

# “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier:” Ideas and Strategies for Using Music from the National Jukebox to Teach Difficult Topics in History

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It seems each generation of young people finds new ways to express life’s complex emotions and experiences through music. As a favored outlet for self-expression, music also provides future generations with a fascinating historical record. Sound recordings and sheet music of once popular songs offer unique opportunities for students to analyze evidence of historic events, cultural shifts and societal trends from a particular time under study. These primary source formats can prove particularly useful for teachers when addressing complex topics.

Through its website, [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov), the Library of Congress offers free access to millions of digitized primary sources in a variety of formats, including sound recordings and sheet music. A section of the website especially for K-12 teachers, [www.loc.gov/teachers](http://www.loc.gov/teachers), provides ready-made, easy-to-use classroom materials that help students engage in inquiry, develop critical thinking skills, and construct knowledge using the Library’s primary sources. Additional online presentations and activities for teachers include Lyrical Legacy: 400 Years of American Song and Poetry, ([www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/)), which explores 18 American songs and poems from the Library’s digital collections by providing historical background information, original primary source documents, classroom activity ideas, and, in many cases, sound recordings.

## The National Jukebox

Teachers and other Library patrons now have even more online opportunities for bringing the past to life through historic sound recordings. In May 2011, the Library and

Sony Music Entertainment launched the National Jukebox, [www.loc.gov/jukebox](http://www.loc.gov/jukebox), one of the largest online collections of historical recordings. The website currently features over 10,000 recordings, originally released in the United States between 1901 and 1925; plans to increase the content are already in effect. Besides a vast selection of songs and instrumental music, the National Jukebox also contains digitized versions of spoken word recordings such as political speeches and poems.

Access to the National Jukebox is free, and users listen to the recordings on a streaming-only basis. Visitors to the site can browse categories of recordings, use the search engines to search for specific recordings, or listen to items from themed playlists. The site’s “jukebox” feature also enables users to create and share their own playlists by simply clicking on the “playlist” button that appears on each recording. In addition to creating playlists for personal use, the Library encourages patrons to submit their playlists for possible inclusion on the National Jukebox site.

## Using Music from the National Jukebox to Teach Difficult Topics in History

Music can provide a powerful entry point for students to begin investigating difficult topics from the past that may still be controversial in the present. For example, the National Jukebox and the online collections of the Library of Congress offer teachers an incredible selection of digitized sound recordings and sheet music to teach about war.

## Teaching Different Perspectives on War with Songs from World War I

Today’s students may encounter reports of U.S. military casualties across the globe in daily news headlines and the debates about the wars’ legitimacy that this triggers. They may not be aware, however, that similar controversy surrounded earlier wars and that recording artists of the past captured some of these divergent opinions.

Other than World War II, there is perhaps no other time period in American history that compelled the nation’s songwriters to capture the societal events in song more than the time of the “Great War,” or World War I. Many of the songs about the Great War were either extremely popular or influential, and many reached the Top Twenty of popular music charts in the years before, during and after this conflict. Sound recordings and sheet music enable students to explore public



attitudes and different perspectives on the complex topic of war using the Great War as a case study.

For example, begin the activity by modeling analysis of sound recordings and sheet music for the class using “The Rose of No Man’s Land,” one of three songs listed here. Invite students to listen to the song’s sound recording at least once. Next, select questions from the Teacher’s Guide to Analyzing Sound Recordings to facilitate this process and record students’ responses on the Primary Source Analysis Tool.<sup>1</sup> Repeat these steps to model analysis of the song’s sheet music, except this time select questions from the Teacher’s Guide to Analyzing Sheet Music and Song Sheets.

Afterwards, have students work in pairs using copies of the Primary Source Analysis Tool to analyze the sound recording and sheet music for “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to be a Soldier,” “Over There,” or both songs, depending on ability levels and time constraints. When ready, invite the class to compare notes on all three songs and discuss, “What can we learn about different perspectives on the Great War by analyzing popular songs from this time period?” Challenge students to identify additional perspectives and historical context—for example, by reading the lyrics of the song, “Mammy’s Chocolate Soldier.” Conclude by assigning students to investigate popular songs of today for evidence of different perspectives on the war on terror.

## Sample Songs from the Great War Era

### “The Rose of No Man’s Land.”

(Words by Jack Caddigan; music by James A. Brennan; published by Leo Feist, 1918.)

In addition to mothers and girlfriends (sweethearts), many World War I songs were dedicated to another important woman during this time: the American Red Cross Nurse. “The Rose of No Man’s Land” was one of three “nurse” songs in the Top Twenty during 1918.

Sound Recording: [www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/6935](http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/6935)

Sheet Music: [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/dukesm:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(ncdhasm.a1238\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/dukesm:@field(DOCID+@lit(ncdhasm.a1238)))

### “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier.”

(Lyrics by Alfred Bryan; music by Al Piantadosi; published by Leo Feist, 1915.)

As one of the finest “mother” songs composed during the war, “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” remained in the Top Twenty the first six months of 1915. The song reflects the neutrality mentality common in the United States at this time as a plea from an American mother, asking the government to spare her son from joining the war effort.

Sound Recording: [www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/1324](http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/1324)

Sheet Music: [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/dukesm:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(ncdhasm.a0665\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/dukesm:@field(DOCID+@lit(ncdhasm.a0665)))

### “Over There.”

(Words by Sidney Mitchell; music by Archie Gottler; published by Leo Feist, 1915.)

See Patriotic Melodies Special Presentation in Performing Arts Encyclopedia for information: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/html/patriotic/patriotic-home.html> George M. Cohan composed “Over There” in 1917 after reading in the newspaper that America had declared war on Germany. The song was an instant success and became a national hit after vaudeville star Nora Bayes recorded it. In fact, the sheet music cover features a photo of Bayes in a military uniform and it is her recording of the song that is found in National Jukebox.

Sound Recording: [www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/5977](http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/5977)

Sheet Music: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.ihas.100010518/default.html>

### “Mammy’s Chocolate Soldier.”

(Words by Sidney Mitchell. Music by Archie Gottler. Waterson, Berlin & Schneider Co., 1918.)

A popular song that made it to the Top Twenty, the first verse tells the story of an African American boy who wants to play soldier with white boys, but they tell him he can’t because of his race. In the second verse, he is grown up and marching as a soldier in a parade. These lyrics allude to U.S. War Department policies with regard to African American men and military service that changed over the course of World War I.

Sound Recording: Not currently available on the National Jukebox

Sheet Music: [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/dukesm:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(ncdhasm.b0890\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/dukesm:@field(DOCID+@lit(ncdhasm.b0890)))

## Using Prohibition Era Songs to Teach about Addiction and Substance Abuse

It may surprise students to learn that songs about alcoholism reached the Top Twenty of popular music charts nearly 100 years ago during the Prohibition Era. Sound recordings and sheet music that express either pro- or anti-prohibition views from this time period provide students with an interesting case study relating to the topic of addiction and substance abuse as expressed through popular music.

Begin the activity by analyzing “The Alcoholic Blues” sheet music together as a class (see songs listed below). Use pre-selected questions from the Teacher’s Guide to Analyzing Sheet Music and Song Sheets to facilitate discussion while students individually record responses on the Primary Source Analysis Tool. Next, ask students to listen carefully to the song’s sound recording at least once. Use pre-selected questions from the Teacher’s Guide to Analyzing Sound Recordings to prompt students’ discussion of any new insights from hearing the song. In particular, encourage them to consider:

*Is the sound recording what you expected to hear after analyzing the sheet music?*

*How does hearing the recording change your hypotheses about the song’s purpose, if at all?*

*What connections, if any, can you draw between the time this song was recorded and today?*

Afterwards, have students work in pairs using copies of the Primary Source Analysis Tool to analyze the lyrics to “Molly and the Baby, Don’t You Know” (listed here). When ready, repeat the steps above for playing and analyzing the song’s sound recording. Compare this song to “The Alcoholic Blues,” and discuss as a class, “How might popular songs from this time period have influenced public opinion about Prohibition?” Conclude by assigning students to use lyrics from popular songs of today as evidence to support or contest the current legal drinking age of 21.

## Sample Songs from the Prohibition Era

### “The Alcoholic Blues.”

(Words by Edward Laska; music by Albert Von Tilzer; published by Broadway Music Corporation, 1919.)

The National Jukebox’s recording of “The Alcoholic Blues” is performed by Billy Murray, one of the most popular comic singers in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century. The humorous lyrics to “The Alcoholic Blues” are even more effective through Murray’s satirical interpretation.

Sound recording: [www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/6980](http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/6980)

Sheet music: [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/dukesm:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(ncdhasm.a6066\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/dukesm:@field(DOCID+@lit(ncdhasm.a6066)))

### “Molly and the Baby, Don’t You Know.”

(Words by H.S. Taylor; music by J.B. Herbert; sung by Homer A. Rodeheaver, in the National Jukebox.)

Homer Rodeheaver (1880–1955) was a trombone-playing, baritone-voiced evangelist who served as music director for the preacher Billy Sunday. He introduced jaunty, rhythmic songs into his programs and often led choirs with his trombone playing.

Sound recording: [www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/4336](http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/4336)

Sheet music: Not available from The Library of Congress Website; see transcription below:

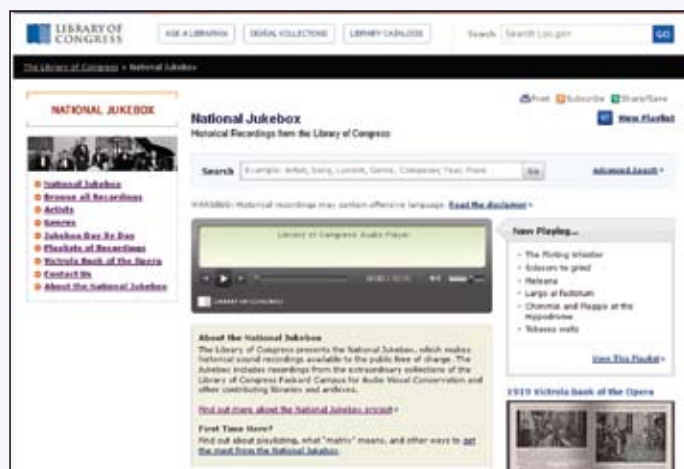
### Lyrics to “Molly and the Baby, Don’t You know”

#### Verse:

1. *There’s a patient little woman here below, and a little kid that ought to have a show. Now I’ll give the whiskey up, and I’ll take a coffee cup with Molly and the Baby, don’t you know!*
2. *You may tell the liquor-seller not to crow, he will never get a nickel from me now; he may keep his poisoned trash, and I’ll put away my cash for Molly and the Baby, don’t you know!*
3. *You may tell the politicians they may go, I am in for prohibition, head and toe! For at last I’ve turned my coat, and I’ll cast a temp’rance vote for Molly and the Baby, don’t you know!*

#### Chorus:

*Don’t you know, don’t you know, what a fellow ought to do when’s he got a little fam’ly depending on him so. He should try to be a man, and to do the best he can for Molly and the Baby, don’t you know, don’t you know!*



## Options and Strategies for Searching the National Jukebox

Of course, these learning activities explore only two possible topics that teachers might address using historic recordings from the National Jukebox. To browse the National Jukebox for recordings dealing with other topics, select one of the options located on the left side of the homepage:

- Browse all recordings—this option allows users to browse recordings by category, including vocal, language, place, target audience, label, date range, composer, author, lyricist, performer, and genre
- Artists—users can browse artists from A-Z
- Genres—under this option, users can browse by musical genre including classical music, ethnic characterizations, popular music, religious, and spoken word
- Jukebox Day by Day—by using this option,

users can find recordings for any given day of the year

- Playlists of recordings—browse playlists of recordings created by Library of Congress curators, project partners or other guest experts

Users can also type into the search box located in the center of the homepage to conduct specific searches in the National Jukebox. It is worth noting, however, that the Jukebox's search features do not currently support topical "subject" searches (e.g., women's rights or immigration); users may therefore need to search specific titles or songs, or names of performers, composers or lyricists from appropriate time periods in order to identify materials relevant to their interests. To help narrow specific searches, select the advanced search button.

### Conclusion

Historic sound recordings and sheet music

capture the attitudes and beliefs shared through music, offering students unique opportunities to better understand the past. Through the free online collections of the Library of Congress and its new National Jukebox, teachers now have access to thousands of these musical windows into the thoughts and feelings of songwriters throughout U.S. history.

### Note

1. Teacher's Guides and Analysis Tool are available for free download from [www.loc.gov/teachers/using/primarysources/guides.html](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/using/primarysources/guides.html). Please note that the Primary Source Analysis Tool is in a fillable format that teachers may either print or ask students to complete online to be saved or printed when finished.

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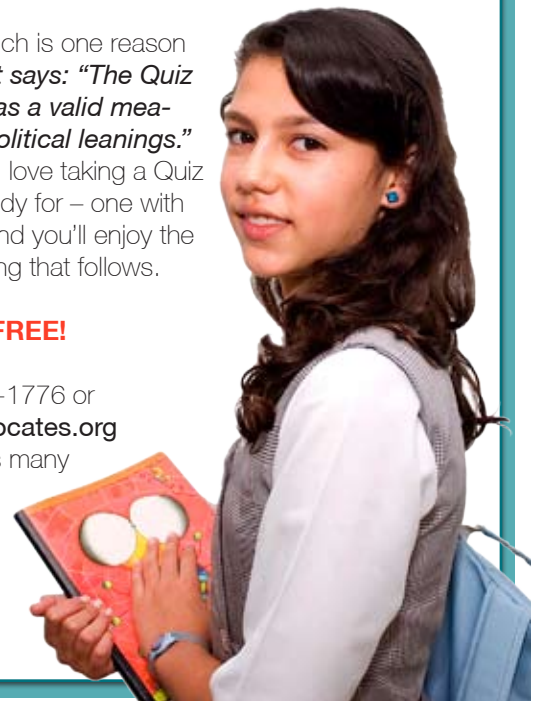
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