

Brass Bands of the Past Module Description and Summary

John Leahy, 11/24/2008

Module Summary

Brass Bands of the Past describes the social atmosphere in music around rural America (technically in Michigan, but the town can be really be set anywhere in America). Specifically, it focuses on the Brass and Saxhorn bands that emerged throughout America, which provided a significant entertainment venue for the vast majority of towns in an era without any form of mass entertainment (not counting the newspaper).

The first chapter sets the stage for a typical Saxhorn Band concert, introduces the instruments and sound, and shows the community's involvement in the concert. The second chapter shows the “children's bands” that some communities supported at the time; and attempts to recreate what learning an instrument must have been like back then. The third chapter has the Patrick Gilmore Band, one of the premier bands of the world, showing the “rock star” status that these ensembles had. The fourth chapter fast-forwards into the early 1900s, where the phonograph starts making its way into the community, contributing to the end of community based Brass Bands.

Character List

William Cole – The main character of the story, who introduces the town, plays in the children's band, and goes to see the Gilmore band.

James Cole – The son of the main character in this story, who introduces the phonograph and the tension it causes.

Learning Goals

Chapter One: Students should see what life in the late 1800's in rural America was like from a 11 year old's perspective. They should be able to explain what entertainment was like (community bands, playing outside) and differentiate from their own personal experiences.

Chapter Two: Students should understand that children's bands existed for younger musicians. Students learning their own instruments (not recorder) may be able to compare and contrast the experiences the main character's experiences learning a new instrument with their own.

Chapter Three: Students should understand the “rock star” status of traveling bands like Patrick Gilmore's Band. Students should be able to identify one or two differences between the town band and Patrick Gilmore's Band. The students then should be able to link this experience with the musical / popular figures they admire today.

Chapter Four: Students should be able to understand what a phonograph is and the changes it brought about to live music. Students hopefully will be able to relate this change in technology with some change in technology today.

GLCEs Addressed

From the Fourth Grade Social Studies GLCEs:

4 – H3.0.4 – *Draw upon stories, photos, artifacts, and other primary sources to compare the life of people in towns and cities in Michigan and in the Great Lakes region during a variety of time periods from 1837 to the present (e.g., 1837-1900, 1900-1950, 1950-2000). (G)*

This entire module, especially chapter one, focuses on a generic town in Michigan (which can truly be anywhere in the Great Lakes region). It demonstrates life and the community in the late 1800s, and is fully applicable to life in between 1837-1900.

The fourth chapter in the module fast-forwards to 1910, and discusses and draws out the changes that have occurred after the turn of the century. Cars are not introduced, but changes in railroads, distribution, and technology are discussed.

4 – H3.0.5 – *Use visual data and informational text or primary accounts to compare a major Michigan economic activity today with that same or a related activity in the past. (E)*

Should one choose to use the music traditions of Michigan (Techno or Motown), portions of this module (specifically only the first chapter is sufficient) can provide visual data and informational text of what music was like in Michigan in the past.

From the Fourth Grade English Language Arts GLCEs:

R.WS.04.01-05 + R.WS.04.07 – *Word recognition and Vocabulary. [Developing the skills to identify the meaning of words students are not familiar with through context and the sound of the word.]*

One can see there are several vocabulary words that students can read and figure out within this module. Among the words found are word (chapter, page), word (chapter, page),

R.NT.04.01-04 – *Narrative Text. [Analyzing the meaning, themes, human experience, and textual effects in quality literature.]*

I cannot claim that this module is expertly written and deserves the attention of literary criticism. That said, this is a narrative selection with characters that have motivations and clearly demonstrates the first person point of view. The fourth chapter jumps forward some time, a technique that directly relates with **R.NT.04.04**. Further, the fourth chapter contains some relatively complex conflict which is shown and drawn out through this shift through time.

Structure of Chapters and Pages

Chapter 1: Welton's Saxhorn Band

Page 1: Welcome to Welton!

Page 2: The Band's About to Play!

Page 3: The Instruments of the Band

Page 4: Listening to the Music *(Sound files present)*

Chapter 2: Our Children's Band

Page 1: Let's Begin Playing in the Band!

Page 2: Let's Get Ready to Perform

Page 3: The Concert!

Chapter 3: The Gilmore Band is Coming!

Page 1: The Gilmore Band is Coming on Tour!

Page 2: The Gilmore Band Arrives by Train

Page 3: An Amazing Concert *(Sound files present)*

Chapter 4: A New Way to Listen to Music

Page 1: Changing Times

Page 2: The Phonograph *(Sound files present)*

Page 3: The Last Band Concert

Page 4: The New and the Old