



Muse Machine 2025 Summer Institute-Inspired Lesson Plan

## Amendments Through Music: Suffrage Ballads

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### Lesson Plan Summary:

Teachers of American government often seek engaging ways to help students retain essential content. Inspired by the 2025 Summer Institute *Storytelling and the Folk Arts Spirit: The Roads that Lead to Home*, Valerie Folz of Butler Tech School of the Arts challenged students to write and perform ballads about suffrage amendments. Student groups researched the historical problems each amendment addressed, then composed songs to teach their peers. With choice in amendment, song, and rubric criteria, students eagerly performed their work, and Valerie's assessments showed the ballads were both effective and engaging.

## Muse Machine Lesson Plan – Summer Institute 2025

**Instructor:** Valerie Folz

**Title of Lesson:** Amendments Through Music: Suffrage Ballads

**Subject Area & Grade Level:** American Government, 11th Grade

**Summer Institute Inspiration:** Songs That Tell a Story with Rick Good

### OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

#### *Summary:*

Students will write and share ballads to tell the story of suffrage amendments (Amendments 15, 19, 24, 26) to the United States Constitution.

#### *Enduring Understandings:*

When marginalized groups vocalize their experiences of injustice, public opinion can shift to grant change.

#### *Standards:*

##### **Ohio Social Studies, American Government Content Statements:**

7. Constitutional government in the United States has changed over time as a result of amendments to the U.S. Constitution, Supreme Court decisions, legislation, and informal practices.

10. Constitutional amendments have provided for civil rights such as suffrage for disenfranchised groups.

#### *Objectives & Outcomes:*

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- 1) Define and use in context the terms ballad, suffrage, disenfranchisement, Fifteenth Amendment, Nineteenth Amendment, Twenty-fourth Amendment, Twenty-sixth Amendment, and poll tax.
- 2) Understand the folk tradition of ballads in the United States by listening to popular ballads and connecting them to historical events and the oral storytelling tradition.
- 3) Write their own ballad to tell the story of a suffrage amendment.

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### *Teaching Approach(es):*

- Whole class
- Student-led
- Individual or small group

### *Assessment Tool(s):*

- Ballad lyrics
- Student conversations/observations
- Student performance on a formative assessment (multiple choice questions)

## LESSON PREPARATION

### *Teacher Needs:*

#### **Teacher Context & Research**

- [The Library of Congress Celebrates the Songs of America](#)
- [Was “The Star Spangled Banner” an old drinking song?](#)
- [Suffrage in America: The 15th and 19th Amendments](#)
- [Amendment 24–Elimination of Poll Taxes](#)
- [Amendment 26–Voting at 18](#)

#### **Helpful Hints**

1. To help students have enough material to write their ballad, provide short reference sheets that highlight the history, details, and/or impact of each suffrage amendment.
2. To help students write quality ballads, agree on length and how many content details need to be present in the final ballad. A rubric could be helpful.
3. Providing an example will help many students be successful, but let students know they can be creative with their ballad.
4. Having students project their ballad lyrics on the board or providing a print out of lyrics allows their classmates to sing along.
5. My students really enjoyed having access to a microphone as they sang.

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### *Student Needs:*

#### **Prior Knowledge**

This lesson takes place in the middle of our Amendments unit in a junior-level American government course. Students are familiar with the definition of amendment and that most amendments promote political protections and extend rights.

#### **Student Voice**

In this lesson students will help create the requirements for their ballads, how they will be shared, and their own ballad lyrics to a melody they select.

#### **Vocabulary**

- **Ballad** – A narrative poem or song that tells a story, often passed down orally. Ballads usually have simple language, repeated lines or refrains, and focus on dramatic events or emotions.
- **Suffrage** – The right to vote in political elections.
- **Disenfranchisement** – The denial or restriction of the right to vote or other rights of citizenship, often targeting specific groups of people.
- **Fifteenth Amendment** – Ratified in 1870, it prohibits the federal and state governments from denying a citizen the right to vote based on “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”
- **Nineteenth Amendment** – Ratified in 1920, it grants women the right to vote, guaranteeing that voting rights cannot be denied on the basis of sex.
- **Twenty-fourth Amendment** – Ratified in 1964, it prohibits the use of a poll tax (a fee charged to vote) in federal elections.
- **Twenty-sixth Amendment** – Ratified in 1971, it lowers the voting age in the United States to 18.
- **Poll tax** – A fee charged to individuals as a requirement for voting, historically used in some states to keep poor people and African Americans from voting.

## EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES

Evidence of outcomes will be demonstrated in both the student created ballad and on traditional assessments with multiple choice questions. Students will demonstrate required

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vocabulary understanding on multiple-choice questions through their selected answers and by using the terms appropriately within their ballads. Students will understand how ballads are an effective method of oral storytelling by learning about the voting rights amendments through each others' ballads. Since a student only needs to write a ballad about one amendment, their learning of the other amendments will come by listening and singing along with the ballads of their peers.

### LEARNING PLAN

#### Teaching Inquiry

How can writing ballads help students explain the factors that led disenfranchised groups to gain suffrage through Constitutional amendments?

#### Essential Question

What purposes can songs serve in creating, promoting and reinforcing social change?

#### Resources/Materials

- [The Anacreon in Heaven](#) (YouTube)
- [Suffrage Ballads Slide Deck](#)
- [Voting Rights Amendments Summaries](#)
- [Voting Rights Amendments Quiz](#)

#### Hook

In small and then whole group discussion, ask students, “Think of a time in your life when you made a change. What motivated you to change?”

#### Main Lesson Narrative/Sequence

1. Begin the lesson by playing the song “[The Anacreon in Heaven](#)” and asking students if the tune sounds familiar. What song uses the same melody? Answer: The National Anthem. Tell students our National Anthem is a ballad, or a song that tells a story. Ballads or folk ballads are threaded deeply in American culture and influenced from Anglo and African cultures.
2. Teach students about the components of ballads and how to write ballads with a brief lecture and by listening to some examples. [This slide deck can assist.](#)

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3. Tell students that today we get to learn about the voting rights, or suffrage, amendments. We'll learn about them by composing a ballad that tells the story of one suffrage amendment. Ask students to help you create a list of requirements for their ballads. Consider length (8 lines? Two verses and a chorus? An entire song?), required content (amendment number, who was impacted most, cause and consequence of amendment), how to share with class (will students be required to share in front of others or only volunteers?) Will students work alone or with others? Post agreed requirements for students to reference.
4. Give students 20-30 minutes to write their ballads. Students may use teacher resources or look up additional content on their own. [This document has a summary of each amendment](#) with additional details to help inspire lyrics. It's okay if these are a work in progress, but the short time window creates urgency to work.
5. Students share ballads.
6. Students take [formative assessment to check for understanding](#) for key amendment details required in the standards.

### Demonstration of Learning

- Students created and performed their ballads with their class. Students also took a multiple choice quiz.

### Final Review

Because this is a new lesson and I want to increase student-led practices in my classroom, students and I built the ballad rubric together. Each bell had their own requirements, but in general we agreed on the following criteria: Ballad minimum length of two verses and 1 chorus; groups of 1-3 students; ballads must say amendment number, who gained right to vote, and contain at least one additional detail or fact about the amendment.

- For the formative assessment, I gave students three attempts and recorded the highest score in the gradebook. This way, if gaps in their knowledge existed after writing ballads they could find the gaps by seeing missed questions and look up the correct answers to learn through the assessment.

### Student Artifacts

- [Video of student performing her ballad for her peers \(19th Amendment\)](#)

The Fifteenth <sup>rising son</sup> ☺

Verse 1.  
There is an amendment, that is <sup>the</sup> law  
The Fifteenth is its name.  
It gave the right to vote to men  
no matter what their race \*

Verse 2.  
In eighteen seventy, it passed \*  
a promise turned to win  
That no man's voice be silenced here \*  
For the color of his skin.

Verse 3  
But still, they faced literacy tests.  
The taxes + the lies  
Though freedom was wrote down on the page  
They had to fight for the prize. \*

Chorus  
Oh Mother, tell your children \*  
Let every bell be rung  
The ~~Fifteenth~~ Fifteenth marked their right to vote  
for every freedman's son

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Hey Joe Where you going with that gun  
of your hand?

Hey Joe, I said where you gain with that gun in  
your hand?

I'm going down to fight a war  
you know I dont have a choice  
once im 18, yeah

I'm going down to fight a war  
yk I dont got a choice when im 18.

Huh that aint cool

Hey joe I heard your fightin a war  
fighting hard now

Hey Joe I heard your protesting now  
Protested for voting rights, yeah  
yeah

yes I did I protested  
you know I cant vote, but I cant fight

yes I did I protested  
yk I cant even vote round here

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Print & Write

I gave the government a choice  
Voting rights!

Alright  
Pass the 26th amendment already, baby  
yeah  
Oh dig it  
Ah alright

Hey Joe what you gonna do now?  
What you gonna do now

Hey Joe I said what you gonna do now?  
Will you fight will you fight with no rights  
well dig  
I'm going to protest  
Wanna more to get rights  
Alright  
I'm going to protest  
Wanna more till I can vote  
If I can fight  
I can vote  
you cant control me  
you better believe they pass it  
I gotta vote now  
Hey Joe you better believe #26

### POST-LESSON REFLECTION

**Students:** Students largely enjoyed this lesson. There was a near perfect turn-in rate. Some ballads had more details and effort than others, but in general objectives were met across the board. Here is a summary of key student takeaways from class reflections after the lesson:

- Students enjoyed the creative, performance-based format of the assignment. Using a microphone made the activity feel like a real performance, and presenting helped with memory and learning more effectively than reading.
- They valued the freedom built into the project, though some wanted clearer guidelines, examples, or templates. Several suggested adding more options beyond songs—such as poems or dance—and appreciated being allowed to work alone or with others.

Students also recommended improvements:

- Allow sign-ups to organize performance time
- Provide more time for composing
- Offer a longer timeline so songs can be higher quality

**Teacher:** I enjoyed this lesson and would definitely repeat it again. There were some key items to remember and consider for future use:

- 1) The vast majority of my students got really into the idea of writing a ballad, and knowing they could perform it in front of their peers made them want more time to work and practice. So, this single day lesson turned into a two day lesson. I gave students longer time to work and we shared ballads on a different day than the kickoff portion. I'd either plan for this in the future or really emphasize the why behind a tighter time frame.
- 2) Some of the ballads were outstanding, but others lacked depth of understanding. Usually this lack of detail came from unclear requirements or choosing a short melody and me not emphasizing that the melody could be repeated multiple times to add additional content. In the future I would clarify in the requirements what level of detail I'm hoping for.
- 3) Students remembered more details about their amendments as a result of writing ballads, even if those details weren't part of the song. Overall, student performance on my formative assessment and later test showed students retained key knowledge about each voting rights amendment. Ballads are an effective and engaging way to learn content.