
Experiencing the Battle of Bunker Hill through Music

High (9th – 12th grade)

Time required: 40-50 minutes

Specific recommendation: 11th grade Social Studies/American History

Goals/Objectives:

- Write an accurate summary of one stanza of “Bunker Hill”
- Identify the author’s purpose for writing “Bunker Hill” using textual evidence
- Identify how the music of “Bunker Hill” contributes to the listener’s interpretation of the text

Common Core Standards:

- RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole
- RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas
- SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to make informed decisions and solve problems.

Materials:

- **Song of America Links**

To print:

Basic Musical Elements handout: <https://songofamerica.net/downloads/basic-musical-elements-handout/>
Song of America “Bunker Hill” song page: <http://songofamerica.net/song/bunker-hill>

To reference:

Song of America Nathaniel Niles page: <http://songofamerica.net/writer/niles-nathaniel>
Song of America Andrew Law page: <http://songofamerica.net/composer/law-andrew>

To listen to:

Song of America War Cries radio program: <https://songofamerica.net/program/war-cries/>

Instruction:

- The teacher begins by introducing or reviewing the Battle of Bunker Hill (1775), as well as Nathaniel Niles [<http://songofamerica.net/writer/niles-nathaniel>] and Andrew Law [<http://songofamerica.net/composer/law-andrew>]
- The teacher distributes copies of “Bunker Hill” and introduces unknown vocabulary
 - *Grape shot*: ammunition consisting of a number of small iron balls fired together from a cannon
 - *Aether*: the clear sky; the upper regions of air beyond the clouds

- The teacher reads aloud the text “Bunker Hill” [<http://songofamerica.net/song/bunker-hill>] and asks the students to close their eyes and visualize a scene. Students share what they have visualized after the teacher is finished reading
- Students listen to the recording of “Bunker Hill” [<https://songofamerica.net/program/war-cries/> at 9:29, or 8:52 with Thomas Hampson introduction] and once again the students are asked to close their eyes and visualize a scene.
- The teacher begins a discussion by asking, “What did you visualize when listening to the song? How was listening to the song different from when you heard a reading of the text? What sounds made it different/similar? Where would this song have been played during the Revolutionary War?”
 - Refer to the *Song of America* Basic Musical Elements handout for an easy guide to talking about music:
<https://songofamerica.net/downloads/basic-musical-elements-handout/>
- *Guided Practice*
 - The teacher introduces an activity by re-reading the first stanza of the text aloud
 - The class paraphrases the stanza, with the teacher writing their short summary (1-2 sentences) on the board
 - The teacher asks the question, “What imagery does Nathaniel Niles provide that would have either inspired or frightened the audience?” (e.g. “where blood and carnage/Clothe the ground in crimson” frightens the audience because of its gruesome portrayal of war)
 - Optional extension: Using simple terms, the teacher can then choose to write a new rhythm and/or melody for the first stanza, noting how composers often use specific elements of the text in order to guide their compositions (e.g. The repetition of the line “Where blood and carnage” may be louder in the melody because of Nathaniel Niles’ emphasis)
- *Independent Practice*
 - Students are then divided into three groups, each receiving one of the remaining stanzas to focus on for the activity
 - After re-reading their stanza, students write a one to two sentence summary of their stanza in their own words
 - Students next answer the question, “What imagery does Nathaniel Niles provide that could either inspire or frighten the audience?” Students choose one to two lines from the stanza.
 - Students can then choose to write a new rhythm and/or melody for their stanza
 - The groups take turns sharing their summaries and imagery to the class. Groups that chose to write a new rhythm and/or melody can also share their work.

Assessment: Students are given an exit slip and are asked to answer the question, “Do you think that Nathaniel Niles’ text inspired or frightened American patriots during the Revolutionary War? Cite one line from the poem that supports your argument.”