



# Sea Chanties And Call-And-Response Poetry

## Overview & Major Themes

Students will explore several sea chanties or “work songs” sung on sailing ships. They will look at the language involved, reasons for singing them, and examples from well-known movies. Students then write their own sea chantey using creative writing to develop thematic connections.

## Objectives

- Students will hear or read at least 3 examples of call-and-response poetry, sea chanties, or work songs.
- Students will explore at least one period in history where a group of people made use of call-and-response poetry.
- Students will draft 1 poem, representative of call-and-response style, using creative writing skills.

## Outcomes

- Students will understand the purposes served through sea chanties and other work songs.
- Students will use creative writing skills to draft original poetry.

## Materials & Resources

- Whiteboard/Chalkboard
- Handout of song lyrics
- Computer/Television/ Movie Player
- Access to YouTube, or several movies that include work songs (listed below)

## Instructional Activity

15 min.

As an introduction to the activity, begin by showing brief clips of several sea chanties, or “work songs”, at least one that includes a call-and-response poetry style. An educator could use:

Master and Commander Sea Chanty

Moby Dick Sea Chanty

The Muppet Show, Episode 220

Wellerman viral sea chanty, created by Nathan Evans on Tiktok

Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs “Whistle While You Work” or “It’s Off to Work We Go”

O Brother Where Art Thou – Opening scene of chain gang at work

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5 min.

Work together with students to define “work songs.” Finally, explain that these songs, often in call-and-response with a leader, set a pace and rhythm for a task. Often, the task takes a team effort that is coordinated, like a dance group dancing together, or sailors hauling a heavy object together.

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5 min.

Weaving Through History: As a general rule, sailors aboard naval vessels like *Constitution* were not allowed to sing sea chanties during their work, but many sailors came from or moved onto other merchant vessels where chanties were allowed. Why do you think *Constitution* sailors were not allowed to sing during their work? Officers demanded silence because they wanted to be able to relay orders without the confusion of song.

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10 min.

What other groups of people do we know of who worked together to complete arduous or tedious tasks where a “work song” with a call-and-response style would have been present? Think movies, books, or Hollywood. Allow students to name. (Mariners, Africans who were enslaved, Army – Boot Camp trainees, Railroad Workers, Cowboys, Prisoners, Chain Gangs, etc). Many of these “work songs” were in a call-and-response style.

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2 min.

Pass out lyrics to several work songs, so that students have an example of this type of poetry.

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30 min.

Students work together or on their own to create poetry that would be an example of their own work song. Students will either need to: 1) Pick a chore or a task to accomplish with their work song, or 2) Pick a group of people in history that would have used a work song, and write lyrics for them.

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30 min.

Students may read their poetry out loud, sing their work song, or illustrate their work song to hand in or perform at a later time.

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