

**Title of Lesson:** Strange Fruit: Lynching in America  
(Suggested grade level: 11)

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**Background Information:**

Background information for teacher:

- This Web site provides a [brief summary of lynching in America](#) from the pre-Civil War era through the 1930s.
- [Without Sanctuary](#) is an on-line photographic essay documenting lynching in America. **PLEASE NOTE:** Many of the photographs are graphic and not suitable for most classrooms.
- This Web site provides [a short biography of Billie Holiday](#).
- The lyrics to “Strange Fruit” were written as a poem by Abe Meeropol, a Jewish schoolteacher from New York in 1937 after seeing published photograph of the lynching of [Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith](#). The poem was published in the *New York Teacher* under the pseudonym, Lewis Allan. After seeing Billie Holiday perform, Meeropol showed her the poem, and Holiday worked on it with Sonny White to create the song. The record made it to No. 16 on the music charts in July 1939.

**Overview of lesson:** The students will listen to Billie Holiday singing “Strange Fruit” as an introduction to an examination of lynching in America. They will read an 1899 article from the *The Southern Argus*. They will draw conclusions from statistics of lynching in Alabama and lynching in the United States. The students will blog their reaction to the subject of lynching.

**Content Standards**

[Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies](#) (Bulletin 2004, No. 18)

Eleventh Grade: Standard 10, p.73

[Alabama Course of Study: Technology](#)

Ninth – Twelfth Grade: Standard 6, p. 23

[Alabama Course of Study: English Language Arts](#)

Eleventh Grade: Standard 23, p. 85

[National Standards for History, 1996](#)

**Standards in History for Grades 5-12** (p. 100)

Era 7, Standard 1 – How Progressives and others addressed problems of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and political corruption

1C – The student understands the limitations of Progressivism and the alternates offered by various groups.

[National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies](#), (Bulletin 111, 2010)

Standard 5 – Individuals, Groups, and Institutions (p. 139)

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

**Primary Learning Objective(s):**

- Students will be able to recognize racial bias.
- Students will draw conclusions about the prevalence of lynching in the United States.

**Time allotted:** 50-90 minutes

**Materials and Equipment:**

- Copy of lyrics of “Strange Fruit” (attached)
- Recording of “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday. See Engagement/Motivation Activity below.
- Rubric for blog posting (attached)
- Excerpt of “The Negro Questions,” an article that appeared in *The Southern Argus*, Montgomery, Alabama, on May 12, 1899. (attached)
- Statistics on lynching in Alabama (attached)

**Technological Resources:**

- Computer with internet access
- Have students set up a blog, or you can establish a blog for their responses, at any free site available to your school or at [Blogger](#) by Google.

**Background/Preparation:**

Students will review and be asked to give examples of the term *vigilante justice*. Students should have already studied the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement for African Americans. Students will have already created a Google blog or be familiar with journaling.

**Procedures/Activities:**

**Engagement/Motivation Activity:**

Tell students, “Billie Holiday was a famous Jazz singer in the 1930s and 40s. You will listen to her singing a song entitled ‘Strange Fruit.’ As you watch and listen, note her demeanor.” After showing the video, ask students to describe her demeanor by proposing adjectives.

Note: You can find a video of Billie Holiday singing “Strange Fruit” on YouTube. [YouTube Downloader](#) is a free program which will allow you to download the video and save to a flash drive to show to your students.

<b>Step 1</b>	Pass out the lyrics to the song, and have the students watch the video again while reading the lyrics. After listening to the song the second time, students will share their reactions to the lyrics.
<b>Step2</b>	Tell students that they are going to read an excerpt of an 1899 newspaper article about a mob action against an African American and that it originally appeared in the <i>New York Journal</i> . Tell students that Samuel Hose was accused of killing his employer and raping the employer’s wife. Have students read “The Negro Question” article in <i>The Southern Argus</i> , Montgomery, Alabama, May 12, 1899

	(attached). Explain any difficult vocabulary.
<b>Step 3</b>	<p>Ask the following questions after reading “The Negro Question:”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What does the author mean by “The Negro Question?”</li> <li>2. Do you agree with the author’s justification of Samuel Hose’s punishment? Why or why not?</li> <li>3. What are your thoughts on the author’s opinion of enfranchisement for African Americans?</li> <li>4. How does the author justify the “violation the women” as being worse than murder?</li> <li>5. Reflecting on the statistics given in the last paragraph, is there a similar argument concerning capital punishment today?</li> </ol>
<b>Step 4</b>	<p>Display the statistics on lynching in Alabama. Ask the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Who wrote the letter?</li> <li>2. To whom was the letter written?</li> <li>3. When was the letter written?</li> <li>4. Why do you think the information had been requested?</li> <li>5. Why do you think the request was made to Tuskegee?</li> <li>6. What is your reaction to the prevalence of lynching in Alabama?</li> </ol>
<b>Step 5</b>	<p>Display the chart available at <a href="http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingsstate.html">http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingsstate.html</a>. Ask the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How is this chart different from the Alabama chart?</li> <li>2. What conclusions can be made about lynching in the U.S.?</li> <li>3. Imagine that you lived during the late 1800s and early 1900s and are a part of an anti-lynching movement. Brainstorm methods that your organization could use to end lynching.</li> <li>4. What dangers might you face as a member of an anti-lynching movement?</li> </ol>
<b>Step 6</b>	<p>If internet access is available, students will write their reactions to lynching in America in a Google blog. If internet access is unavailable, students will write their reactions in a journal entry. Tell students to include their reactions to Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” in their responses.</p>

### Assessment Strategies:

The student will be graded based on his/her response to the blog posting or journal entry using a rubric created from [RubiStar](#), a free program that teachers can use to create rubrics (see attachment).

### Extension:

- Determine the role of other muckrakers in bringing about the reforms of the Progressive Movement. Examples of works by muckrakers such as Upton Sinclair, Lincoln Steffens, Thomas Nast, and Ida Tarbell can be read and analyzed as catalysts for reform.
- Analyze the relationship between the development of anti-lynching laws and current hate crime laws.

### Remediation:

- Work individually with students who are having trouble with the technology.

**Accommodation:**

- Review Individualized Education Plans, Gifted Plans, 504 Plans and ELL Plans for instructional and assessment accommodations or modifications.
- Identify appropriate objectives specific to individual students' needs as indicated by Individualized Education Plans, Gifted Plans, 504 Plans and ELL Plans.

**Modification:**

- Students will be allowed to respond orally to the Step 6 assignment.

## Excerpt of Article from *The Southern Argus*, May, 1899

### THE NEGRO QUESTION,

**"A Political Blunder That is Worse Than a Crime."**

J. J. Ingalls in New York Journal.

It is evident that the abolition of slavery has not settled the negro question.

Enfranchisement was one of those political blunders that is worse than a crime. It has been a curse instead of a blessing, and after thirty years of bloody tumult, the race problem remains the most portentous menace of our civilization.

The horrible tragedy at Newnan shocks the conscience of mankind, but up to a certain point the action of the mob is intelligible.

There are some crimes for which statutes or penalties, the verdict of juries, the sentences of judges, are inadequate.

The violation of women is one of them.

It is worse than murder, because the victim is condemned to living death. It destroys the family and the home, which are the foundation of the state.

The law fines and imprisons the adulterer, the seducer, the ravisher; but public opinion condemns him to death. If the husband, the father, the brother slays the invader of the home, though it is technically murder, the jury acquits and the people say "amen."

This is the unwritten law of the Anglo-Saxon race, to which we belong.

La Rochefoucauld, the French moralist, says with equal truth and cynicism that it is easy to endure the misfortunes of our friends with fortitude.

We condemn the faults and sins of others with the same equanimity and composure.

It is not difficult to denounce the butchery of Sam Hose as a hideous crime against humanity, a bloodthirsty and sickening atrocity, a disgrace to American civilization.

The execration is deserved. No condemnation can be too severe. But no judgment of the people of Georgia is just that neglects to confess that there are many northern communities where similar crimes have been and would be similarly avenged, less the barbaric details, or that omits to take into consideration the environment, or which forgets that Massachusetts and New York are equally responsible with Georgia and South Carolina for the presence of the African race and the existence of human slavery on this continent.

Lynch law from the humanitarian point of view, admits neither of defence nor apology, but civilization is largely to blame for its decrees.

Justice is tardy. In 1896 there were 10,652 homicides in the United States and 122 legal executions.

ROBERT R. MOTON, PRINCIPAL

WARREN LOGAN, TREASURER

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FOR THE TRAINING OF  
COLORED YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN

TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE, ALA.

February 21, 1921

Mrs. M. B. Owen,  
Director Department of Archives  
and History,  
Montgomery, Alabama.

Dear Madam:-

In compliance with your request of January 27th, for certain information regarding lynchings in Alabama, we are sending you herewith a complete record of the lynchings in Alabama from 1871 to 1920. We hope this will be of service to you, and are very glad to comply with your request.

Yours very truly,

*R. R. Moton*  
Principal.

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## II

### Total Lynchings in Alabama by Years. 1871-1920.

Year	Number Lynched.
1871-73	1 (white, shot for murder)
1882	5
1883	4
1884	3
1885	4
1886	4
1887	4
1888	9
1889	6
1890	8
1891	14
1892	14
1893	17
1894	12
1895	10
1896	13
1897	16
1898	8
1899	5
1900	8
1901	12 (Constitution adopted this year made sheriffs responsible.)

Year	Number Lynched
1902	4
1903	2
1904	5
1905	3
1906	6
1907	11
1908	4
1909	8
1910	8
1911	2
1912	8
1913	2
1914	2
1915	9
1916	1
1917	4
1918	3
1919	7
1920	7
Total	<u>273</u>

**Strange Fruit**

Southern trees bear strange fruit,  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,  
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant South,  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,  
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh!

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

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Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Due Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Persuasive Essay: Lynching Blog Posting Rubric

**Directions:** You will write a blog entry on your reactions to lynching in America. You will include your reactions to Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" in your response. Remember to organize your thoughts, and to support your position. You will be graded according to the rubric below.

CATEGORY	4 - Above Standards	3 - Meets Standards	2 - Approaching Standards	1 - Below Standards	Score
<b>Attention Grabber</b>	The introductory paragraph has a strong hook or attention grabber that is appropriate for the audience. This could be a strong statement, a relevant quotation, statistic, or question addressed to the reader.	The introductory paragraph has a hook or attention grabber, but it is weak, rambling or inappropriate for the audience.	The author has an interesting introductory paragraph but the connection to the topic is not clear.	The introductory paragraph is not interesting AND is not relevant to the topic.	
<b>Organization</b>	Content is well organized using headings or bulleted lists to group related material.	Uses headings or bulleted lists to organize, but the overall organization of topics appears flawed.	Content is logically organized for the most part.	There was no clear or logical organizational structure, just lots of facts.	
<b>Position Statement</b>	The position statement provides a clear, strong statement of the author's position on the topic.	The position statement provides a clear statement of the author's position on the topic.	A position statement is present, but does not make the author's position clear.	There is no position statement.	
<b>Support for Position</b>	Includes 3 or more pieces of evidence (facts, statistics, examples, real-life experiences) that support the position statement. The writer anticipates the reader's concerns, biases or arguments and has provided at least 1 counter-argument.	Includes 3 or more pieces of evidence (facts, statistics, examples, real-life experiences) that support the position statement.	Includes 2 pieces of evidence (facts, statistics, examples, real-life experiences) that support the position statement.	Includes 1 or fewer pieces of evidence (facts, statistics, examples, real-life experiences).	
<b>Closing paragraph</b>	The conclusion is strong and leaves the reader solidly understanding the writer's position. Effective restatement of the position statement begins the closing paragraph.	The conclusion is recognizable. The author's position is restated within the first two sentences of the closing paragraph.	The author's position is restated within the closing paragraph, but not near the beginning.	There is no conclusion; the paper just ends.	

Total Points \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: