



The Legacy of the African-American Spiritual: Student Exercises - Segment 3

Segment 3: Spirituals as Resistance

Critical Thinking

1. According to Joe Carter, what was the significance of the story of the pool of Bethesda?
2. Explain what Joe Carter means when he says, “the politics of freedom distract.”
3. How were songs used to resistance against slavery?
4. Why were many spirituals re-discovered and published in the 1960’s?

Opposing Viewpoints: To explore the issues of slavery and slave resistance, conduct an informal debate in response to the following question:

Research Challenges

1. Compare and contrast gospels and spirituals. Research both styles and listen to selections of each. How are their messages similar and different? Explain how the music feels different when you listen to each? What is the purpose of each style?
2. Research James Weldon Johnson. Write a report that summarizes his work. Why did James Weldon Johnson begin collecting and then publishing spirituals? See if your library or your public library carries his 1925 book of spirituals. If they do, read the lyrics to these spirituals and write a summary of what these songs are about. If they do not, write a letter to the library explaining what this book could offer to their current book collection and why they should order it!

Related link: [*James Weldon Johnson Biography*](#)

3. What are different modes of resistance that were employed by slaves against slavery? How do the spirituals fit into this larger picture of slave resistance?

Related links:

- [*Breaking the Silence: Teaching about Slavery*](#)
- [*Underground Railroad National Geographic Site*](#)