

This Little Light of Mine

In this activity participants explore and prepare for the lessons of the cornerstone curriculum theme of “Building Community” through the song “This Little Light of Mine.”

What to Know

"This Little Light of Mine" is a gospel song that came to be an anthem of the civil rights movement in the 1950's and 60's. Often mistakenly believed to have been sung on plantations during slavery, it was originally written by [Harry Dixon Loes](#) around 1920 as a children's song. During the Civil Rights Movement, [Zilphia Horton](#) adapted the song and taught it to Pete Seeger. The song is famously tied to Civil Rights leader, [Fannie Lou Hamer](#). While being detained by police on her way back from attempting to register to vote with other members of her community, she began singing this song.

The song, which has simple, repetitive lines with only one change per verse, lends itself to learning quickly and singing along, perfect for bringing people together with a common cause. People sang this and other spirituals during the Civil Rights Movement as a way of expressing unity as they fought for equal rights and freedom for everyone.

We chose this song to introduce our cornerstone theme of Building Community because we believe there is a "little light" inside each of us that makes each of us special. For some, it is a light that makes them kind and friendly, that shows that they are really curious, or that they love animals, music, art or the outdoors. For others, their very special light is a commitment to helping others, making sure that people are treated fairly, and doing their part to make sure that justice and freedom are preserved. Each person sharing his or her "light" helps to us to appreciate and respect the little light that is different in each of us and bonds us together in "common" unity.

Objectives:

Participants will:

1. learn and explore the song *This Little Light of Mine*;
2. create new verses for the song that are meaningful to them; and,
3. be able to express their thoughts about the light that is within them that others may not see.

Common Core Standard Alignment

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.

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

- picture of Superman
- [“This Little Light of Mine”](#) lyrics posted or copied (one for each student)
- Colored construction paper
- 12” x 18” white or manila construction paper

Gather Together/Warm-Up/Bell Ringer: Kryptonite and Superpower (5 minutes)

Hold up a picture of Superman. Ask students what some of Superman’s superpowers are. Have a couple of volunteers share (x-ray vision, super-strength, etc.). Ask what Superman’s super-weakness is (kryptonite).

Say:

“Everyone has things that they are really good at and things that they struggle with. Take a moment to think about some of those things for yourself. Then we will go around and share one “superpower” and one “kryptonite” each.” Give students examples that include academic or performance-based strengths like being good at math or basketball or drawing and their opposites. Give students examples of interpersonal or intrapersonal skills as well (being patient, having a good attitude, being friendly, being a good listener, etc. and for the “kryptonite” examples, being impatient, not listening, forgetting to wait your turn, etc.

Process: What special lights or superpowers that have been suggested by your fellow students do you think are most important to you in terms of your feeling happy at school? What kryptonite suggestions make you feel most unhappy or sad?

Sum up that there is great diversity in our strengths and weaknesses.

“Isn’t that awesome? We have so many super-power lights surrounding us that can make us feel good about ourselves and each other. It’s awesome to know that some of our kryptonite weaknesses are alike and that we all have them. It’s so good to know that we all have strengths and weaknesses. That understanding brings us together and makes us a better, stronger, more caring community.”

Main Activity: “This Little Light of Mine” (10 Minutes)

Tell students that to begin the second unit, “Building Community” they are going to be learning a new song, “This Little Light of Mine.” Give a brief history of the song as provided in the “What to Know” section.

Listen to Peter Yarrow and his daughter, Bethany, singing "[This Little Light of Mine.](#)"

Process:

As you listen to the words what does it make you think?

How do you feel when you listen to the song?

Have students sing each verse together.

*This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine,
This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine
This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

*Everywhere I go, I’m gonna let it shine
Everywhere I go, I’m gonna let it shine
Everywhere I go, I’m gonna let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

*In my brother’s heart, I’m gonna let it shine,
In my brother’s heart, I’m gonna let it shine
In my brother’s heart, I’m gonna let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

*In my sister’s soul, I’m gonna let it shine,
In my sister’s soul, I’m gonna let it shine,
In my sister’s soul, I’m gonna let it shine,
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

*All around the world, I’m gonna let it shine
All around the world, I’m gonna let it shine
All around the world, I’m gonna let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

*This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine,
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Pair students and ask: “How can this song help us to appreciate each other more, feel closer to each other, feel more understanding and empathetic towards one another. What would

our class be like if each of us could appreciate everyone else and help each other to “let our light shine?” Share responses.

Create new pairs of students and ask: “Who in your life helps your little light to shine? What do they do that helps your light shine?” Share responses.

Give each pair a sheet of paper and pencils. Have each pair come up with one or two new verses. Some examples might be: “right here in my school,” “when I’m doing homework,” “when I’m with my friends,” etc. Record student ideas on chart paper. When you sing the song, add in student verses.

Integrated Arts: Candles (15 minutes)

Go-round: *“Each one of us has a little light inside of us. What’s your little light that you bring to yourself, your friends, your family, our class community, our school or the world?”*

Using the art materials you have prepared instruct students to create their “little light” art project. Students will use construction paper to represent a candle and a flame. Have students draw either a picture of themselves, head to toe, or a large drawing of their hands. Students will glue the candle so their hands are holding it. Above the picture, students write “My little light is....” and add their own idea.

Bring students together to share.

Closing: Pass the Light (10 minutes)

Pass an object that symbolizes a light (an unlit candle, a “flameless” candle, a picture of the sun, a flashlight, etc.).

Ask: *“How do all of our little lights contribute to building our community?”*

Grade Level Modifications

K-1 Instead of pairing students to write down ideas for new verses, have students do a quick pair share and then share with the whole group. Alternatively, you could create new verses as a whole class. For the candle art project, have students dictate their idea for “My little light is....” as needed. Follow the instructions for grades 2-5 for the rest of the activity.

6-12 Instead of doing the integrated arts “candles” project, have students in pairs choose a version of the song online that they like (there are gospel versions of the song, rap, hip-hop, country, etc.) Then have students create their own music video to that version of the song using footage they shoot at your school or in your community. This can be done as a homework assignment or in conjunction with a music class. Use class time to help students get started.

Curricular Connections

K-1 Literacy: Read [*I'm Like You, You're Like Me*](#) by Cindy Gainer. Ask students, “*How are the children in these pages building community? How do they show they care about one another? Are they having fun together? How are the children similar? How are they different?*”

K-1 Science and Literacy: At a learning center place materials for students to explore light: prisms, kaleidoscopes, transparent papers, colored acetate, flashlights, mirrors, glitter paper. (Be sure to set ground rules for where flashlights can be shined- not in anyone’s eyes!) Allow students to explore freely and make their own discoveries about the way light behaves. Have students write and draw their observations in their regular journals or science journals.

K-5 Literacy and Art: Give each student a 6” x 18” piece of white or manila construction paper to be folded into three sections. In each panel have students show how they let their “light” shine. In the first panel have students show themselves at home, in the second, at school, in the third in the world. Have students label pictures as appropriate for their grade level.

2-5 Literacy: Have students respond to these prompts in their journals for one-two weeks: *How have you shown your “little light?” Have you seen anyone else showing their “little light?” In what ways has this made our classroom community stronger?*

K-5 Music: Use percussion instruments to keep time with the song “This Little Light of Mine.” Maracas, blocks, triangles, hand drums and clapping can be used to keep a steady rhythm or to mix up the beat a little. For your kinesthetic learners, incorporate marching or dancing moves. Let students take the lead!

6-12 Literacy and Social Studies: Read [*Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer*](#) by Carole Boston Weatherford or arrange for a screening of the half hour [documentary](#) about Fannie Lou Hamer’s important, yet unsung role as a hero of the Civil Rights movement. This [video](#)

about Fannie's life gives a brief overview of her brave move during the civil rights movement to register to vote and how she went on to testify for Congress and run for political office herself. Discuss women's rights as they relate to the civil rights movement. And of course, don't forget to mention her very special use of the song "This Little Light of Mine" in her very historic work.

6-9 Science: Have students build an [infinity mirror](#). Though it will look like a tunnel of infinite light, turn it around and discover that the mirror is only a couple inches thick. What properties of light does this activity reflect? How does "passing on our light," augment it?

Handout 1: *This Little Light of Mine*

This Little Light of Mine

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