

# Creating an African American Spiritual Small Repertoire

An Introductory Unit Integrating  
Traditional Spirituals in  
An Elementary General Music Class

Written by  
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Iowa Maple Elementary School

Created for  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade General Music Class

The sounds of goat skin djembes against the flat finger thump of decorative Dounddombas, has been faithfully passed on by thousands of African musicians for centuries. When the slaves from West Africa reached the Americas in the 1600's, they not only brought with them skills in farming, but a rich musical heritage. They created and played musical instruments, which set the tone for nearly every event in their lives.

Although it is true, they used music in religious ceremonies and for festive dance rituals, music was not merely a catalyst for gaining favor from the gods. Music was a communication mechanism, which went well beyond speech and gestures. The sound of the African Drum could be heard for great distances, sending both local and universal messages to those far and near.

Today, drums still help many to express the songs, dances, stories and musical traditions of the fascinating culture of West Africa. At this time it is important to identify those instruments Commonly used in Africa and eventually in the Americas.

The Doundoumba drum is a very large wooden barrel-shaped drum with calfskin heads fastened to each end and laced cords. The Dooundoum plays the bass or lowest drum part. It says its name "doun doun."

The Djembe is one of Africa's most versatile and popular drums. It plays a very important part on all ceremonial and festive occasions. It is played throughout West Africa, especially in Mali, Guinea, Senegal and the Ivory Coast.

The Djembe is carved in the shape of a goblet, from a solid Block of red wood found in Guinea's Tropical forest region. Goatskin is used for the head, which is fastened by an intricate system of laced cords. Sometimes the Djembe is called "tam tam" Because its rhythm says "tam tam."

The Ashiko is a cone shaped wooden drum that has calfskin

Head on top, which is fastened with, laced cords. There are three sizes of Ashiko's and they "sing" different, parts just like people's voices-bass, tenor and soprano. The Ashiko is played for special events- dancing, weddings, and religious ceremonies. As you can see the place of the African drum in African culture is very important.

Now, we must look at the singing traditions of the West African culture, and trace its root to the African American Spiritual as we know it today. The first thing you notice about the vocal music of Africa is that it is rich in melody, with many rhythms going with the beat of a drum group and them splitting off into a new beautiful pattern of its own. This variation can on for a very long time, and can end with an echo like finish. Next the message of the vocalist could be very simple, such as a call for young children to return from playing to their home. However, during festive events singing is more often heard in large groups, with an energetic song leader who determines the flow of the singing.

Once a celebration begins it may last until the morning of the next day. During rites of passage for young men singing is important, participants may not eat for days as they perform in a trance-like fashion to root on the young neophyte.

During religious ceremonies a priest or elder will use music to initiate dance rituals. As the villagers dance and sing the days of harvest are noted and the gods are thanked for their mercy.

When the Slaves came to South Carolina most were immediately baptized and given a new name. Although, they were not taught to read and write, they were allowed to gather in relatively small structures called Praise Houses. These small units were generally located near a larger church facility, and some are still used today by various church groups.

When former Slave families were given land and freedom after the Civil War many elder members became pastors of neighbor churches. This person had been fortunate and had

learned to read and write and was the ideal person to pass on the new religious beliefs of the church. The bible became a significant resource for song ideas, hence the birth of the early hymns composed by Afro American musicians. These songs were powerful and could energize whole fields of workers. However, the African American Spiritual served long before, and gave the slaves hope for freedom from oppression before church hymns became popular.

My final observation emerges from the fact that new communication emerged in the form of a new language created by islanders of South Carolina East Coast. The new language was called Gullah. In its basic form Gullah had a shared vocabulary as English but had a different twist on nouns, pronouns, verbs etc.

Gullah is still spoken on many islands in South Carolina which were separated until from the midland until about 1960. Once bridges were built from the islands to near present day Charleston, the Gullah culture could finally interact with the established Charlestonian inner city. Now, this new African American Spiritual could be heard in the Baptist Church, A.M.E., and many other faiths.

I offer this brief background on African music, culture in an effort to give you some connecting historical point of view between early inhabitants of the Low country of South Carolina. Listed below are additional books I recommend to enhance your journey into the world of the African American Spiritual.

DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE  
Charles Joyner

AN INTRODUCTION TO GULLAH  
Virginia Geraty

## Lesson 1: "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing"

Written by J.W Johnson and J.R. Johnson

### CMSD Standards:

- 1-Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music;
- 2-Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music;
- 3-Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments;
- 8-Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts;
- 9-Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

### Objectives:

- Students will sing a song in the style of an African American Spiritual.
- Students will improvise accompaniment for percussion instruments.
- Students will explore the culture of West Africa.

### Materials:

- Student copies of "African American Spiritual", vocal parts
- Silver Burdett Ginn® The Music Connection rehearsal accompaniment CD
- CD 10-track 2
- Students will use Non-pitched/pitched percussion instruments such as cabasa, agogo bells, maracas congas, hand drums and bongos.

### Prior knowledge and experience:

- Teacher should be familiar with the history of African American Spirituals.
- Students have sung simple songs.
- Students have learned the correct method of holding and playing non-pitched percussion instruments.
- Students have familiarity with improvising rhythms.

### Procedures:

Display a classroom map that includes Africa. Assist students in locating West Africa.

Explain to students that drumming and singing are essential elements of music, which originated in West Africa.

Use the following historical and cultural description as needed:

People from West Africa settled on the islands in South Carolina and brought their language and culture. The cooking is extremely varied due to the many cultures that have settled there. They

grew sweet potatoes, corn, and vegetables. They also eat dairy foods, fish, and chicken meat.

Slave Songs were originally an improvised song of repetitious affirmations. Many times lyrics are about reaching a better place. African American spirituals often contain many syncopated rhythms, and include the use of percussion, keyboards, guitars, saxophones, and trumpets when performed.

Direct the students' attention to the lyrics in classroom guide books and on an overhead projector.

Present simple rhythmic ostinatos for the song. For groups still learning notation, have them echo simple patterns that repeat. For advanced students, have them read notated rhythms. Without singing, have students play the ostinatos using a combination of rhythm instruments such as cabasa, agogo bells, and maracas.

### Sample Ostinatos

Provide the percussion parts. Teach part 1 of the percussion part by having students begin by playing or clapping on the downbeats only, or clapping their hands. Keeping a slow tempo at first, add each additional instrument to create simple polyrhythms. Be sure to model using correct technique.

Teach Part 2 teach vocal parts. First verse, second verse, followed by the third verse. Encourage memorization of the lyrics.

### Teach Part 3

Combine the vocal parts, and instrumental ostinatos, parts. Choose students to play instruments, and others to sing, and rotate periodically. Begin combining parts by having students play instruments only, and then add one vocal line at a time, increasing the tempo gradually.

Indicators of success:

Students sing the song using correct posture, correct rhythms, and accurate pitches.

Students improvise ostinatos using pitched/non-pitched instruments.

Students perform accompaniment on the percussion instruments using correct technique and rhythmic accuracy.

Interdisciplinary extension:

### Literature and Culture

Spirituals were spawned in America and were originally performed by the slaves from West Africa.

## Lesson 2: "Two Wings"

### CMSD Standards:

- 1-Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music;
- 2-Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music; 3-Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments;
- 8-Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts;
- 9-Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

### Objectives:

- Students will sing a song in the style of an African American Spiritual.
- Students will improvise accompaniment for percussion instruments.
- Students will explore the culture of West Africa.

### Materials:

- Student copies of "African American Spiritual", vocal parts
- Silver Burdett Ginn® The Music Connection rehearsal accompaniment CD
- CD 2-track 6
- Students will use Non-pitched/pitched percussion instruments such as cabasa, agogo bells, maracas congas, hand drums and bongos.

### Prior knowledge and experience:

- Teacher should be familiar with the history of African American Spirituals.
- Students have sung simple songs.
- Students have learned the correct method of holding and playing non-pitched percussion instruments.
- Students have familiarity with improvising rhythms.

### Procedures:

Display a classroom map that includes Africa. Assist students in locating West Africa.

Explain to students that drumming and singing are essential elements of music, which originated in West Africa.

Use the following historical and cultural description as needed:

People from West Africa settled on the islands in South Carolina and brought their language and culture. The cooking is extremely varied due to the many cultures that have settled there. They grew sweet potatoes, corn, and vegetables. They also eat dairy foods, fish, and chicken meat.

Slave Songs were originally an improvised song of repetitious affirmations. Many times lyrics are about reaching a better place. African American spirituals often contain many syncopated rhythms, and include the use of percussion, keyboards, guitars, saxophones, and trumpets when performed.

Direct the students' attention to the lyrics in classroom guide books and on an overhead projector.

Present simple rhythmic ostinatos for the song. For groups still learning notation, have them echo simple patterns that repeat. For advanced students, have them read notated rhythms. Without singing, have students play the ostinatos using a combination of rhythm instruments such as cabasa, agogo bells, and maracas.

### Sample Ostinatos

Provide the percussion parts. Teach part 1 of the percussion part by having students begin by playing or clapping on the downbeats only, or clapping their hands. Keeping a slow tempo at first, add each additional instrument to create simple polyrhythms. Be sure to model using correct technique.

Teach Part 2 teach vocal parts. First verse, second verse, followed by the third verse. Encourage memorization of the lyrics.

Teach Part 3

Combine the vocal parts, and instrumental ostinatos, parts. Choose students to play instruments, and others to sing, and rotate periodically. Begin combining parts by having students play instruments only, and then add one vocal line at a time, increasing the tempo gradually.

Indicators of success:

Students sing the song using correct posture, correct rhythms, and accurate pitches.

Students improvise ostinatos using pitched/non-pitched instruments.

Students perform accompaniment on the percussion instruments using correct technique and rhythmic accuracy.

Interdisciplinary extension:

### Literature and Culture

Spirituals were spawned in America and were originally performed by the slaves from West Africa.

### Lesson 3: "He's Got the Whole World In His Hands"

Written by J.W Johnson and J.R. Johnson

#### CMSD Standards:

- 1-Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music;
- 2-Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music;
- 3-Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments;
- 8-Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts;
- 9-Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

#### Objectives:

- Students will sing a song in the style of an African American Spiritual.
- Students will improvise accompaniment for percussion instruments.
- Students will explore the culture of West Africa.

#### Materials:

- Student copies of "African American Spiritual", vocal parts
- Silver Burdett Ginn® The Music Connection rehearsal accompaniment CD
- CD 3-track 14
- Students will use Non-pitched/pitched percussion instruments such as cabasa, agogo bells, maracas congas, hand drums and bongos.

#### Prior knowledge and experience:

- Teacher should be familiar with the history of African American Spirituals.
- Students have sung simple songs.
- Students have learned the correct method of holding and playing non-pitched percussion instruments.
- Students have familiarity with improvising rhythms.

### Procedures:

Display a classroom map that includes Africa. Assist students in locating West Africa.

Explain to students that drumming and singing are essential elements of music, which originated in West Africa.

Use the following historical and cultural description as needed:

People from West Africa settled on the islands in South Carolina and brought their language and culture. The cooking is extremely varied due to the many cultures that have settled there. They

grew sweet potatoes, corn, and vegetables. They also eat dairy foods, fish, and chicken meat.

Slave Songs were originally an improvised song of repetitious affirmations. Many times lyrics are about reaching a better place. African American spirituals often contain many syncopated rhythms, and include the use of percussion, keyboards, guitars, saxophones, and trumpets when performed.

Direct the students' attention to the lyrics in classroom guide books and on an overhead projector.

Present simple rhythmic ostinatos for the song. For groups still learning notation, have them echo simple patterns that repeat. For advanced students, have them read notated rhythms. Without singing, have students play the ostinatos using a combination of rhythm instruments such as cabasa, agogo bells, and maracas.

### Sample Ostinatos

Provide the percussion parts. Teach part 1 of the percussion part by having students begin by playing or clapping on the downbeats only, or clapping their hands. Keeping a slow tempo at first, add each additional instrument to create simple polyrhythms. Be sure to model using correct technique.

Teach Part 2 teach vocal parts. First verse, second verse, followed by the third verse. Encourage memorization of the lyrics.

### Teach Part 3

Combine the vocal parts, and instrumental ostinatos, parts. Choose students to play instruments, and others to sing, and rotate periodically. Begin combining parts by having students play instruments only, and then add one vocal line at a time, increasing the tempo gradually.

Indicators of success:

Students sing the song using correct posture, correct rhythms, and accurate pitches.

Students improvise ostinatos using pitched/non-pitched instruments.

Students perform accompaniment on the percussion instruments using correct technique and rhythmic accuracy.

Interdisciplinary extension:

### Literature and Culture

Spirituals were spawned in America and were originally performed by the slaves from West Africa.

## Lesson 4: "Down by the Riverside" African American Spiritual

### CMSD Standards:

- 1-Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music;
- 2-Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music;
- 3-Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments;
- 8-Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts;
- 9-Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

### Objectives:

- Students will sing a song in the style of an African American Spiritual.
- Students will improvise accompaniment for percussion instruments.
- Students will explore the culture of West Africa.

### Materials:

- Student copies of "African American Spiritual", vocal parts
- Silver Burdett Ginn® The Music Connection rehearsal accompaniment CD
- CD 7-track 13
- Students will use Non-pitched/pitched percussion instruments such as cabasa, agogo bells, maracas congas, hand drums and bongos.

### Prior knowledge and experience:

- Teacher should be familiar with the history of African American Spirituals.
- Students have sung simple songs.
- Students have learned the correct method of holding and playing non-pitched percussion instruments.
- Students have familiarity with improvising rhythms.

### Procedures:

Display a classroom map that includes Africa. Assist students in locating West Africa.

Explain to students that drumming and singing are essential elements of music, which originated in West Africa.

Use the following historical and cultural description as needed:

People from West Africa settled on the islands in South Carolina and brought their language and culture. The cooking is extremely varied due to the many cultures that have settled there. They

grew sweet potatoes, corn, and vegetables. They also eat dairy foods, fish, and chicken meat.

Slave Songs were originally an improvised song of repetitious affirmations. Many times lyrics are about reaching a better place. African American spirituals often contain many syncopated rhythms, and include the use of percussion, keyboards, guitars, saxophones, and trumpets when performed.

Direct the students' attention to the lyrics in classroom guide books and on an overhead projector.

Present simple rhythmic ostinatos for the song. For groups still learning notation, have them echo simple patterns that repeat. For advanced students, have them read notated rhythms. Without singing, have students play the ostinatos using a combination of rhythm instruments such as cabasa, agogo bells, and maracas.

### Sample Ostinatos

Provide the percussion parts. Teach part 1 of the percussion part by having students begin by playing or clapping on the downbeats only, or clapping their hands. Keeping a slow tempo at first, add each additional instrument to create simple polyrhythms. Be sure to model using correct technique.

Teach Part 2 teach vocal parts. First verse, second verse, followed by the third verse. Encourage memorization of the lyrics.

### Teach Part 3

Combine the vocal parts, and instrumental ostinatos, parts. Choose students to play instruments, and others to sing, and rotate periodically. Begin combining parts by having students play instruments only, and then add one vocal line at a time, increasing the tempo gradually.

Indicators of success:

Students sing the song using correct posture, correct rhythms, and accurate pitches.

Students improvise ostinatos using pitched/non-pitched instruments.

Students perform accompaniment on the percussion instruments using correct technique and rhythmic accuracy.

Interdisciplinary extension:

### Literature and Culture

Spirituals were spawned in America and were originally performed by the slaves from West Africa.

## Lesson 5: "Peace Like A River" African American Spiritual

### CMSD Standards:

- 1-Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music;
- 2-Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music;
- 3-Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments;
- 8-Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts;
- 9-Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

### Objectives:

- Students will sing a song in the style of an African American Spiritual.
- Students will improvise accompaniment for percussion instruments.
- Students will explore the culture of West Africa.

### Materials:

- Student copies of "African American Spiritual", vocal parts
- Silver Burdett Ginn® The Music Connection rehearsal accompaniment CD
- CD 2-track 11
- Students will use Non-pitched/pitched percussion instruments such as cabasa, agogo bells, maracas congas, hand drums and bongos.

### Prior knowledge and experience:

- Teacher should be familiar with the history of African American Spirituals.
- Students have sung simple songs.
- Students have learned the correct method of holding and playing non-pitched percussion instruments.
- Students have familiarity with improvising rhythms.

### Procedures:

Display a classroom map that includes Africa. Assist students in locating West Africa.

Explain to students that drumming and singing are essential elements of music, which originated in West Africa.

Use the following historical and cultural description as needed:

People from West Africa settled on the islands in South Carolina and brought their language and culture. The cooking is extremely varied due to the many cultures that have settled there. They

grew sweet potatoes, corn, and vegetables. They also eat dairy foods, fish, and chicken meat.

Slave Songs were originally an improvised song of repetitious affirmations. Many times lyrics are about reaching a better place. African American spirituals often contain many syncopated rhythms, and include the use of percussion, keyboards, guitars, saxophones, and trumpets when performed.

Direct the students' attention to the lyrics in classroom guide books and on an overhead projector.

Present simple rhythmic ostinatos for the song. For groups still learning notation, have them echo simple patterns that repeat. For advanced students, have them read notated rhythms. Without singing, have students play the ostinatos using a combination of rhythm instruments such as cabasa, agogo bells, and maracas.

### Sample Ostinatos

Provide the percussion parts. Teach part 1 of the percussion part by having students begin by playing or clapping on the downbeats only, or clapping their hands. Keeping a slow tempo at first, add each additional instrument to create simple polyrhythms. Be sure to model using correct technique.

Teach Part 2 teach vocal parts. First verse, second verse, followed by the third verse. Encourage memorization of the lyrics.

### Teach Part 3

Combine the vocal parts, and instrumental ostinatos, parts. Choose students to play instruments, and others to sing, and rotate periodically. Begin combining parts by having students play instruments only, and then add one vocal line at a time, increasing the tempo gradually.

Indicators of success:

Students sing the song using correct posture, correct rhythms, and accurate pitches.

Students improvise ostinatos using pitched/non-pitched instruments.

Students perform accompaniment on the percussion instruments using correct technique and rhythmic accuracy.

Interdisciplinary extension:

### Literature and Culture

Spirituals were spawned in America and were originally performed by the slaves from West Africa.

## Oral Presentation Rubric

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Group Topic : \_\_\_\_\_

Group Members: \_\_\_\_\_

### Oral Presentation Rubric

Oral Presentation Rubric	Possible Points	Self-Assessment	Teacher Assessment
Provided depth in coverage of topic.	10		
Presentation was well planned and coherent.	10		
Presenters were models of thoughtfulness. Personal experience integrated where relevant and appropriate. <b>Explanations and reasons given for conclusions.</b>	10		
Communication aids were clear and useful. Handout was useful for others interested in topic.	10		
Bibliographic information for others was complete.	10		
<b>Total Possible Points</b>	<b>50</b>		

**Rate each category according to the following scale: 9-10 = excellent, 7-8 = very good, 5-6 = good, 3-4 = satisfactory, 1-2 = poor, and 0 = unsatisfactory.**

## Iowa Maple

### *Oral Presentation*



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: Mr. Owens

Date of Presentation: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Work: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Criteria Points**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

#### **Organization**

Audience cannot understand presentation because there is no sequence of information.

Audience has difficulty following presentation because student jumps around.

Student presents information in logical sequence which audience can follow.

Student presents information in logical, interesting sequence which audience can follow.

\_\_\_\_\_

#### **Content Knowledge**

Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about subject.

Student is uncomfortable with information and is able to answer only rudimentary questions.

Student is at ease with content, but fails to elaborate.

Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) with explanations and elaboration.

\_\_\_\_\_

#### **Visuals**

Student used no visuals.

Student occasionally used visuals that rarely support text and presentation.

Visuals related to text and presentation.

Student used visuals to reinforce screen text and presentation.

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**Mechanics**

Student's presentation had four or more spelling errors and/or grammatical errors.

Presentation had three misspellings and/or grammatical errors.

Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors.

Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors.

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**Delivery**

Student mumbles, incorrectly pronounces terms, and speaks too quietly for students in the back of class to hear.

Student incorrectly pronounces terms. Audience members have difficulty hearing presentation.

Student's voice is clear. Student pronounces most words correctly.

Student used a clear voice and correct, precise pronunciation of terms.

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**Total---->**

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**Teacher Comments:**