



## LESSON PLANS

## Songs of War

### Grade Level(s):

6 - 12

### Subject Area(s)

Language Arts - Writing, Civics, U.S. History, Music

### Estimated Time

One 45-50 minute class period

### Summary

Popular culture can both glorify and be critical of war. In this activity, students will learn about some romanticized songs that were written about the battles of the U.S.-Mexican War. Focusing on the song "The Death of Ringgold," students will explore the reasons why such a song was written, analyze some of the components of the song, and then apply their knowledge by writing a new song about the same topic.

### Objectives

Students will:

- Explore the relationship between real-life events and popular culture, specifically music.
- Consider some of the purposes of popular culture during a time of war.
- Analyze the components of a patriotic song.
- Learn about the impact that such a song can have on the members of a society.
- Create a new song about the death of Ringgold by assuming a different perspective from the original song.

### Materials Needed

This activity can be completed using a computer lab where students can access the [video clips](#) and handouts themselves via [The U.S.-Mexican War website](#). It can also be done by using one classroom computer with a projection device. In the second scenario, you will need to provide the students with the following handouts:

- [Songs of War worksheet](#)
- ["The Death of Ringgold" sheet music](#)  
([http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mussm&fileName=sm2/sm1857/611000/611580/mussm611580.db&recNum=0&itemLink=D?mussm:3:/temp/~ammem\\_ordj::&linkText=0](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mussm&fileName=sm2/sm1857/611000/611580/mussm611580.db&recNum=0&itemLink=D?mussm:3:/temp/~ammem_ordj::&linkText=0))
- [Video Clips Library](#) ([http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/resources/video\\_library.html](http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/resources/video_library.html))

### Video clips used:

- "The Battle of Palo Alto and the death of Major Ringgold"
- "Patriotic songs and the 'romance' of war"



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### Procedure

**Pre-viewing Activity:** Discuss with students the idea that songwriters can have many different goals for their songs. Have the students brainstorm a list of current popular songs and identify what they think the songwriters' goals were in writing them.

Take the students back to the time of the U.S.-Mexican War by discussing the importance of sheet music during the 19th century, not only as a form of entertainment but as a way to communicate information and ideas. Since there was no recorded music at this time, sheet music was the most important product of the music industry. For some background, you can reference this website:

<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/sheetmusic/about.html> (You can follow the links on the Duke site to see great examples of sheet music.)

**Viewing Activity:** Tell students to go to "The U.S.-Mexican War" website to access the two video clips, "The Battle of Palo Alto and the death of Major Ringgold" and "Patriotic songs and the 'romance' of war" (or display the videos with a projection device in your classroom). Explain to students that in the first video clip they will learn about one of the first American casualties of the U.S.-Mexican War, Major Charles Ringgold. Tell students that in the second clip, they will see and hear how Ringgold's death was turned into a very popular song that was circulated around the United States via sheet music. Have the students think about the questions on the Songs of War worksheet as they watch the videos. Ask students to complete the worksheet after they have watched the video clips.

**Post-viewing Activity:** After students have completed the worksheet, have them read the lyrics on the sheet music for "The Death of Ringgold." Then have students discuss the relationship between Ringgold's violent death and the romantic song that was written to celebrate it. Ask students to speculate on the songwriter's goal when he wrote "The Death of Ringgold." Have students consider whether a different kind of song could be written about the same event if a songwriter had different goals.

Break the class into three groups. Explain that each of the three groups will now write a new song about Ringgold's death from a different perspective and with a different goal. The three new approaches are:

1. An American anti-war song.
2. A song from the side of the Mexican army.
3. A personal song from the viewpoint of one of Ringgold's children.

Have each group identify a clear goal for their new song. Then have them write their new songs using the same structure of four-line verses with an ABAB rhyme scheme that is used in "The Death of Ringgold." (Also, the original song has five verses, but it may make more sense to ask the students to write only three verses in their new songs.) Explain to the students that the success of their songs will depend on how well their new lyrics help them achieve their stated goals.

Have each group present its new song to the entire class; then have the students offer each other feedback on their work.

### Classroom Assessment

To assess the students' work, consider the following:



- Did the students' new lyrics achieve their stated goals thematically?
- Did the students' lyrics follow the same structure as the original song, "The Death of Ringgold"?
- Did the students make a clear and thoughtful presentation of their new songs?
- Did the students in each group work well together as a team?
- Did the students offer each other feedback that showed an understanding of the material and the objectives of the activity?

### Extensions and Applications

If there are musicians in the class, have them set the class's lyrics to music. Discuss the different styles of music that might be appropriate for the lyrics and how each would impact a song's message. How could the music help the songwriter achieve his/her goals in a way that the lyrics alone could not?

Another activity would be to have students explore the Library of Congress website about American songs and sheet music in the 19th century: <http://memory.loc.gov>.

There are many resources here, including a wealth of original sheet music and audio recordings as well. Students can find the sheet music for "The Maid of Monterrey," another song from the U.S.-Mexico War here: <http://memory.loc.gov/>.

To broaden the activity, students can explore the following site to learn about sheet music from 19th century California: <http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/~mkduggan/neh.html>.

And students can learn about 19th century African-American sheet music here: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award97/rpbhtml/aasmhome.html>.

**For younger students:** This activity can also be adapted for younger students. Rather than breaking the class into small groups, create the new version of "The Death of Ringgold" with your entire class. This will allow you to provide extra support and guidance to all of the students as you and they write the new song together.

### National Standards

McRel K-12 Standards Addressed:

#### Language Arts

- Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
- Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.
- Standard 3: Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions.

#### Civics

- Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.

#### Music



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- Standard 6: Knows and applies appropriate criteria to music and music performances.
- Standard 7: Understands the relationship between music and history and culture.



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### Online Resources

Below are the links for sites referenced in this activity with some additional suggestions:

- The U.S.-Mexican War (1846 - 1848)  
<http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/>
- Background on sheet music  
<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/sheetmusic/about.html>  
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/mussmhtml/mussmhome.html>
- "The Death of Ringgold" sheet music  
<http://memory.loc.gov/>
- "The Maid of Monterrey" sheet music  
<http://memory.loc.gov/>
- Accordion Dreams: Cultures of Music and Dance  
This PBS program provides a showcase of 19th century period recordings in South Texas.  
<http://www.pbs.org/accordiondreams/about/index.html>
- Digital History: sing New Technologies To Enhance Teaching And Research  
This University of Houston/Chicago Historical Society site offers a comprehensive bibliography of musical and other resources.  
[http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/modules/mex\\_am/bibliography3.html#music](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/modules/mex_am/bibliography3.html#music)



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### Songs of War Worksheet

Complete this worksheet after you watch the video clips.

1. Describe the death of Major Charles Ringgold.
2. Describe the way Ringgold's death is portrayed in the song "The Death of Ringgold."
3. Describe the music in the song "The Death of Ringgold."
4. What do you think were the goals of the person who wrote the song "The Death of Ringgold"?
5. Do the video clips lead you to believe that "The Death of Ringgold" (and other songs like it) had an impact on the American public? What was that impact?