The History of Amazing Grace

Lesson Overview

Overview: Using primary source information, the students will learn about Amazing Grace as it evolved into one of America's most popular hymn tunes. The students will learn about the history, the variations and hear audio recordings of Amazing Grace from early American history.

Grade Range: 9-12

Objective: After completing this activity students will be able to:
- Discuss the history of Amazing Grace including dates and time frames about the creation and publication of the tune.
- Be able to provide historical data using primary source material to explain Amazing Grace’s development in the United States.
- Be able to give examples of different performing groups that performed Amazing Grace as a popular tune in the 20th Century and discuss how it evolved from a simple hymn tune to a popular music hit.

Time Required: Four class periods of 40 minutes.

Discipline/Subject: High School Music Theory

Topic/Subject: Performing Arts, Music


Standards

Illinois Learning Standards:
Common Core Standards:

5. Performing and notating music
6. Listening to, analyzing and describing music
7. Evaluating music and music performances
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture

Materials

Handouts: Copy of the Southern Harmony, Baptist Chorals and a modern day version of Amazing Grace.

Analysis Tools: Amazing Grace Analysis Sheet

Rubric: Amazing Grace Analysis Grading Rubric
The History of Amazing Grace

Origin

- John Newton
  - Born in 1725 in Newport, England
  - Religious beliefs initially lacked conviction
  - Was continually in trouble, but ended up being "rescued" by a ship's captain; he converted to Christianity.
- 1779 in England
  - "Rock a My Soul" is a John Newton poem
  - "Amazing Grace" is a hymn that speaks of the joy and peace of the soul through the gift of grace
  - "Amazing Grace" is a reference to the difficulties we encounter in life.
- John Newton wrote the words, however, it took 60 years for the present day tune to be written.

Olney Hymns in Three Books

- Published in London in 1779
  - Only contained words to popular hymns
  - Many of the songs we know today were sung to different tunes that were popular in the day
  - Each congregation took the words in the Olney Hymns and adapted them to well-known songs or melodies.
Amazing Grace Comes to America

- 1785
  - Ten years after its publication in the Olney Hymns, Amazing Grace was included in the Reformed Dutch Church Hymnal Published in New York.
- 1790
  - Newton's Olney Hymns was published in New York.
- 1794
  - Newton's Olney Hymns was published in Philadelphia.
- 1795
- 1795
  - Newton's Olney Hymns was published in New Jersey.

Amazing Grace in America

- Early 19th Century
  - Amazing Grace had been adopted by the Reform, Baptist and Congregationalist Churches in America.
  - It had "interdenominational appeal".
  - Once the words had been linked to a specific tune, the emphasis went from the words to its music.

The Melody of Amazing Grace

- Based on a Pentatonic (5 note) scale.
- In its earliest form, the song only used these 5 pitches.
  - William Walker 1835
    - Tune called "New Britain"
    - Published with the "New Britain" melody in the "Southern Harmony" in 1835.
    - By the Civil War, Amazing Grace had become a well-known, beloved, anthem by all.

Olney Hymns in Three Books

- Contained the first printing of Amazing Grace.
- Numbered "hymn 342".
- Begins at the bottom of page 53.
- Olney Hymns later published in New York in 1750 and in Philadelphia in 1791.
  - Hymn 342.
1831 Virginia Harmony

- Shape Note Tune Book
  - Printed music that used shapes to designate note length
- Second book to use the tune that we know as Amazing Grace.
- Compiled by Methodist Lay Preacher James Correll and Presbyterian Preacher David Clayton, Virginia Harmony lists the tune as Harmony Grove.
- The melody was originally matched with the Isaac Watters hymn, "There is a Land of Pure Delight".

1835 Southern Harmony

- First published in 1835
- First publication of the Amazing Grace words with the New Britain Tune.
- William Walker took the Harmony Grove tune and changed some notes around to get the tune we know today.

1877 Sacred Songs and Solos

- This book uses the hymn tune Clarenmont for the hymn Amazing Grace.
- According to historian Steve Turner, this book was the “defining hymn collection of late-nineteenth century evangelicalism”
- Ira Sankey compiled this collection and was the first to refer to the hymn by the title Amazing Grace.

1888 Baptist Chorals

- First time Amazing Grace was printed with the New Britain tune.
- It had been used with New Britain but never printed with it as the main hymn tune.
1900 Make His Praise Glorious

- Edwin Othello Excell adjusted Amazing Grace to sound more contemporary.
- Adjusted some of the harmonies and transitions that were awkward in the Southern Harmony version.

Make His Praise Glorious

![Image of music sheet]

Early Recorded Performances of Amazing Grace

- 1922 - Sacred Harp Chorus
- 1929 - J.T. Allison's Sacred Harp Singers
- 1939 - Mrs. Mary Shipp
- 1939 - Jesse Allison, Vera Hall and Dock Reed
- 1939 - Group of Adults Singing
- 1941 - Shiloh Baptist Church Choir
- 1942 - Sacred Harp Singing Society
- 1946 - Seymour Mayo

1922 Sacred Harp Choir

- First group to record Amazing Grace
- Brunswick Records recorded the Sacred Harp Choir performing Amazing Grace under the name New Britain.
1929 JT Allison's Sacred Heart Singers

- JT Allison recorded "Jewett" in 1929
- Gennett recording studio in Richmond, Indiana recorded 32 album sides of the Allison's singing a variety of shape note songs.

1939-Mrs. Mary Shipp

- Wife of a preacher
- Found by Herbert Halpert on a recording tour in the South from March 15 through June 23, 1939.
- Halpert recorded 5 discs of the Ship family at the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in Byhalia, Mississippi.
- Recordings include Mary Shipp and four of her children.

Mary Shipp continued

- This version is a solo performance
- "Melodious", using a variant of the New Britain hymn tune

1939-Jesse Allison, Vera Hall and Dock Reed

- This recording is one of more than 3,000 acetate discs that John Lomax and his wife Ruby and son Alan Lomax made for the Archive of American Folk-Song during the 1930s
- Recorded on May 26, 1939 in Livingston, Alabama
- Ruby Tarrr Pickens (local resident) introduced John Lomax to Vera Hall
1939 - Group of Adults Singing

- Herbert Halpert recording from his Southern recording tour.
- Balanced this group with one microphone powered by car batteries.
- This group sang from the Collesbery Worship Hymnal and was recorded at a school house in Vancleave, Mississippi on June 8, 1939.

1941 - Shiloh Baptist Church Choir

- In 1941 and 1942, John Henry Faulk received a fellowship from the Rosenwald Foundation to document African American religious traditions in Texas.
- Used a field recorder and blank acetate discs from the Library of Congress.
- Made more than 100 recordings in churches around Austin, Texas.

Shiloh Baptist Church Cont.

- This recording of Amazing Grace uses a variation of the New Britain Hymn Tune and also uses a call and response technique common to African American Churches.

1942 - Sacred Harp Singing Society

- George Pullen Jackson was a scholar of sacred American Music. He went with John Lomax to the 1942 Sacred Harp Singing Convention in Birmingham, Alabama.
- They recorded 28 discs of hymns, fugue tunes and anthems.
- This version of Amazing Grace is in four part harmony using the New Britian Hymn tune.
Library of Congress Items:
Title of Source: Library of Congress, Performing Arts Encyclopedia: Amazing Grace:
URL of Source: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/html/grace/grace-timeline.html

Online Resources:
Title: Library of Congress, Performing Arts Encyclopedia: Amazing Grace
URL: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/html/grace/grace-timeline.html
Description: Amazing Grace Timeline

Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure Step #</th>
<th>Resource or Material Used</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Present class with Power Point presentation on the History of Amazing Grace. The presentation is broken down into the following areas:</td>
<td>Power Point</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. History and Origin</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B. First Publications of Amazing Grace</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Recorded Examples of Amazing Grace.</td>
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<td>2. After completion of the presentation, introduce the Amazing Grace Analysis Assignment. The purpose of this assignment is:</td>
<td>Analysis Tool</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Analyze what they hear in the recordings that they listen to.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>B. Improve their written expression skills by having to explain their thoughts in writing.</td>
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<td>C. Improve their listening skills by having to listen to the recordings with a critical ear. Comparing two contrasting works of music to find differences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Assess the quality of student work by using the Amazing Grace Analysis Rubric</td>
<td>Rubric</td>
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Evaluation

Student learning will be evaluated by completion of the analysis worksheet, and by their verbal participation in class.

Extension

None.

Author Credits:

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Reflect of each of the following statements as it applies to Amazing Grace. Each reflection should be 4-8 complete sentences. Be sure to fully explain your reasoning for each reflection.

1. Using the provided copy of Amazing Grace from the Southern Harmony, describe what you see. Compare it to the copy of the modern day version provided. What are the differences? What are the similarities?

2. Using the provided copy of Amazing Grace from the Baptist Chorals, describe what you see. Compare it to the copy of the modern day version provided. What are the differences? What are the similarities?

3. Compare the Southern Harmony and Baptist Chorals versions. They were written at two different time. How did they music change? How did it stay the same?

4. Using the Library of Congress Website, go to the Amazing Grace timeline and listen to three recordings of your choice that we did not listen to in class. Complete an analysis of the three recordings in the provided format below.

   a. List the performer/performers
   b. When was it recorded?
   c. Where was it recorded
   d. What is its Library of Congress Call Number

   In 3-5 sentences give a brief overview about the recording. Things to consider:

   What do you hear?
   How is it different from the version we all know?
   What makes this recording unique?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Rubric</th>
<th>6 points</th>
<th>8 points</th>
<th>10 points</th>
<th>12 points</th>
<th>Points Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Harmony versus Modern Day</td>
<td>Student supplied limited information. Comparison was very general and not specific.</td>
<td>Student supplied below average information. Some comparisons were specific, but overall it was general.</td>
<td>Student supplied above average information. Most comparisons were detailed and showed evidence of thoughtful evaluation.</td>
<td>Student supplied excellent information. All comparisons were logical, detailed and showed evidence of thoughtful evaluation.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Baptist Chorals versus Modern Day</td>
<td>Student supplied limited information. Comparison was very general and not specific.</td>
<td>Student supplied below average information. Some comparisons were specific, but overall it was general.</td>
<td>Student supplied above average information. Most comparisons were detailed and showed evidence of thoughtful evaluation.</td>
<td>Student supplied excellent information. All comparisons were logical, detailed and showed evidence of thoughtful evaluation.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparison of Southern Harmony and Baptist Chorals</td>
<td>Student supplied limited information. Comparison was very general and not specific.</td>
<td>Student supplied below average information. Some comparisons were specific, but overall it was general.</td>
<td>Student supplied above average information. Most comparisons were detailed and showed evidence of thoughtful evaluation.</td>
<td>Student supplied excellent information. All comparisons were logical, detailed and showed evidence of thoughtful evaluation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis of Three Recordings</td>
<td>Student supplied limited information. The brief overview was generic and included basic facts only.</td>
<td>Student supplied below average information. The brief overview contained only a few specific ideas and did not give the reader a sense of what is going on in the recording.</td>
<td>Student supplied above average information. The brief overview contained several ideas and gave the reader a vague sense of what is going on in the recording.</td>
<td>Student supplied excellent information. The brief overview contained detailed information and the reader would be able to understand exactly what was going on in the recording.</td>
<td></td>
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Total Points Earned___________________

Comments:

*The History of Amazing Grace*