

1. The Work Song

American music was created by Africans and Europeans who began coming to the New World in the 16th century. They combined their cultures to create what became the Blues, Jazz, and Rock and Roll in the United States. In Brazil, the Samba, and in Cuba, the Son, are also good examples of this combination. The African slaves sang while they worked in the cotton fields. Cotton was a major part of the early colonial economy. The word "cotton" in English comes from Arabic: al qutun. Picking it wasn't easy because the pickers had to bend over constantly as their loads got heavier in the hot sun.

Why did the slaves sing? Did the singing help them? Write down five reasons why slaves would sing while they worked.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



2. PICK A BALE OF COTTON

Great God almighty gonna pick a bale of cotton*
Great God almighty gonna pick a bale a day.
Great God almighty gonna pick a bale of cotton
Great God almighty gonna pick a bale a day.

chorus: Oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Oh Lordy, pick a bale a day.
Oh Lordy, pick a bale of cotton
Oh Lordy, pick a bale a day.

You gotta jump down, turn around, pick a bale of cotton
You gotta jump down, turn around, pick a bale a day.
You gotta jump down, turn around, pick a bale of cotton
You gotta jump down, turn around, pick a bale a day.

Me and my wife can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my wife can pick a bale a day.
Me and my wife can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my wife can pick a bale a day.

Me and my gal gonna pick a bale of cotton
Me and my gal gonna pick a bale a day.
Me and my gal gonna pick a bale of cotton
Me and my gal gonna pick a bale a day.

Me and my buddy can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my buddy can pick a bale a day
Me and my buddy can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my buddy can pick a bale a day.

Me and my partner can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my partner can pick a bale a day.
Me and my partner can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my partner can pick a bale a day.

You gotta jump down, turn around, pick a bale of cotton
You gotta jump down, turn around, pick a bale a day.
You gotta jump down, turn around, pick a bale of cotton
You gotta jump down, turn around, pick a bale a day.

Great God almighty I can pick a bale of cotton
Great God almighty I can pick a bale a day.
Great God almighty I can pick a bale of cotton
Great God almighty I can pick a bale a day.

*A bale of cotton weighs about a quarter of a ton. Nobody ever picked a bale a day.

3. Rhythm

What is *rhythm*? It is the general term we use to describe the patterning of accents (or beats or stresses) in time. It comes from the Greek word *rhythmos*, “measured motion,” derived ultimately from a word meaning “to flow.” To experience rhythm, the ear must hear a recurrent sequence of accents at predictable intervals. For many reasons, human beings find this experience pleasurable and deeply engaging. Why? Partly because the principle of regular recurrence is found in non-artistic contexts as well, some of these primary in the formation of consciousness. Before an infant is born it develops a sense of hearing, and the first thing it hears is the heartbeat of the mother—a heartbeat perceived in regularly recurring sequence. The steady rhythm of the mother’s daily walk must also be experienced by the child as a physical sensation of gentle rocking to and fro. Eventually the child develops its own heartbeat, in counterpoint to the mother’s. At birth another primary rhythm is established, the intake and exhalation of breath. When the child begins to see, visual equivalents of rhythm emerge: the regular alternation of night and day; a series of steps from the ground floor to the next level; the regularly repeating patterns of textiles and wallpaper.

As adults we are at least partly conscious of all sorts of sonic and visual rhythms at many junctures of our lives. Given room to walk without hindrance, we naturally fall into a precise rhythm as we move through space. We observe waves breaking on the shore of large bodies of water, and we note high and low tides in the ocean. We watch the moon rise and fall and move through several phases in a month, before the same cycle returns again. Each year we experience the turnover of four seasons in a dependable sequence. In sports like rowing or running, children’s games like jump rope, in dancing, in sexual relations, in singing or playing an instrument, we respond to rhythmic directives. If we are scientists, we observe and quantify rhythms at the subatomic level all the way up to the operation of the solar system and the interaction of galaxies throughout the universe. If we are painters, we may use regular rhythm as a design element in our paintings. And if we are poets, we will write poetry that draws on the human sense of rhythm to achieve an expressivity that we have felt intuitively.

—from *The Poem’s Heartbeat* by Alfred Corn

4. What Is Your Song? Write It.

So, rhythm is a regular pattern that repeats itself in a pleasurable way. It often makes you want to sing and dance. The ocean's waves crashing on the beach are rhythm. The rising and setting of the sun are rhythm. The moon, day and night, and life and death are rhythms. Breathing in and out is rhythm. A heart beating is rhythm and so are hands clapping to a beat. When humans create music they surely express the rhythms in their lives and the rhythms of the world around them. Music makes us a part of things. Is there anyone who doesn't like music?

What are the rhythms in your life? When do you wake and go to sleep? When do you eat? When do you work? When do you rest and when do you play? What makes up the parts of your day? What would your main verbs be?

If your life were a song, what kind of song would it be? Would your song be fast or slow, loud or soft? Would someone sing? Would it be a simple guitar or an orchestra including violins?

Everybody works including you. Think of your work song. The slaves called their work song, Pick A Bale Of Cotton. What would the title of your work song be? How would its lyrics express the rhythms of your life?

Write your work song. Write it with your rhythms. Sing it.

5. What Are the Rhythms of Your Life? Writing an Essay

Directions: Answer questions 1 through 5 below. From your answers, write a five paragraph essay entitled "The Rhythms of My Life." Starting with 1 and its questions, continue until 5 and its questions, and you will have your five paragraph essay.

1. The world is full of rhythm and every individual has his or her own rhythm. What are your rhythms? Which rhythms make you particularly you? What makes you unique?

2. Do you think your rhythms are like the rhythms of most of the people from your country, culture and language or are your rhythms more reflective of you as an individual?

3. Music is the most shared rhythm in the world, and every country has developed its own unique forms of rhythm and expressions when it comes to music. In what ways do you think your culture has contributed to world music? Has your culture's music affected you? Explain.

4. Are you more influenced by the music of your culture or the music of the world? If one song was going to represent you what would that song be? If there are words, include them and if they are in your language, translate.

5. Do you think the particular rhythms in your life right now will continue or do you believe that in time your rhythms will change? Explain.