

Teaching The Holodomor Through Music – The Song *Dry Tears*

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Introduction

The song *Dry Tears* was written by **Natalia Onyschuk and James French**. Our goal in writing the song was to teach students about the Holodomor from the perspective of school age children innocently living their lives when the genocide began. Our hope is that students will understand the significance of the Holodomor and empathize with those affected by it, if they can imagine how people their own age endured this historical moment. The lyrics in the chorus reflect the voices of children of the present. These children hold the future in their hands and have the power to prevent injustices such as the Holodomor from reoccurring.

The lyrics were written in English so that the song’s message can reach a broader audience. It is important to emphasize that although the Holodomor is memorialized within the Ukrainian community, it is a human tragedy that all cultures can learn about, and many can relate to from their own historic, and even contemporary, experiences with genocide. Specific lyrics have been included in Ukrainian to reinforce the Ukrainian peoples’ strong belief in God during the Communist era. These lyrics include a quote from Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, the Our Father, responses from the Ukrainian liturgy and funeral hymn. These lyrical quotes would have been known by most children at the time of the Holodomor and are familiar to most in our present time.

Dry Tears can be incorporated into Language Arts, Music, and Art curriculums. It may also be part of the Social Studies curriculum, but those lesson plans are not included in this material. It is important for students to consider the song within Language Arts first because here they learn about the content from the lyrics. Afterwards they will have the tools to explore expressing these emotions in different mediums.

This is a series of 3 lessons, one on language arts, one on music and one on art, dealing with the Holodomor and the song *Dry Tears*. Each lesson is 30 minutes.

LESSON 1: Language Arts

Grade Level: Grades 4-6

Time Frame: 30 minutes

Learning Intention/Objective:

To develop an understanding of the lyrics, ask questions, explore, express, and share their personal feelings about the Holodomor.

LESSON 1: Language Arts

Curriculum links

- 1.1 Discover and Explore - Express ideas and develop understanding.
- 1.2 Clarify and Extend – Extend understanding.
- 2.1 Use Strategies and Cues – Use comprehension strategies.
- 2.2 Respond to Texts – Construct meaning from text.

Materials required

Computer, projector, screen, white board and/or chart paper, dictionary (on device or hard copy) and a copy of the video and score of *Dry Tears*.

Students may require some background information about the Holodomor.

Lesson Plan Activities / Procedure:

- Show the video of *Dry Tears*, project the lyrics on the screen and read them as a class.
- Check for understanding. What is the song about? What is the theme? Can you understand the message? Who is the speaker?
- Discuss the feelings that are evoked when they hear the song. What do you feel when you hear the song and read the lyrics?
- Brainstorm a list of feelings on the board with the students.
- Have the students find words in the lyrics that evoke these feelings.
- Make a list of those words.
- Distinguish between the chorus and the verses. What messages are given in the verses and what message is given in the chorus?
- Discuss word choice. Why is some of the text in Ukrainian? What does “dry tears” mean?
- Discuss the relationship between poetry and lyrics. Look at the structure of the lyrics. Can you identify the rhyming words? List them on the board.
- Complete the lesson with a repeat of the lyrics of the song.

Suggested Follow Up Activity / Extension activities

- Scaffold information and transition to Social Studies with a KWL chart.

LESSON 2: Music

Grade Level: Grades 4-6

Time Frame: 30 minutes

Learning Intention/Objective:

To understand that lyrics of a song relay a message. Explore how the message is conveyed through singing.

Curriculum links:

Element of Expression

6. Music reflects our feelings about holidays, seasons, our country and cultural heritage.

7. The words of a song are very important to the understanding of the song (text).

Skill: Moving

7. Improve movements to poems, stories and songs.

Skill: Listening

9. Detect the rise and fall of melody.

13. Detect the contour (shape) of melody.

Skill: Singing

15. Continue vocal development: sing with expression and good enunciation.

23. Develop musical interpretation: awareness of the meaning of a song through its words (text).

Materials required:

Computer, projector, screen and copy of the video and score of *Dry Tears*.

Lesson Plan Activities / Procedure:

- Watch the video *Dry Tears*.
- Project the lyrics on the screen and discuss the meaning of the song.
- Play the song and have students move to the music and to the lyrics.
- Discuss phrasing. Have students use their hands to show the contour of the phrases.
- Discuss the difference between the chorus and the verses. Can they hear a difference? What are those differences? Why are they different?
- Have students select the words that should be sung with different dynamics.
- Circle or highlight the words that should be expressed and sung differently.

Lesson 2: Music

- Ask students how we can put expression into our voices to portray the feelings of the words? Experiment with different vocal techniques and try singing the song with opposite feeling. For example: verse 3 – *No play, no strength, days grow quiet*. Sing it *happily* and in *mezzo forte*.
This section should be sung with voices that are tired, sad, quiet and defeated. The dynamic is written as *piano* and *pianissimo*. The conductor in the recording chose to make this a dramatic point in the song. Why? Ask students what effect this has on the audience.
- The *coda* has a message. What is it? What happens to the melody? This is a section that expresses a time of faith and surrender to God.
- *A personal note*: Tell the choir that when they sing *Dry Tears*, they must be so expressive that the audience will be brought to tears.
- Practice the song for a performance at a school assembly or at a Holodomor commemoration.

LESSON 3: Art

Grade Level: Grades 4-6

Time Frame: 30 minutes

This art project may be done as a class or as a whole school event. Directions for teachers are given as a class project.

Learning Intention/Objective:

To reflect on the lyrics of the song *Dry Tears* and visually represent the song in the form of visual art using different mediums. such as, painting, collage and sculpture.

Curriculum links:

Expression

Purpose 1 – Students will record or document activities, people and discoveries.

Purpose 2 – Students will illustrate or tell a story.

Materials required:

Computer, screen and the video and score of *Dry Tears*.

Wheat fields art: large sheets of art paper, construction paper (brown for the stalks), yellow paint.

Warm autumn breezes: large art paper, markers and/or crayons (different shades of red, orange and yellow)

Portrait of Taras Shevchenko: art paper, pencils and eraser, a picture of Taras Shevchenko.

School desks stand empty: paper, pencils, markers and/or crayons, a classroom with desks.

LESSON 3: Art

Tell our story to the world: large art paper, an image of the world, paint (blue, green, brown), black sharpie to outline the earth, manila tag paper for hands, markers and/or crayons to decorate hands, scissors and glue.

Lesson Plan Activities / Procedure:

- Divide the lines of the song amongst the students.
- Each student will be required to visually depict the lyrics of the song. This can be done in several ways, the following are some ideas that have been produced by teachers and students. Teachers select phrases from the song lyrics and ask them what they can visualize from the words.
- *Wheat fields* – draw a stalk of wheat, students put handprints along the stalk to represent the kernels, beard and leaves.
- *Warm autumn breezes* – teach warm and cool colours and shapes (long lines). Students use warm colours and draw long, wavy lines across the page.
- *Just let us learn and grow - Учітеся брати мої* – Draw a portrait of Taras Shevchenko
- *The school desks stand empty* – Draw an empty classroom. May refer to COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.
- *Tell our story to the world*. Draw the world (globe) as a circle. All students cut out their handprints and brightly colour them. Paste them so they encircle the world.
- Once all sections of the lyric phrases selected have been depicted, the art may be displayed on the bulletin board, in the gym, and /or be digitized.
- The message could be shared with other schools to develop an awareness of the Holodomor and other human rights violations and genocides. It may also be used to develop social justice projects and fundraisers.

Resource List:

Link to the video *Dry Tears*, performed by the St. Matthew School Choir, conducted by Natalia Onyschuk, at the 65th anniversary of the Ukrainian Dnipro Ensemble of Edmonton. Irena Smihelsky, Artistic Director and Conductor. Irena Tarnawsky, Accompanist and Collaborative Pianist. November 3rd, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GyfUyfSb_0

Musical score of the song *Dry Tears*

Art projects:

Portraits of Taras Shevchenko.

<http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CS%5CH%5CShevchenkoTaras.htm>

Map of the world

<https://geology.com/world/world-map.shtml>