

If I Had a Hammer

In this activity participants explore and prepare for the lessons of the cornerstone curriculum theme of Celebrating Diversity through the song "If I Had a Hammer."

What to Know

"If I Had a Hammer" was written by Pete Seeger and Lee Hays in 1949 as an anthem for many progressive concerns of the day and most specifically the Labor Movement. The song features images of blue-collar workers (hammers and bells to suggest factories, etc.) as a rallying call for justice and equality. The "song to sing" alluded to in the third verse relates to labor songs and people collectively using their voice to address social ills. The Labor Movement led to unions that helped barter for higher wages, safer work conditions, health care and stopped child labor, among other things.

"If I Had a Hammer" became a top ten hit when recorded by Operation Respect's founder Peter Yarrow's folk trio Peter, Paul & Mary in 1962. It then became an anthem of the civil rights movement. Peter, Paul & Mary performed the song in 1963 at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom where Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. The lines "I'd sing about love between my brothers and my sisters," and reference to "the hammer of justice" and "the bell of freedom" all resonate with our fourth curriculum cornerstone theme, "Celebrating Diversity."

Experts suggest the importance of explicitly teaching children to celebrate differences, as well as providing ample opportunity to have positive experiences within diverse groups. In order to truly embrace the value of "celebrating" diversity, it is essential that "diversity" is not an add-on to curriculum choices. To teach children this value, diverse voices and images need to be fully integrated into the curriculum and culture of the school.

Objectives:

Participants will:

1. learn and explore the song; and,
2. be able to express their thoughts about what it means in relation to our fourth theme, "Celebrating Diversity."

Common Core State Standards

- Anchor Standards for Literacy: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 - Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- Anchor Standards for Writing: Range of Writing
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10 - Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
- Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3-Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.6 - Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.
- Anchor Standards for Language-Knowledge of Language
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Preparation and Materials

- One copy of People Search for each student (Handout 1)
- Lyrics for *If I Had a Hammer* posted or one copy for each student (Handout 2)
- Small strips of paper and a hat or box
- [Video](#) of Peter, Paul, and Mary singing at the March on Washington
- Peter Yarrow singing [If I Had a Hammer](#)

Gather Together/Warm-Up/Bell Ringer: Uniquely You (10 Minutes)

Gather students together. Introduce the “Uniquely You” activity. Students will write one thing on a sheet of paper that is a special, unique skill, talent or characteristic he or she has. The statement should read: “One way I am uniquely myself is. . .” Model it by saying something you think is unique about you. “One way I’m uniquely myself is I live in the city, but I grew up on a farm. . .” or “One way I’m uniquely myself is I was born in Honduras.” When participants are finished, have them fold their papers and put them into a hat or box. Go around the classroom having the kids take one piece of paper out of the hat and reading it out loud.

Process:

“What is one thing that surprised you about the “Uniquely You” activity?”

Tell students that you asked them to do the “Uniquely You” activity as a way to start a unit and discussion about diversity.

Together create a definition of “diverse” somewhat along the lines of this: *Diverse: showing a great deal of variety and differences.* Create a web chart of words related to the word “diverse” to help create your definition. Group similar items as you chart.

Tell students that creating a caring community includes recognizing the diversity among its members and “celebrating” or “appreciating” that diversity:

“A caring community doesn’t expect everyone to look the same, act the same, or agree on everything. A caring community allows people to be their true selves and to be respected as individuals with unique gifts to share.”

Brainstorm and chart together some of the ways people can be diverse - size of family, interests, physical attributes such as eye color, skin color, hair color, strengths, language, etc.

Main Activity: If I Had a Hammer (15 Minutes)

Tell students you are going to share a special song with them today that will deepen their understanding of the idea of diversity as it relates to creating caring communities and treating people fairly.

Give students a brief overview of the Civil Rights Movement such as the paragraph listed below or a [short video](#) like this one from the History Channel. Explain that the Civil Rights Movement is one example of a way that people came together to change something that was unfair about our laws. Adapt the information below to what your students may already know about the Civil Rights Movement.

“In the United States during the first half of the twentieth century, black people and white people were treated very differently, in a way that was unfair to blacks. It was true all over the country, but in the southern part of the country there were laws that made sure black people were treated unfairly, called Jim Crow laws. Blacks were not even allowed to vote. They were required to use different water fountains, lunch counters and sit in the back of the bus. When a lot of people began working together to try to change these laws, during the 1950’s and 60’s, they became part of the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement worked so that all people would be treated fairly and equally.”

Now tell students you are going to show them a video clip of Peter, Paul and Mary singing at the March on Washington, where Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Peter Yarrow is the one on the right when the group sings—and is the founder of Operation Respect.

Show students the [video](#) of Peter Paul and Mary performing.

Ask students:

How do you feel when you listen to the song?

Why do you think Peter, Paul and Mary chose to sing this song at the March on Washington?

Why are people singing along?

Now show Peter Yarrow singing the song in the present time ([hyperlink](#)). Tell students to listen carefully to the words. Provide students the lyrics on a chart or on their own sheets so they can follow along.

Process as a group:

As you listen to the words what comes to mind?

What sort of danger or warnings are they “hammering out” or “ringing out”?

What’s the difference between a hammer, a bell, and a song?

*What can this song mean for **us** in our classroom?*

Guide discussion so that students understand that the song is a song about peace and justice and trying to celebrate diversity among everyone in the world. Peter, Paul, and

Mary sing the song to inspire others to commit to creating such a community. How might spreading this message change the world?

Integrated Arts: Singing Your Song (10 Minutes)

In small groups, or as a whole class, create new versions of the song (use Handout 2 to help students fill in new lyrics). Sing the new versions together.

Closing (5 Minutes)

Process with a go-round: *"How do you feel after learning about and singing this song?"*

End with a group high-five or special handshake of the students' making.

Grade Level Modifications

K-1 For the Gathering, write on chart paper “One way I am uniquely myself is....” Pair students and have them share their unique quality. Come back to circle and have each student share what their partner shared with them. Process as in grades 2-5 lessons.

Based on your students’ developmental stage and background knowledge, share that in the United States white people haven’t always treated black people fairly. Give examples of the way black people were discriminated against: not being able to eat in the same restaurants; children not being able to go to same schools; black children being given old, outdated textbooks from white schools; etc. Explain that during the 1950’s and 60’s many people recognized how unfair that was and came together to try to change that. These people were part of the Civil Rights movement.

Before showing the Peter Paul and Mary video, read [*The Other Side*](#) by Jacqueline Woodson. It is about two young girls who are told not to cross the fence between their yards and the solution they create. Share with students that the story is an example of how children are affected when people don’t celebrate one another’s differences, or when one group of people thinks they are better than another.

Continue lesson as presented for grades 2-5.

Have students work on versions of *If I Had a Hammer* at centers later in the day.

Grades 6-12 Do the gathering as described. Begin the main activity by asking students to pair/share examples of injustice in the world. Tie this to the Civil Rights movement.

Then after listening to the song the second time with Peter Yarrow only, set up four rotation stations with the following questions written on chart paper or newsprint with markers (one question per page):

What images come to mind when you hear the words “hammer out” or “ring out” danger and warning?

What’s the difference between a hammer, a bell, and a song?

How might we “ring out love between our brothers and our sisters?”

*What can this song mean for **us** in our classroom?*

Break students into four equal sized groups and have those groups circulate among the newsprint or chart paper answering the questions. Give a few minutes at each station and then ask the group to rotate to the next one until all groups have rotated among the stations.

Curricular Connections

K-5 Literacy, Art and Music: Have students decorate the lyric sheet of *If I Had a Hammer* and keep in their poetry or music folder. Younger students can use highlighters to find sight words.

K-5 Literacy: Read [*Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Citizens*](#) by Carole Boston Weatherford. Ask questions such as: *“How do you think the little girl is feeling? Why are these laws in place? In what ways are some people benefitting from these laws? Why do people follow the laws if they are unfair? Why is it important to know that this happened in the United States? What lessons can we learn from this?”*

K-5 Literacy and Math: Assign students to pairs or groups. Invite students to look through a random sample of 20-30 books in your class library. Have them chart the diversity of the main characters-boy/girl, black/white, able-bodied/differently able bodied, or whatever categories resonate with your students. Hang the charts and do a gallery walk so students can see all the charts. Ask students what they notice. Are some groups represented more than others? Why is that? Can the class do something to help diversify the literature in the library?

2-12 Literacy and Social Studies: Have students research famous speeches (FDR, Nelson Mandela, Maya Angelou, JFK, etc.) that demonstrate caring and celebrating diversity. Have students write their own speeches about celebrating diversity and practice reading their speeches to small group.

2-12 Literacy, Math, and Art, Social Studies: Assign children to groups. Have each group create a board game celebrating diversity. The landing spaces can have players share something about themselves, find two things in common with another player, name one way they are unique in the group of players, or any ideas the students devise.

6-12 History and Art/Music: Tie the song to the history and accomplishments of the labor movement. Look closely at the role of art/music in creating social change. What other songs have been used successfully to create a positive difference in the world. Why might that be?

Handout 1: If I Had a Hammer

If I Had a Hammer Lyrics

If I had a hammer,
I'd hammer in the morning
I'd hammer in the evening,
All over this land

I'd hammer out danger,
I'd hammer out a warning,
I'd hammer out love between my brothers and my sisters,
All over this land.

If I had a bell,
I'd ring it in the morning,
I'd ring it in the evening,
All over this land

I'd ring out danger,
I'd ring out a warning
I'd ring out love between my brothers and my sisters,
All over this land.

If I had a song,
I'd sing it in the morning,
I'd sing it in the evening,
All over this land

I'd sing out danger,
I'd sing out a warning
I'd sing out love between my brothers and my sisters,
All over this land.

Well I got a hammer,
And I got a bell,
And I got a song to sing, all over this land.

It's the hammer of Justice,
It's the bell of Freedom,
It's the song about Love between my brothers and my sisters,
All over this land.

It's the hammer of Justice,
It's the bell of Freedom,
It's the song about Love between my brothers and my sisters,
All over this land.

Handout 2: If I Had a Hammer

Create a new version of *If I Had a Hammer*.

If I had a hammer, I'd hammer in the morning,

I'd hammer in the evening, all over this land.

I'd hammer out _____

I'd hammer out _____

I'd hammer out _____

All over this land.