

MAMA, LOOK SHARP (REMIX)

Objectives

- Students will learn the music and lyrics to a song from *1776* and understand its purpose/function in the show.
- Students will create their own version of the song by writing their own lyrics.
- Students will connect to themes of sacrifice, loss and sending a message to a loved one.

Materials needed

- Speaker to play “Mama, Look Sharp” song from original cast recording of *1776*
- Piano/Keyboard or app that can play “Mama, Look Sharp” melody
- Sheet music of “Mama, Look Sharp” song (see attached)

Activity

The musical *1776*, with music and lyrics by Sherman Edwards and book by Peter Stone, was originally written in the 1960s during a time in which the United States was at war with Vietnam. 58,200 American soldiers lost their lives during the Vietnam War.

The song, “Mama, Look Sharp,” is sung from the perspective of an American soldier who is at battle during the Revolutionary War. The phrase “look sharp” means to act quickly. In this song, this soldier is telling their mother to act quickly and come find them before they die.

“Mama, Look Sharp” shows the human face of war. For reference, 6,800 American soldiers lost their lives during the Revolutionary War.

What is the human cost of war?

- Play the first two verses of the song, “Mama, Look Sharp.”
- Ask: What is your immediate reaction this song? What emotions does it bring up?
- Teach the first two verses of the song. First the lyrics, then the melody.
- Speak each line in rhythm and ask students to repeat (call and response).

*Mama, hey mama
Come lookin' for me
I'm here in the meadow
By the red maple tree*

*Mama, hey mama
Look sharp, here I be
Hey! Hey!
Mama, look sharp*

- Use sheet music to play the melody on piano/keyboard (or app; or use song recording from earlier).
- Sing each line one by one. Students can hum along if they'd rather not sing.
- Once students know the song, ask them to make the song their own. Ask them to imagine that they are sending a message to a loved one. Maybe it's someone they haven't seen in a while or maybe it's someone they may not see for a while. If they were to send a message to a loved one, to someone that really matters, what would you say to them?
- Re-write these lyrics with their own original message. In the original song, the character is addressing their "mama" but maybe they're sending this message to someone different. Maybe it's simply someone's name.

Here's an example...

*Brother, my brother
I miss you so much
It's been too many years
Since we have been in touch*

*Brother, my brother
Please get back to me
Hey! Bro!
Please call me back!*

Reflection

- How did it feel to write those lyrics?
- How did it feel to send that message?

While watching the show, pay special attention to this song. Why do you think the creators included this song in the show? Also, pay attention to the music and lyrics of the other songs. Do any specific songs stand out to you? How does the music communicate the story? How does it set the mood? What lyrics stand out to you? Who sings those lyrics?

Lesson Extensions

Students can take their original lyrics and sing them over the music from "Mama, Look Sharp."

In groups, they can record themselves each singing their own verses and/or record a whole new original song with multiple original verses.

Lesson Variations

If educators/students are not musically inclined, they can abandon the melodic/music portion of this activity and just focus on the lyrical/text portion.