
Exploring Point of View with Classic American Song

Intermediate (3rd - 5th grade)

Time required: 40 minutes

Specific recommendation: 5th grade Social Studies/Language Arts

Goals/Objectives:

- Support and defend one interpretation of the text “Shenandoah” using textual evidence
- Analyze how the music of the song “Shenandoah” contributes to its interpretation

Common Core Standards:

- RH.6.6 Identify aspects of text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose
- RL.5.7 Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text

Materials:

- **Song of America links:**

Song of America “Shenandoah” song page: <http://songofamerica.net/song/Shenandoah>

Basic Musical Elements handout: <https://songofamerica.net/downloads/basic-musical-elements-handout/>

- Map that includes the Shenandoah River, such as this one included in this PDF
- **American and Multicultural Folk Songs Online Reference:**
<http://www.songsforteaching.com/folk/>

Instruction:

- The teacher begins by playing a popular folk or traditional songs [\[http://www.songsforteaching.com/folk/\]](http://www.songsforteaching.com/folk/) and asking students to share their experiences with these song(s), if applicable
- The teacher asks students to then talk and turn to a partner to answer the questions: “What songs have you learned from your family? Are there any songs you learned when you were younger? Do you know the story of the songs?” Questions are written on the board to ensure that students remember to answer each question
- The teacher introduces the Shenandoah River in the 1800s, including a discussion about the river’s influence on slavery, fur traders, and Native Americans [\[http://songofamerica.net/song/Shenandoah\]](http://songofamerica.net/song/Shenandoah)
- The teacher or (in the upper grades) a student volunteer reads aloud the text “Shenandoah”

- The teacher tells the students that they will be listening to the song “Shenandoah” and instructs them to close their eyes and move freely to the music
- Students listen to “Shenandoah” [<http://songofamerica.net/song/Shenandoah>]
- The teacher begins a class discussion by asking the students, “How did the ‘rolling river’ feel when listening to the song? What did you imagine? Who is Shenandoah?”
- Then the teacher explains that there isn’t just one meaning to the song and introduces two interpretations for the text: Shenandoah as the river or Shenandoah as the Native American chief with a daughter who is courted by a fur trader
- Students listen to the song again. The class is divided in half with each group focusing on one interpretation of the text and underline/highlight phrases that support their interpretation. For example, “Oh Shenandoah, I love your daughter” would support the interpretation that the text is written from the perspective of a fur trader who is courting Shenandoah’s daughter. Students also answer the question, “How does the music support your interpretation?” For example, students may state that the soft melody resembles a love song or a gently flowing river.
 - 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/>
- Each group decides upon two phrases they believe best support their interpretation of the text, as well as how the music supports their interpretation, and will share their responses with the class
- Class discussion: “Why do ‘traditional songs’ often have many interpretations?”

Going Further:

The teacher collaborates with the school’s music teacher to have the students learn the song prior to the lesson (if possible)