



The Legacy of the African-American Spiritual: Student Exercises - Segment 1

Segment 1: Introduction and the Purpose of Spirituals

Critical Thinking

1. What purpose did/does the Spiritual have in African-American history?
2. What makes the Spiritual different from other types of music, what is special about it?
3. What feelings do you not find in Spirituals? What feelings do you find? Does this give the sense of an advanced ethic or a regressed one?
4. Define “oral tradition” as a source in history. Why do historians study songs and stories of the past? What can we learn from the “oral tradition” that classic documents do not offer? Evaluate the importance of the oral tradition in the study of history.

Research Challenges

1. What musical elements/traits from the African tradition can be found in popular music in America today?
2. Comparison Activity: “Music as the door out of despair”
Joe Carter explains the “transcendent quality” of music to be its ability to offer a mental escape from situations of despair. Listen to three spirituals and describe the mood of the songs. How do you feel when you listen to these songs? Write down the message that was being conveyed in each song. Write a paragraph that describes what specifically spirituals provided for slaves.

After completing this task, see [Music of the Holocaust](#) and read about how music was a mode of expression and survival during the Holocaust of World War II. Listen to three examples of songs from this time period and describe the mood of the songs. How do you feel when you listen to these songs? Write down the message that was being conveyed in each song.

Question 1: Compare and contrast spirituals with the music from the Holocaust.

Question 2: Write a summary that explains how music serves as a survival mechanism.