CCRA.R.4, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.SL.4, CCRA.L.1

**Academic Subject Areas:** America, American Values, National Anthem

### What You'll Need

- Video: *Otto's Tales: American Songfest* (Click [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Otto's Tales: American Songfest* (Click [Here](#))

### Lesson Plan (45 mins.)



### Warm-Up: (10 mins.)

1. Begin the lesson by explaining why patriotic songs are important. Let students know that patriotic songs are more than just melodies and lyrics; they are powerful tools for expressing national pride, cultural values, and historical significance. They serve as a means to unite people, celebrate national identity, and pass down traditions and values to younger generations.
2. Create a **K-W-L chart** on the board (Know, Want to know, Learned). Let students know that today they will be learning four patriotic songs: "You're a Grand Old Flag," "My Country 'Tis of Thee," "America the Beautiful," and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."
3. Ask students to share what they already **Know** about these or other patriotic songs (e.g., "I know the 'Star-Spangled Banner' is a song we sing at sports games, or "I know 'American the Beautiful' talks about mountains and skies.")
4. Have students share what they **Want to know** about the songs they will be learning (e.g., "I want to know why 'You're a Grand Old Flag' is an important song, or "I want to know who wrote 'My Country 'Tis of Thee.'")
5. Give a brief history of each of the songs using the song index above.
6. Explain that students will watch a video featuring each of these songs. Encourage them to listen carefully to the lyrics and think about the history they just learned as they listen.

### Watch and Complete: (25 mins.)

1. Show the video *Otto's Tales: American Songfest* to the students.
2. As students watch and listen, pause after each song and ask the following questions:
  - "You're a Grand Old Flag": What words or images stood out to you in this song? Why is the American flag a significant symbol for our nation? How can we show respect for this symbol?
  - My Country 'Tis of Thee: What does the lyric "land where my fathers died" mean? Why do you think the song mentions "pilgrim's pride?" What do you think of when you hear, "From every mountainside, let freedom ring?"
  - "America the Beautiful": What do you think "spacious skies" and "amber waves of grain" refer to? Why are "purple mountain majesties" mentioned in the song? What does "God shed his grace on thee" mean? How do you think the phrase "crown thy good with brotherhood" relates to how people should treat each other? What does "from sea to shining sea" mean, and why is this important?
  - "Battle Hymn of the Republic": This song uses a lot of metaphorical language taken from the Book of Revelation in the Bible. Take the time to explain the following lines and their relevance to the Civil War:
    - "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." This line signifies a vision of divine glory and justice. Many Union soldiers felt that they were fighting a holy war against the injustice of slavery.
    - "He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored." This imagery symbolizes God's judgment and punishment of evil. The "grapes of wrath" symbolize the wrongdoings that are being judged and destroyed. The Union army sought to eradicate the evil of slavery.

- “His truth is marching on.” This line conveys the idea that divine truth and justice continue to prevail in an unwavering march toward righteousness. For the Union, it reassured them that their efforts in the war were aligned with truth and, ultimately, the triumph of good over evil and truth over lies.
3. Distribute a printed version of the song lyrics to each student (they are part of the accompanying worksheet linked above). Read the lyrics aloud, as many of the words are difficult for K-2 students to read and understand.
  4. Practice singing each song together as a class, using the video as a guide or music background if needed. Sing the songs multiple times to help students remember the lyrics and understand their meanings.

#### Wrap-Up: (10 mins.)

1. Follow the instructions on the worksheet. This will help students to think through the images and how they relate to the song lyrics.
2. Return to the K-W-L chart and fill in the **L**earned section with what students learned about the patriotic songs.
3. Summarize the key points discussed in the lesson, emphasizing the importance of patriotic songs in expressing American values, uniting the country, and understanding history.

#### Extension Activity:

Create a class patriotic songbook. Each student can draw a page to illustrate a few lines of their favorite patriotic song. Compile the completed illustrations along with the full lyrics of the song and bind them together with a fun cover featuring a photo of the class or an American-themed image such as the American flag or a map of the United States. Display the songbook in class and provide a copy for each student to take home and share with their families.

#### **Don't have time for the complete lesson? Quick Activity (15-20 mins.)**

After watching the video, distribute the “Otto’s Tales: American Songfest Worksheet” and read the lyrics to the students. Have them match the images to the corresponding songs. Then, discuss the importance of singing patriotic songs for cultural literacy, understanding national symbols and traditions, commemorating historical events and figures, and promoting unity and national identity.