

# Onward To Freedom

Rhonda Benin & Friends



## Study Guide

The purpose of this assembly is to examine the important concept of freedom and how the music of enslaved African Americans created music that expressed their desire and plans for freedom, and how that music helped them survive.

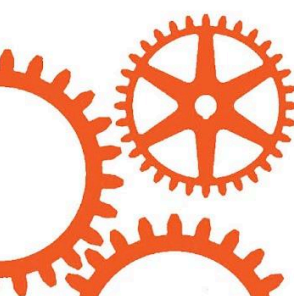


## What Is Freedom?

Freedom is a sacred and inalienable right that all human beings possess. It is the power to act according to one's will while respecting the laws and rights of others.

### What Are Our Personal Freedoms?

- Speech
- Expression
- Movement
- Thought
- Consciousness
- Religion
- The right to a private life



## No Freedom

### The Transatlantic Slave Trade

Between the years of 1518 and 1807 African men, women and children were captured and sold into slavery. These people were stolen from their homelands and brought on slave ships from the west coast of Africa to the new world continents of North and South America and the Caribbean.

### The Middle Passage

Described as the most cruel part of the 5 to 12 week journey from Africa to the new world, the captured African people were chained together and packed into the bottom of large ships in awful conditions with lack of space and food, diseases and physical violence.





## Plantation Life

In the United States, slavery was legal in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. Slaves lived on large plantations where they provided free labor while working in the cotton, tobacco and rice fields, with no pay. The slave masters were often cruel and treated the slaves as if they were not human beings.

- Family members were sold.
- Slaves were not allowed to read, write or speak their native language
- Slaves were not allowed to practice any of their African customs
- Those caught disobeying were either beaten, sold or killed.

## The Drum

- The playing of the drums which was a primary instrument for West African People was outlawed when the slave owners discovered the drum patterns enabled the slaves to communicate from one plantation to another and plan slave rebellions.
- The Africans in turn shifted the outlawed drum patterns and rhythms into dances and stylized vocalizations.





## **Survival Through Music**

In order to endure the harshness of slave life, the enslaved used music, song, and dance to discuss life, death, escape, spiritual philosophies, and emotions: all of which helped individuals cope with the traumas that came with being enslaved.

African Americans often used *metaphors* to hide the meaning of the songs. Imagine the reaction of a master upon hearing a group of bonded persons singing “I’m going to run away”. To prevent this from happening, many spirituals were “coded”. Trains, flying, marching, and walking are metaphors used by the enslaved to suggest movement, either physical or imagined.

## **The Black Spiritual**

The plantation songs known as spirituals are religious songs that were created in the camp and revival meeting of the slaves. These meetings were held in the woods or at a far off location unknown to the Masters where slaves were free to worship as they pleased. The enslaved would take part in dances and songs of their homeland Africa, as well as their new inherited faith, Christianity.





There are two types of spirituals

- **Sorrow Songs:** Songs sung slowly and mournfully

**Let's Listen!**

*“Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child”*

[:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXg9UFUXFXU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXg9UFUXFXU)

- **Jubilee:** rejoicing, expressing great joy and celebration

*“Swing Low Sweet Chariot”*

1909 recording of The Fisk Jubilee Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXg9UFUXFXU>

## Call and Response

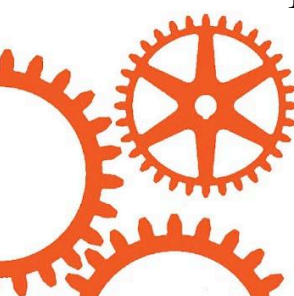
A common element in African music, where a leader sings or plays a phrase and the rest of the group responds with a similar phrase.

**Listen and Sing Along!**

*“Way Down Yonder, In The Brickyard”*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pM8uiMVH918>

Bessie Jones





## Secret Spiritual Worship

Revival meetings of the slaves were held in the woods or at some far off location unknown to the Masters where slaves were free to worship as they pleased the slaves. The plantation songs known as spirituals are religious songs that were created in the camp and Revival meeting of the slaves. The slaves would take part in dances and song which is of their Homeland as well as their new inherited Faith Christianity

**Let's Listen!**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAJBZXIzKcY>

***“In The Morning”*** Sweet Honey In The Rock







## Ring Shout

A shout or ring shout is an ecstatic, transcendent religious ritual, first practiced by African slaves in the West Indies and the United States, in which worshippers move in a circle while shuffling and stomping their feet and clapping their hands.

## Let's Watch!

The Georgia Sea Island Singers demonstrate a Gullah Ring Shout *“Throw Me Anywhere Lord”*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dGamWaYcLg>

Let's Listen and Sing Along!

*Kum Ba Yah My Lord (Come By Here)*

African American Spiritual

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkzz3e1oCZs>

What do the Roman numerals above the music mean?

A  
Melody  
from Africa

### Kum Ba Yah

Traditional Song from Africa

REFRAIN



1. Someone's singin', ... 2. Someone's prayin', ... 3. Someone's shoutin', ...



280 I-IV-V<sub>7</sub> Chords







## “Train Is A Comin’”

### African American Spiritual Shaggy & Toots and The Maytals

LESSON  
**1**

Element: EXPRESSION

Skill: LISTENING

Connection: SOCIAL STUDIES



**TRAIN TO FREEDOM**

Many African American spirituals were used to send messages along the Underground Railroad. What message does this song send? **Listen** to “Train Is A-Comin’.” **Sing** the song and learn all the verses.

CD 2-17  
MIDI 7

### Train Is A-Comin'

African American Spiritual



1. Train is a - com - in', oh, yes,  
2. Better get your tick - et, oh, yes,



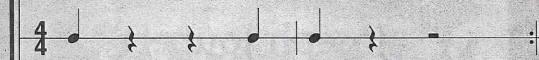
Train. is a - com - in', — oh, yes,  
Better get your tick - et, — oh, yes,



## Get on Board!

Play these ostinatos with the song.

On the first verse, use the cabasa. On the second verse, add the vibraslap. On the third verse, you can add the drum.



Train is a - com - in', train is a - com - in',  
 Better get your tick - et, better get your tick - et,

Train is a - com - in', oh, yes.  
 Better get your tick - et, oh, yes.

- Room for many others, oh, yes,  
 Room for many others, oh, yes,  
 Room for many others, room for many others,  
 Room for many others, oh, yes.



## Vocabulary

- **Transatlantic Slave Trade:** Between the years of 1518 and 1807 African men, women and children were captured and sold into slavery. These people were stolen from their homelands and brought on slave ships from the west coast of Africa to the new world continents of North and South America and the Caribbean.
- **American Civil War:** war between northern and southern states of United States
- **The Middle Passage:** the most difficult leg of the 5 to 12 week journey from Africa to the new world
- **Plantation** Interstate in a tropical area cultivated by workers living on it
- **Spiritual** a religious song
  - Sacred: belonging to God
  - Secular
  - Sorrow Songs: songs sung slowly and mournfully
  - Jubilee: rejoicing expressing great joy and celebration
- **Oral tradition** a report of historical events in spoken form
- **Call and Response:** is a common element in African music, where a leader sings or plays a phrase and the rest of the group responds with a similar phrase.





## About The Artists

### **Rhonda Benin** (Vocalist, Producer, Artist, Teacher)

Rhonda Benin is a San Francisco Bay Area based vocalist. Rhonda's impressive resume includes her 22-year stint as a founding member of The GRAMMY nominated vocal ensemble Linda Tillery and The Cultural Heritage Choir. She appears on the CHC's 7 CD's and has toured over 35 countries. As a solo jazz and blues artist, Rhonda has performed at SF Jazz, Yoshi's, MOAD, The Healdsburg, Sonoma, Burlingame, Sausalito, Filmore, and Calistoga Jazz Festivals. In the summer of 2012 Rhonda traveled to Hangzhou, China for a three-month engagement at the JZ Jazz Club and was 2014 USA headliner for The Kigali Up Music Festival in Kigali, Rwanda. In addition to singing, Rhonda is producer and founder of the Women's History Month's annual show "Just Like A Woman". JLAW is a tribute to Bay Area Women In Music and will celebrate its 10th year in 2024.

### **Leon Joyce, Jr.**, drummer

### **Lorenzo Hawkins**, keyboards

This Study Guide was written and developed by Rhonda Benin  
with additional formatting by Rhythmix Cultural Works.  
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