

Rushcart Players

STUDY GUIDE



Let Freedom Ring is a spirited musical review that celebrates our nation's birth and development. Its story, like a colorful quilt, is a compilation of authentic folk songs and significant moments in history. Native Americans, pilgrims, early settlers, pioneers and many other groups of immigrants over the centuries give **Let Freedom Ring** its rich texture and brilliant hue. It is embroidered with humor and drama, and framed with the energy, determination and courage of those who helped shape our history.

Let Freedom Ring (formally known as **American Sampler**) was written and originally presented in 1976 as a kind of birthday present to America in its bicentennial year. Since then, it has enjoyed several revivals. Indeed, the telling of our nation's story through folk songs and brief vignettes has proven universal in appeal and timeliness.

In examining America's birth and development, we chose to focus on people — what they thought and how they felt. Our objective throughout **Let Freedom Ring** is to convey a sense of "what it was like" to be in that time and place in history; a sense of the courage required to leave the

familiar and explore the unknown; a sense of ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary goals; and a sense of the legacy of immigrant groups coming to America since its earliest beginnings to contribute to its democratic ideals. In the process of bringing history to life, **Let Freedom Ring** puts human value issues squarely on the agenda for even the youngest of students to consider.

The purpose of this study guide is to provide an overview of the material covered in **Let Freedom Ring**. It also offers ideas for discussion and projects that might enhance the theatre experience and further illuminate the historical events included in our presentation. Points for discussion are intended to invite thought, creativity and personalization rather than "right" or "wrong" answers. It is our hope that you will tailor our suggestions to suit your needs and present them in an uncritical framework in your classroom or home.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our view of the rich and diverse heritage that lets freedom ring for all of us -- in America.

LET FREEDOM RING

SUMMARY

Let Freedom Ring begins with the beginning of time, moving quickly to the arrival of the first “settlers” from Asia. With the passage of approximately 30,000 years (in under five minutes!), **Let Freedom Ring** introduces a new group of settlers who arrive on the Eastern shores in 1620 after a long and arduous journey from England. Among the new immigrants are four main characters — Sam, Sarah, Jenny and Ginny — who transcend time, distance and circumstance, leading us chronologically and geographically through two centuries of American history. Their journey through the landscape of America includes whistle stops along the way to witness early encounters with Native Americans, disputes with Mother England, The Boston Tea Party, The American Revolution, westward expansion, The Underground Railroad, Civil War, California Gold Rush and Industrialization.

Let Freedom Ring's finale is a spirited medley of international songs that celebrate the new wave of immigration at the turn of the 20th century. The familiar melodies provide an overview of America's multi-cultural history and a musical salute to the many ethnic groups that contribute to the unique texture and rich character of our great nation.

Folk songs included in **Let Freedom Ring** are:

Simple Gifts
When I First Came To This Land
Revolutionary Tea
Riflemen at Bennington
Kansas Emigrant
Pat Works on the Railway
Banks of the Sacramento
Follow the Drinkin' Gourd
Two Brothers
Union Maid

The international medley includes excerpts from:

Yankee Doodle (England)
Frere Jaques (France)
Bobo Waro (Africa)
Suliram (Asia)
Jig (Ireland)
Santa Lucia (Italy)
Moscow Nights (Eastern Europe)
Mexican Hat Dance (Latin America)
Wonderful America (Scandinavia)
This Land is Your Land (America)

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

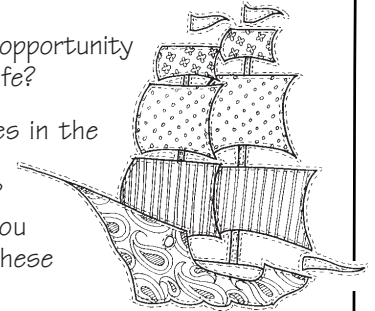
NEW SETTLERS IN A NEW LAND

About 30,000 years ago, the first people, later to be known as Native Americans, came over a land bridge from Asia, following the buffalo because these animals provided food and clothing for survival.

- What do you think it would be like to have to move continuously from place to place for your food and clothing?
- Why do you think some of the hunters and their families remained in North America?

Around 1620, more travelers came to the new land — this time by boat from Europe and Africa. They came for freedom, opportunity, adventure and the promise of a better life for themselves and their children.

- Discuss what you think is meant by freedom in America.
- What do you think is meant by opportunity or the promise of a better life?
- Can you think of some places in the world today where freedom or opportunity do not exist? Discuss the situation as you know it or imagine it to be in these countries?
- Imagine living at a time when there were no cars, planes, cell phones, internet or modern means of travel and communication. What do you think it felt like to get into a relatively small boat and travel for months to an unknown place? What would it take to make you willing to risk such a journey to a new land? Write a poem or story about these thoughts.



When the new settlers and the Native American met for the first time, there was tension. But when the Native American helped the settlers know more about the land and how to survive in their new surroundings, they became friends.

- Why do you think the Native American and new settlers were frightened at first? What were some of the differences between them? Similarities?
- What do you think it would have been like for the new settlers in their new land without the help of the Native American? Draw a picture or write a short story or play about what you imagine it was like the first time the Native Americans and Pilgrims met.

THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

Over a period of about 100 years, new settlers continued to come to the new land. Many came from England and were known as colonists. “Mother England,” as she was often called, controlled the colonists, telling them what they could and could not do and what taxes they had to pay.

- Why do you think the colonists felt they had the right to decide things for themselves?
- How do you think Mother England felt when the colonists refused to obey her laws?

When it became clear that the colonists were not complying with Mother England's demands, she sent soldiers to the new land to be sure the colonists would obey her laws.

- Why do you think the colonists were alarmed and angry to see British (English) soldiers in their towns? How do you think you would feel if you saw soldiers from another country stationed in your town, for the purpose of telling you what you can and cannot do?
- Divide the class into groups for role playing — each group containing some colonists, some British officers and soldiers. Create a setting and situation in which the British representatives make demands in the name of King George (or Mother England) and the colonists take a stand against the demands. Have groups share the outcomes by reporting or performing their docu-drama for the rest of the class.

WESTWARD EXPANSION

After America won her independence from England, some people moved westward because they heard that the American government was offering free land to those willing to develop it. The pioneers moving west in our play sing a song from that era. The lyrics are:

*"We cross the prairies as of old,
The pilgrims crossed the sea;
To make the west, as they the east,
The homestead of the free."*

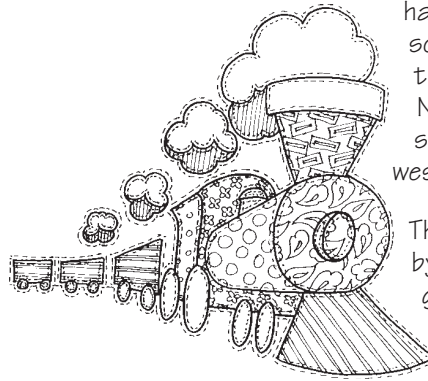
- What do you think were the hopes of the people moving west to claim free land?
- What are some of the differences between moving west nearly two hundred years ago, and moving west today?
- Imagine that you and your family are moving west on a wagon train and, because there isn't much space, you can take only five of your favorite things with you. What would you take? Why did you choose those five items?
- Write a letter to a friend telling him or her all about the adventures — good and bad — you are having on your journey westward.



The Native American, observing the westward expansion of new settlers says, "Can they do that? Just come and take over the land? We've always lived here. Where are we going to go? Can they do that?"

- History has given us the answer to her question, but if we could re-write history, what are some other possible solutions to Native American and second American use of the land?

- Write a short story or play dramatizing an event you have read about in a history, social studies or library book that took place between Native Americans and second Americans moving westward.



The railroad, built primarily by hardworking immigrant groups, was an important step in helping our country develop and grow.

- In what ways do you think the railroad made things better for the United States?
- What do you think were some of the drawbacks to having a railroad cut across the countryside?
- What do you think were some of the problems that made it difficult to build a railroad from one end of the country to the other?

SLAVERY, THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT AND THE CIVIL WAR

Over time, the railroad, clipper ships and other means of transportation made it possible to get from the east to west. Many people "rushed" to the west for the promise of gold. Some were successful, but most were disappointed. At the same time, however, political, economic and human rights issues were dividing the nation in the east. The characters in our play become concerned that "not everyone in America is free. Black people in the South are slaves and have no rights at all."

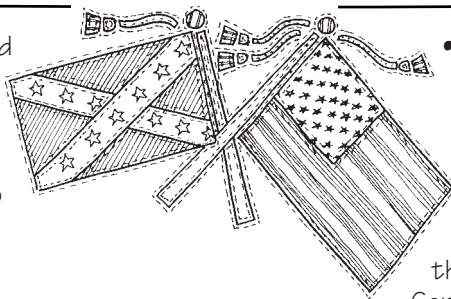
- What do you think life would be like if you were not free because you were "owned" by someone else? Write a poem or short story from this perspective, giving it the title, "If I Were Free . . ."

A group of people, the Abolitionists, began working to do away with slavery. They developed a secret route for slaves to escape to freedom in the North called "the underground railroad." They could only travel at night, and spoke in code language about the paths to follow and routes to take.

- Why do you think it was necessary to be secretive about the escape route?
- If you believed, as the Abolitionists did, that "All men are created equal," but lived in a time when slavery existed, do you think you might have joined the Abolitionists and worked on the "underground railroad?" What are some other things that you might have tried or suggested to help do away with slavery?

Soon after President Lincoln was elected, the northern states and the southern states formed their own armies and went to war. The South was fighting for states' rights while the north was fighting to preserve the union.

- Which army do you think you would have joined if you had to choose? Was it a difficult choice? Why?
- Discuss some alternatives to war that might have been employed to settle the differences between the north and the south.



- Create an International Festival, either within your classroom or for the entire grade level or school. Have students dress in costumes or costume pieces representative of their heritage. Have them bring in sample foods, artwork, music, instruments, crafts and other items for a display on the rich diversity within the class and/or within your school community. Contrast this colorful variety with the boredom that everyone being exactly alike would create.

INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE NEW WAVE OF IMMIGRATION

After the North won the Civil War, slavery ended and industry began to develop and grow throughout the country, especially in the larger cities. This was good for many people because there were many jobs and the economy of our nation was booming. But the work was very hard, the hours long and the pay for most workers was hardly enough on which to live. Soon, workers banded together and formed a group — a Union — to demand better working conditions and certain rights.

- Why do you think the workers formed a group to demand their rights, rather than just go to the boss and complain? Can you think of other events in America's history when people got together to achieve a human rights goal?
- Imagine that you are a reporter for your local newspaper. Interview the leader of the Union and the boss/owner of the factory. Now write an article for your paper based on what you imagine they might have said in response to your questions.

According to our play, "many different people came and continue to come from many different countries. They make America a rich and diverse nation." They came and continue to come, as people have since the first colony was founded in 1607, for freedom, opportunity and a better life for themselves and their children.

- Why, in your opinion, are freedom and opportunity so precious that people would leave family, friends, and all that is familiar to come to a strange land with a different language and new customs in search of these values?
- Interview someone you know who was not born in this country. Some questions you might ask are: Where were you born? How long have you been here? What made you (or your family) decide to come to America? What are some differences between life here and life in your native country? What are your hopes for your children and grandchildren? Write an article for a classroom magazine. If each student contributes an article or drawing, you might want to combine them, "publish" the collection and distribute it for other classes to read.

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Pushcart is a member of Actors' Equity Association, ArtPride, Arts Council of the Morris Area, New Jersey Theatre Alliance, Producer's League of Theatre for Young Audiences.

- Why do you think it is important to know about and have pride in our heritage? Why do you think it is important to know about and respect the heritage of others?
- Create a patchwork quilt entitled "Heritage" by having each student create a picture or design representing the part of the world from which he/she or his/her ancestors came. This can be done with fabric or by drawing on squares of paper and making a paper reproduction of a quilt.

THIS LAND BELONGS TO YOU AND ME

Here are some lyrics from a folk song that talks about freedom:

*Freedom doesn't come like a bird on the wing.
Doesn't come down like summer rain.
Pass it on to your children.
You've got to work for it.
Every generation's got to win it again!*

- In your own words, what do you think these lyrics are saying?
- Can you think of parts of the play where people had to struggle, over and over again, to preserve freedom and human rights? Why is this possible in America, but not in many other countries in the world in which we live? What can each of us do to "work for [freedom]. . . to win it again?"

"This land is your land, this land is my land . . . this land was made for you and me."

- What do you think Woodie Guthrie had in mind when he wrote that song? Who do you think is "you" and who is "me?"
- What do you think each of us can do to be sure that America continues to be "a land for you and a land for me?"
- Write a short story or poem, or draw a picture about what America means to you?

