Lesson Plan 1

HIDDEN MESSAGES IN SPIRITUALS

Intermediate (grades 6-8)

1-2 class periods

Program Segments

Freedom's Land

NYS Core Curriculum - Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects, 6-12

Reading

Craft and Structure (meaning of words)

Writing

- Test Types and Purposes (organize ideas, develop topic with facts)
- Production and Distribution of Writing (develop, organize appropriate to task)
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge (short research project, using term effectively)

NCSS Themes

- I. Culture and Cultural Diversity
- II. Time, Continuity and Change
- III. People, Places, and Environments
- IV. Individual Development and Identity
- V. Individuals, Groups and Institutions
- VIII. Science, Technology, and Society

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- understand the concept and historical context of spirituals
- read and listen to spirituals
- discover the meaning of the secret messages found in the lyrics of spirituals
- compose a personal spiritual that includes a line from a known spiritual

Focus Questions

- How did spirituals help to preserve African culture during slavery?
- What are some of the hidden messages in spirituals?
- How can lyrics of spirituals reflect personal meanings?

Key Concepts

Metaphor, Spirituals, Poetry, Lyrics, Interpretation, Self-Reflection

Instructional Resources

Underground Railroad: The William Still Story DVD
Computer, mp3 player or CD to play the song "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"

Coded Lyrics Worksheet
Coded Lyrics Worksheet - Teacher Notes
Student Spiritual Lyrics (teacher should pre-cut and put in box for students to draw from)

"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" Song video (optional) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Thz1zDAytzU

Procedures

- 1. Watch the *Underground Railroad: The William Still Story* segment on spirituals.
- 2. Explain how spirituals are different from hymns and psalms because they were a way of sharing the hard condition of being a slave. Be sure to discuss the significant dual meanings found in the lyrics and their purpose for fugitive slaves (codes, faith).
- 3. Play the song using an Internet site, mp3 file, or CD. (stopping periodically to explain parts of the song)
- 4. Have students fill out the Coded Lyrics Worksheet while discussing the meanings as a class.
- 5. Play the song again, uninterrupted.
- 6. Ask each student to choose a unique line from a box of pre-cut Student Spiritual Lyrics.
- 7. Allow the students at least twenty minutes to compose their own spirituals offering the following instructions before students begin to write:
 - Spirituals should reflect the life of a slave and/or impending travel on the Underground Railroad
 - The students' selected spiritual lyric must be included at least once in their songs
 - Songs should be creative and engaging
 - Students should use metaphors and can include their own "code" with a key for the teacher
 - Any historical facts need to be accurate
- Must meet length requirement (determined ahead of time by teacher)
- When the students are done with their poems/songs ask for a few to read or sing to the class.

Assessment Tasks

The students will identify the hidden meanings in spirituals based on class discussion and Coded Lyrics Worksheets. The students will also compose their own spiritual.

CODED LYRICS WORKSHEET

Name

LYRICS	LITERAL MEANING	"CODED" - SECRET MEANING
Refrain:		
Swing low,		
Sweet chariot,		
Comin' for to carry me home		
Verses:		
I looked over Jordan, and what did I see?		
A band of angels coming after me		
If you get there before I do, tell all my friends I'm coming too		
I'm sometimes up, I'm sometimes down		
But still my soul feels heavenly bound		

CODED LYRICS WORKSHEET TEACHER NOTES

LYRICS	LITERAL MEANING	"CODED" - SECRET MEANING
Refrain:		
Swing low,	Come down	Come into slaveholding states
Sweet chariot,	Heavenly vehicle	The Underground Railroad
Comin' for to carry me home	Taking me to heaven	Take me to freedom in the Northern states or Canada
Verses:		
I looked over Jordan, and what did I see?	I looked over the River Jordan, and what did I see?	I looked over the Mississippi or Ohio River, and what did I see?
A band of angels coming after me	A group of angels coming after me	Workers on the Underground Railroad coming to help me
If you get there before I do, tell all my friends I'm coming too	If you get there before I do, tell all my friends I'm coming too	If I have escaped friends or family, please tell them my escape plan
I'm sometimes up, I'm sometimes down	l'm sometimes up, l'm sometimes down	I have good days and bad days
But still my soul feels heavenly bound	But still my soul feels heavenly bound	But I know I will soon escape North on the Underground Railroad

STUDENT SPIRITUAL LYRICS

Swing low, sweet chariot	Steal away, steal away
Coming for to carry me home	l ain't got long to stay here
A band of angels coming after me	The trumpet sounds within my soul
I'm sometimes up, I'm sometimes down	Wade in the water
Follow the drinking gourd	(It) chills the body, but not the soul
The old man is awaiting for to carry you to freedom	There is a balm in (Gilead)
Go down, Moses (students name)	Sometimes I feel discouraged
let My people go	Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
No more shall they in bondage toil	I once was lost but now am found
Oh, let us all from bondage flee	Through many dangers, toils and snares
You need not always weep and mourn	A life of joy and peace
Oh lordy, trouble so hard	Bright shining as the sun
My soul got happy and stayed all day	