

What can we learn from the songs of the American Civil War?

- Both sides in the Civil War used music as a way of reminding themselves what they were fighting for. It also helped soldiers cope with the loneliness, boredom, homesickness and general horror of war.
- When the war broke out, both sides took existing songs and wrote fresh lyrics for them. These songs provide historians with useful evidence about what the soldiers felt they were fighting for.



Example of a Confederate Song: “Dixie”

- “**Dixie**” (another name for the states of the South) is the song most closely associated with the Confederates. Your teacher may have a version available to play for you. When the war broke out, the Confederates wrote fresh lyrics for the song.
- Read through the lyrics. Discuss what the underlined terms probably refer to.

Confederate Lyrics to “Dixie”

Southerners! hear your country call you!
Up! lest worse than death befall you!
To arms! To arms! To arms! For Dixie!
Hear the Northern thunders mutter!
Northern flags in South wind flutter; . .
To arms! To arms! And conquer peace for Dixie!
Send them back your fierce defiance!
Stamp upon the cursed alliance!
To arms! To arms! To arms! For Dixie!

Extension / Homework task

Discover why the southern states are collectively described as “Dixie”.

Example of a Unionist Song: “Dixie”

- “**The Battle Hymn of the Republic**” is the song most closely associated with the Unionists. Your teacher may have a version available to play for you. Its lyrics were written at the beginning of the war and put to the music of an earlier anti-slavery song called ‘John Brown’s body’.
- Read through the lyrics. Discuss what the underlined terms probably refer to.

Union lyrics to “Battle Hymn of the Republic”

On! ye patriots to the battle,
Hear Fort Moultrie's cannon rattle!
Then away, then away, then away to the fight!
Go meet those Southern traitors,
With iron will.
And should your courage falter, boys,
Remember Bunker Hill.
Hurrah! Hurrah! The Stars and Stripes forever!
Hurrah! Hurrah! Our Union shall not sever!

Extension / Homework task

Discover more about the anti-slavery campaigner ‘John Brown’ if you don’t already know about him.

Main task

- Your job is to write your own civil war song lyrics.
- The aim of these lyrics is to explain why the war broke out.
- You should start by agreeing as a class upon between 5-10 key events / people / themes which must be included. These choices should be based on your earlier studies of the causes of the civil war.
- The tune you choose to set your lyrics to is up to you. You can use one of the songs discussed in this worksheet if you wish. Alternatively, you can use the tune to another song that was popular at the time (all of which can easily be located on YouTube, Spotify or similar):

Other Civil-War Era Songs

All My Trials
Aura Lee
Yankee Doodle
When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again
Oh, Susanna

- Perhaps you can persuade your music teacher to let you record some of your completed songs!

Legacy of the Civil War on Music

- The Civil War continues to have a strong hold on American popular music.
- In 1968, The Band wrote “**The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down**” about the defeat of the Confederate States in the Civil War.
- In the 1970s, one of Elvis Presley’s most popular live songs was “**An American Trilogy**”, which joins together the Confederate “Dixie”, the Unionist “Battle Cry of Freedom”, and the popular spiritual “All My Trials”
- Neil Young wrote the song “**Southern Man**” against what he saw as the continued racial prejudice of the Southern states. In reply, Lynyrd Skynyrd wrote the song “**Sweet Home Alabama**” in which they defended the “Dixie” way of life. When they performed live, they did so with a giant Confederate Flag behind them.

You might wish to listen to some of these songs and take a vote on which one has
(a) The best lyrics and (b) The best music.

