

Reading Revolution Through Song

STUDENT HANDOUT

Rhetoric, Resistance, and “Tom Paine’s Bones”

The materials in this handout are suited for high school English language and literature, U.S. history, and European history. While this lesson does not explicitly address the four core ethnic groups included in CA Ethnic Studies, it works as a skills-orienting introductory lesson that prepares students to ask questions that are foundational to Ethnic Studies coursework: *What is power? Who critiques power? How and why? What happens when they do?*

What’s inside?

- Scaffolded Annotations Handout
- “I Am Showing My Work!” Tables
- Step-by-Steps Rhetorical Analysis Guide for the folk song, “Tom Paine’s Bones” (1995)
- Literary Devices Scavenger Hunt
- Literary Devices vs. Rhetorical Devices Breakdown
- Citing Research and Evidence Worksheet
- Student Questions
- Two Music Videos
- Answer Key

Support Note: *If you are teaching these materials in Los Angeles County and would like an ES Resources representative to assist with your planning or classroom application, please email contact@ESResources.org.*

"Liberty" = right or agency to act, believe, and express oneself w/out external (or internal?) constraints, punishment, or situations of oppression. Must be balanced w/ the right & obligation to respect & uphold the liberty of others?!



Liberty Tree

what happens on trees?
Fruit hangs, leaves dry, they fall, trunks and roots hold, grow, mold, stay firm; they need sunlight; trees in forests communicate like a network. What "hangs" on trees?

Like Apollo riding a golden chariot across the sky to bring the sun
In a chariot of light from the regions of day,
The Goddess of Liberty came;

Ten thousand celestials directed the way
And hither conducted the dame
A fair budding branch from the gardens above,
Where millions with millions agree,
She brought in her hand as a pledge of her love,
And the plant she named Liberty Tree.

The celestial exotic struck deep in the ground,
Like a native it flourished and bore;
The fame of its fruit drew the nations around,
To seek out this peaceable shore.
Unmindful of names or distinction they came,
For freemen like brothers agree;
With one spirit endued, they one friendship pursued,
And their temple was Liberty Tree.

Beneath this fair tree, like the patriarchs of old,
Their bread in contentment they ate,
Unvexed with the troubles of silver and gold,
The cares of the grand and the great.
With timber and tar they Old England supplied,
And supported her power on the sea;
Her battles they fought, without getting a groat,
For the honor of Liberty Tree.

But hear, O ye swains, 'tis a tale most profane,
How all the tyrannical powers,
Kings, Commons, and Lords, are uniting again
To cut down this guardian of ours.
From the east to the west blow the trumpet to arms
Through the land let the sound of it flee;
Let the far and the near, all unite with a cheer,
In defence of our Liberty Tree.

Thomas Paine

I think "sound" here might mean the "tyrannical" rule of the British forces, so sound fleeing would mean - "Yo, British, get out. We don't need/want your noise!"

Regions = location, so how can a day (time) be a place, unless it means the borders as drawn at that time...
Prestigious woman
"AGREE" about WHAT? and who are the "millions and millions?"

"Sky Woman" is a revered figure in the creation story of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) indigenous ppl. It's a story about reciprocity and generosity. I read about Sky Woman in a book - a memoir and I'm remembering the story with the imagery in this line.

stripping off hard-earned, grown or made colonies back to the UK British Empire
"Taxation without representation"
[they had to support the crown's might, but felt used and abused in return]

in 1775,
"Profane" likely meant outside the Church, or even "ordinary".
"Swain" => a young man in love, or a suitor

Like Statue of Liberty, but this was written 110 years before the statue came to us shores

In this time period (late 18th century), 1776, "Lady Columbia" personified this idea. She was a patriotic symbol for the American colonies - pioneered by Phillis Wheatley - an African American poet, in an ode letter to George Washington.

I think this is an allusion to the "manna"/"bread from Heaven" the Israelites are said to have eaten after the exodus from enslavement while wandering in the desert.

"unvexed" = calm, serene, or unbothered.
Lesson/appeal: These people were grateful bread (the simple liberty of food - the right to have it) and did not need "silver" or "gold"

Four-Step Annotations

You do not need to complete these four steps separately. They should be part of the same reading process and can happen back-and-forth as you read.

Immediate Reactions

- Note unfamiliar words, phrases, or references.
- Underline lines that seem important.
- Put a ? next to confusing, unclear, or contradictory ideas.
- Put a ! next to surprising or powerful lines, or a smiley face, or a tear, to represent your personal reaction.

Textually Explicit

- Note historical references
- Look up evidence, historical context, or definitions
- Add your research findings into the annotations

Textually Implicit

Using your personal copy of the “Literary Devices Dictionary” to complete the Rhetoric Scavenger Hunt.

Identify and make notes in your annotations for:

- Rhetorical strategies and literary devices in the reading
- Why did the author use that device? (Purpose / Type of Argument)
- What effect does it have on the reader? (Audience / Content of Argument)

Make personal connections

As we replay the song, “Tom Paine’s Bones,” review the song lyrics, your annotations, and notes from class.

- “This idea/word/tone reminds me of...”
- “This makes me think about...”
- “I feel like...”
- “I wonder if/how/why...”
- “I remember from... that...”
- “This relates to...”
- “I think...”

Annotations

Historians regularly pause reading to research references to people, events, and vocabulary before continuing their interpretation. Instruct students to circle, highlight or otherwise notate every word, clause, phrase, and name they *suspect* to be a historical reference or symbol. When historical terms like names of historical figures appear in a song, they are examples of allusion.

Definition: Historical allusion is a brief, indirect reference to a person, place, thing, or idea of historical, cultural, literary, or political significance.

Play the song, “Tom Paine’s Bones” (Moore, 1995) as students follow along with the lyrics.

- Cover: [The Trials of Cato](#)
- Original: [Tom Paine's Bones](#)

As students listen, they should begin with simple annotation “marks” listed under Immediate Reactions.

Note: the lyrics are in British English spelling (“e.g., defence”).

ANSWER KEY

The following are examples of primary historical references; this list does not include every single historical reference or symbols students can identify.

- “Tom Paine” = Thomas Paine
- “King George” = King George III
- “He’ll hang a rope around my throat” = a form a capital punishment, historically significant during the reign of King George III
- “preached revolution” and “Tom Paine’s plan” = *Common Sense*
- “the age of reason” = European Enlightenment
- “rights of man” = *Rights of Man* (book by Thomas Paine, published 1791); also acceptable: social contract, “self-evident” truths

Literary Devices Scavenger Hunt

With your personal copy of the “**Literary Devices Dictionary**,” work independently or in pairs. You will close-read, study, analyze, and interpret the song lyrics for “Tom Paine’s Bones.”

Treating these lyrics like how the Expert Annotator approached the “Liberty Tree” ballad, search for and identify examples of literary devices in the song.

While annotating:

1. Draw arrows between terms, ideas, and references you looked up and write the definitions or context you discovered corresponding to the line in the song.
2. Add at least 4 questions and show what parts of the text they relate to.
3. Identify 6 literary devices in the text by highlighting or circling and writing the name of the device, including why it is or is not effective.
4. Add 5 personal connections, ideas, or interpretations and show what parts of the text they relate to. Choose a separate color to highlight these additions.

Tom Paine's Bones

By Graham Moore (1995)

As I rode out one evening
By a river of discontent
I bumped straight into old Tom Paine
As a running down the road he went
He said, "I can't stop right now, child
The King George is after me
He'll hang a rope around my throat
And hang me on the liberty tree"

But I will dance to Tom Paine's bones
I'll dance to Tom Paine's bones
Dance in the oldest boots I own
To the rhythm of Tom Paine's bones

I will dance to Tom Paine's bones
I'll dance to Tom Paine's bones
Dance in the oldest boots I own
To the rhythm of Tom Paine's bones

Well, I only talked about freedom
And justice for everyone
But ever since the first word I spoke
I've been looking down the barrel of a gun
And they said I preached revolution
Let me say in my defence
That all I did wherever I went

Was to talk a lot of common sense

But I will dance to Tom Paine's bones

I'll dance to Tom Paine's bones

Dance in the oldest boots I own

To the rhythm of Tom Paine's bones

I will dance to Tom Paine's bones

I'll dance to Tom Paine's bones

Dance in the oldest boots I own

To the rhythm of Tom Paine's bones

Well, old Tom Paine he ran so fast

Left me standing still

And then there was a piece of paper in my hand

Standing at the top of the hill

And it said, "This is the age of reason

And these are the rights of man

I kick off religion and monarchy"

It was written there in Tom Paine's plan

But I will dance to Tom Paine's bones

I'll dance to Tom Paine's bones

Dance in the oldest boots I own

To the rhythm of Tom Paine's bones

I will dance to Tom Paine's bones

I'll dance to Tom Paine's bones

Dance in the oldest boots I own

To the rhythm of Tom Paine's bones

Well, old Tom Paine dead he lies
Nobody laughs and nobody cries
Where he's gone or how he fares
Nobody knows and nobody cares

But I will dance to Tom Paine's bones
I'll dance to Tom Paine's bones
Dance in the oldest boots I own
To the rhythm of Tom Paine's bones

I will dance to Tom Paine's bones
I'll dance to Tom Paine's bones
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Literary Devices

“Allusion” is a rhetorical strategy and a literary device. A **rhetorical strategy** is a technique or method used by writers and speakers to communicate ideas, influence their audience, or provoke a specific response or reaction from their readers / listeners. A rhetorical strategy comes from the word **rhetoric**, which is the art of using language to persuade or influence an audience effectively.

A **rhetorical device** and a **literary device** are very similar. They are purposeful writing choices that someone uses to achieve a specific effect, like to persuade their audience or to evoke a particular emotion. Think of literary and rhetorical devices as tools in a writer’s toolkit — like a carpenter uses a chisel to shape wood, a writer uses tools of language to make their ideas land powerfully.

RHETORICAL DEVICE



Common in **speeches, essays, advertisements, debates, and literature**. It is a technique used to persuade, influence, emphasize, or affect an audience and focuses on how language affects the audience.

LITERARY DEVICE



Common in **works of “literature,”** like poetry, novels, plays, and short stories. It is a technique used to create meaning, imagery, theme, characterization, or artistic effect and focuses on how a work of literature is constructed and interpreted.

Common examples for both rhetorical and literary devices include:

- repetition, metaphor, irony, parallelism, rhetorical questions, symbolism, hyperbole, and alliteration.

What is a rhetorical question?! The answer to a rhetorical question is usually obvious or implied. The word “**rhetorical**” in a **rhetorical question** does not just mean that the question is not meant to be answered, though. Instead, it describes the use of language to communicate a message as a strategy in the way the question is posed. **Because rhetorical refers to the use of language to communicate effectively, persuade, emphasize, or create a particular effect on an audience, a rhetorical question is a question that is asked using language to have a specific effect.**

Literary Devices Guide

Ask #1 | Setting up the Skill

“If I am writing about sadness, and I want my audience to feel the deepness of sadness – like misery - what is one color I can refer to in my writing?”

Potential answers: blue, black, red, grey, dark purple

Ask #2 | Noticing: Repetition

“What is a creative way I can allude to that color when I’m writing about sadness to help my audience feel the depth of that emotion?”

Blue ocean (“thing”) ... before a storm (descriptive “setting”)

Darkness (“thing”) ... of a black night (“descriptive “setting”)

At a funeral (“place”) ... in a sea of black clothes (ambiance)

Endings: Wilted flowers, a candle burning out

Nouns: A raven, a cemetery or graveyard, a broken mirror

Loneliness / nostalgia: a deserted playground

Allusions to other texts: "a grief like Juliet's," "the river Styx," "a sky as blue as Picasso's," "a darkness like Edgar Allan Poe," Pandora's box left open"

An example of literary devices from the song, “Tom Paine’s Bones,” is the chorus.

I will dance to Tom Paine’s bones
I’ll dance to Tom Paine’s bones
Dance in the oldest boots I own
To the rhythm of Tom Paine’s bones

“Dance” and “Tom Paine’s bones” reappear multiple times in the chorus, which is an example of **repetition**.

Ask #3 | Noticing: Metaphor

“What does the songwriter mean by ‘I will dance ... To the rhythm of Tom Paine’s bones’?”

This lyric is *not* literal. The songwriter in 1995 does not literally have Thomas Paine’s boots, nor can a person literally dance to “rhythm” or someone else’s “bones.” This is an example of a **metaphor**.

This line is a **metaphor**.

- The songwriter is *not* literally dancing on his grave.
- **Tone:** He is also not celebrating Paine’s death. These lyrics are actually ones of praise and appreciation.
- **Bones:** are what remain after a person dies. Paine himself is gone, but his principles — liberty, equality, democracy, and reason — remain.
- **Dance:** symbolizes joyful participation, celebration, and continuing a movement. The singer is saying, *I will carry these ideas forward*.

Thomas Paine died in 1809, and this song came out in 1995. Paine’s ideas about *Common Sense*, the *Rights of Man*, and “Liberty Tree” (see Lesson Plans 1 and 2) were revolutionary ideas about the consent of the governed, the fundamental equality of human beings, and they came out of

European Enlightenment. **The words in the chorus are a metaphor for keeping Thomas Paine's ideas alive through actions, years after Paine's death.**

- “Tom Paine's bones” symbolize the enduring legacy of Paine’s revolutionary ideas and the songwriter’s own appreciation for Paine’s ideas, as well as his desire to see them continue on in the future.
- **“To the rhythm of Tom Paine's bones”** suggests that Paine's ideas provide the beat or cadence for the singer's own life and political commitments. His philosophy becomes the music that can guide future generations.

Ask #4 | Noticing: Tone

“Why does the songwriter refer to Thomas Paine by a **nickname** - *Tom* - and what does this rhetorical choice reveal about the songwriter’s own relationship to the historical figure?”

Key idea: Calling him "Tom" instead of "Thomas Paine" makes the historical figure feel familiar, approachable, and personal rather than distant or untouchable. The nickname humanizes Paine and suggests that the songwriter identifies with his values and sees him as a continuing companion in the struggle for freedom and justice, not just a person remembered in history books.

Tone: The songwriter speaks to Paine almost like an old friend or traveling companion, suggesting admiration and a sense of connection rather than detached historical interest.

This **rhetorical choice** reveals that the songwriter sees Paine not simply as a famous figure from the past, but as someone whose ideas are still alive and relevant today.

Genre: Referring to him by his first name also reflects the song's folk tradition, where historical figures are often portrayed as ordinary people whose stories continue to inspire later generations.

Ask # 5 | Noticing: Speaker

“Who is the speaker in this stanza? Is it the narrator, songwriter, or someone else?”

Well, I only talked about freedom
And justice for everyone
But ever since the first word I spoke
I've been looking down the barrel of a gun
And they said I preached revolution
Let me say in my defence
That all I did wherever I went
Was to talk a lot of common sense

The speaker is Thomas Paine.

The following table includes select examples for assessment. This list does **not** include every possible literary / rhetorical device that students might identify. Instead, it provides additional context for the examples already introduced in the “Literary Devices Introduction” segment of class discussion.

ANSWER KEY

“King George is after me”

Allusion: The phrase refers to King George without explaining who he is, relying on the reader's historical knowledge. If “King George” is being used to represent **the British government, the Crown, or British soldiers**, then it is metonymy.

“He’ll hang a rope around my throat”

Imagery: The line creates a vivid, unsettling visual image of execution by hanging, helping the audience feel the speaker's fear and the stakes of resistance. Connotation: The phrase “rope around my throat” carries strong connotations of execution, oppression, persecution, and state violence, extending beyond the literal image. Allusion: The lyric alludes to the historical punishment of those considered traitors or rebels during the era associated with Thomas Paine and the American Revolution. The song draws on that historical context even if it doesn't name it explicitly.

*Why is it **not** hyperbole?* **Because this is not an exaggeration.** During the period the song evokes, execution by hanging was a real punishment for treason or rebellion, so the line is intended literally rather than as overstatement.

“Hang me on the liberty tree”

Allusion: The line alludes to Paine's own writing, *Liberty Tree*, as well as the historical Liberty Tree, a symbol of revolutionary resistance during the American Revolution. This reference connects the lyric directly to Paine's ideals of liberty and resistance to tyranny.

Imagery: The line evokes a vivid visual image of execution, emphasizing the personal cost of political conviction. Symbolism.

Allegory: The Liberty Tree symbolizes freedom, revolution, and the right to challenge oppression. The act of being hanged from the Liberty Tree symbolizes the persecution that can come from advocating freedom. The image creates a tension between the ideal of liberty and the reality that people may suffer or die for defending it. Being "hung on the liberty tree" suggests dying for liberty rather than simply dying.

Irony / Paradox / Dichotomy / Juxtaposition: There is irony in the contrast between "liberty" (freedom) and "hang me" (execution). The image highlights the paradox that people may have to die in pursuit of freedom.

- **Irony** – The symbol of liberty becomes the place of execution.
- **Paradox** – The pursuit of freedom leads to punishment and death.
- **Juxtaposition** – The lyric places the opposing ideas of freedom ("liberty") and execution ("hang me") side by side to emphasize their contrast.

“I Am Showing My Work!”

Words I looked up

Term	Source <i>where I found my answer</i>	Definition	Type
			☐ Historical reference ☐ Vocabulary term ☐ Other _____
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Ideas, Phrases, or Names I Researched

Idea, Phrase or Name	Source <i>where I found my answer</i>	Definition	Type
			☐ Historical reference ☐ Vocabulary term ☐ Other _____
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			☐ Historical reference ☐ Vocabulary term ☐ Other _____
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Additional sources I consulted to learn about...