

Music of the Revolutionary War Era

Lesson Plan #3

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What role did the fife and drum play in battle, on the march, and in camp during the Revolutionary War?

OVERVIEW

Fife and drum corps were an integral part of armies during the Revolutionary War. These instruments and the soldiers who comprised military bands helped soldiers during marches and on the battlefield as a form of communication. Soldiers could hear the loud drums and the piercing melodies of the fife over the roar of battle. These instruments were used to help commanders communicate with the troops in an efficient way. Music played by the fife and drum corps told the soldiers which way to turn, when to march, and even when to load and fire their weapons. Their presence also served as a motivational tool for soldiers during the height of battle.

Fifes, usually constructed of wood, contained six holes and dated back to the 12th century. Even though fairly small and light, the high-pitched sound of these instruments sounded over the loud footsteps of soldiers on the march and even cut through the noise of battle. The rope drum, another instrument found in the music corps of the Revolutionary War, also communicated to the troops. Constructed from wood in a cylindrical, hollow shape, these percussion instruments were an integral part of both armies. Sheepskin heads could be found at both ends of the drum and the ropes on the outer portion of the drum allowed the musicians to tune the drum to achieve maximum sound. Drummers played with wooden drum sticks and provided beats for marching and battlefield maneuvers.

During the time of the American Revolution (1775-1783), the art of warfare became more structured, and music became an even larger part of the soldiers daily routine. Common tunes such as “Reveille” and “Retreat” kept the soldiers organized in camp or on the battlefield. Additionally, fife and drum music played in camp allowed the soldiers to enjoy popular tunes and relax at the end of each day.

Drum or fife players were often young boys. Many times, fathers who enlisted with a particular regiment took their sons with them, allowing them to become musicians. Also, patriotic men who wanted to serve their country but were too old to be soldiers also joined the fife and drum corps. Recruiters regularly overlooked enlistment ages when finding military musicians. The number of musical rudiments and calls that they learned and performed as their military duties was remarkable for the young ages of the

musicians. Nevertheless, their dedication to state and country allowed them to succeed and leave their mark on the American Revolution.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1. Knowledge
 - Describe the different instruments used during the Revolutionary War.
 - List the characteristics of a fife and the characteristics of a rope drum.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis
 - Correctly identify the different instruments used by soldiers by examining and discussing paintings, sketches, etc.
 - Discuss how music played an important role in the armies during the Revolution.
3. Evaluation
 - Evaluate martial music through active listening.

TRUNK MATERIALS

- Fife
- Drum Sticks

ACTIVITIES

Motivational Activity:

1. Explain to students that military music is not new to the fields of battle. Drum corps' date back to the early 13th century and were utilized during the crusades. Fifes were developed during the 1100s and were made from turned wood.
2. Then, pass out [Handout #1 - Instrument Identification](#) to students. Instruct students to identify and list as many characteristics of both the fife and drum as possible.
3. The students can also brainstorm the military uses for both instruments.
4. Share out student answers on the board, making sure to ask guided questions to move the discussion forward. [Handout #1 – Answer Key](#)

Procedure:

1. Today we will learn about the instruments that were played in the armies during the Revolutionary War, specifically the fife and drum.
 - a. Please note that it is not possible to ship a Revolutionary War era replica drum in the Traveling Trunk. You may choose to show your class an image.
 - b. You may choose to pass the fife around to the class at this time.
2. Next, open the [PowerPoint presentation](#) and proceed with the lesson.

- a. There are musical examples in the PowerPoint to play for the students.
3. Guiding questions to ask the students during the lesson:
 - a. Do the fife and drum share equal importance?
 - b. Why do you think these Revolutionary War soldiers need this music or bands?
 - i. Was it helpful for marching?
 - ii. Was it helpful during the roar of battle?
 - iii. Do you think it made communicating commands easier?
 - iv. Was it useful to the men in camp?
 - v. Could it be used for entertainment?
 - c. What mood does it create?
 - d. What images come to mind when you hear it?

Summary Activity:

Distribute [*Handout #2 – Sum it Up: Exit Slip*](#). Students can complete the worksheet using an idea web to gather their thoughts and then complete the guided lesson closure paragraph.

Homework/Assessment:

Have students complete the following prompts found on [*Handout #3 – My Favorite Revolutionary War Instrument*](#).

Writing Prompt:

General George Washington is planning to remove fife and drum corps from the Continental Army. Write a persuasive letter in support of keeping the musicians, music, and instruments in the army.

Extensions:

A great extension would be to make simple musical instruments related to those that they have learned about during this lesson. It would take several periods and some different materials. A perfect project to jointly do with your art teacher! There are numerous resources to construct instruments. I suggest for the elementary level, *My First Music Book: A Life-Size Guide to Making and Playing Simple Musical Instruments* by Helen Drew. The instrument construction in this guide is simple and requires the least amount of materials. Although the book is out of print, it can be readily found online at a very inexpensive cost.

STANDARDS**Common Core State Standards- ELA & History/Social Studies**

- Key Ideas and Details:
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

- Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- Craft and Structure:
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4
 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
 - Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Social Studies - National Council for the Social Studies

- Theme 1: Culture
- Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- Theme 3: People, Places, and Environments
- Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity
- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Resources

Teacher:

- [*Handout #1 - Instrument Identification*](#) ★ ★ ★
- [*Handout #1 - Instrument Identification - Answer Key*](#)
- [*Handout #2 - Sum it Up: Exit Slip*](#)
- [*Handout #3 - My Favorite Revolutionary War Instrument*](#)
- [*PowerPoint*](#)

Students:

- [*Handout #1 - Instrument Identification*](#)
- [*Handout #2 - Sum it Up: Exit Slip*](#)
- [*Handout #3 - My Favorite Revolutionary War Instrument*](#)