

TEACHER GUIDE

1828 DOC. #4: "Little Wat Ye Wha's A-Comin'" Song

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

To this day popular songs play an important role in campaigning. Bill Clinton used Fleetwood Mac's "Don't Stop (Thinking About Tomorrow)" as his theme song in 1992. In 1984 both Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale tried to associate their campaigns with the popular musician Bruce Springsteen and his hit song, "Born in the U.S.A." In 1828 campaign songs were even more important than they are today because there were far fewer forms of mass communication.

As you listen to the next song try to figure out which candidate is being attacked, John Quincy Adams or Andrew Jackson. The title, "Little Wat Ye Wha's A-Comin'" is an expression from Scottish that translates as "Little know you who is coming."

> **Play the song and project the lyrics and/or hand out lyric sheets.**

QUESTION	Do you think this was a song for the Jackson or Adams campaign? What is your evidence?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	This is an anti-Jackson song from the Adams campaign.
EVIDENCE	"after that Calhoun's a-comin'" is a reference to Jackson's Vice President John Calhoun;
EVIDENCE	"Hero's comin'," "Plunder's comin'," are references to Jackson's military history; "he'll shoot and stab," "hang honest men" and "murder" evoke accusations that Jackson was a murderer and executed innocent men in 1815;
EVIDENCE	Martial an' Lynch's Law" and "Jack Cade" imply that Jackson will take the law into his own hands

SEE NOTE →

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LITTLE WAT YE WHA'S A-COMIN'
 Words adapted from "Cincinnati Gazette", July 30, 1828
 Melody: Traditional Scottish tune: "Highland Mower Roll"

Little wat ye wha's a-comin',
 Little wat ye wha's a-comin',
 Little wat ye wha's a-comin',
 Muder wi' gory han's a-comin',
 Fire's a-comin', swords a-comin',
 Pistols, guns an' knives a-comin',
 Nero's comin', Hero's comin',
 Forbye, the second section's comin'.

Little wat ye wha's a-comin',
 Little wat ye wha's a-comin',
 Little wat ye wha's a-comin',
 Martial an' Lynch's Law are comin',
 Slavery's comin', knavery's comin',
 Plunder's comin', Blunder's comin',
 Robbing's comin', Jobbing's comin',
 An' a' the plague o' War's a-comin'.

Little wat ye wha's a-comin',
 Little wat ye wha's a-comin',
 Little wat ye wha's a-comin',
 JUSGERSNAIT' hameo' is comin',
 He'll fret and fume, he'll shoot and stab,
 He'll stamp an' swear "like any drab."
 He'll play Jack Cade—hang honest men,
 An' after that Calhoun's a-comin'.

"Little Wat Ye Wha's A-Comin'"

Audio Clip

Lyrics on PowerPoint slide and student handout

NOTE

Calhoun had been John Quincy Adams' Vice President but switched to be Jackson's running mate due to Adams' anti-states' rights position. Later Calhoun resigned as Jackson's Vice President because of political differences over tariffs and nullification.

SEE NOTE →

EVIDENCE “Nero’s comin’” and “JUGGERNAUT himself is comin’” paints Jackson as a power-hungry leader bent on dictatorial rule.

SEE NOTE →

QUESTION **What do the lyrics tell you about Adams’ positions on slavery and political patronage?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER He is opposed to both.

EVIDENCE “slavery’s comin’” if Jackson and Calhoun are elected; “Robbing’s comin’” and “Jobbing’s comin’” are references to Jackson’s support for political patronage

SEE NOTE →

QUESTION **What is the purpose of this song?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER It is meant to scare citizens into voting against Jackson (particularly opponents of slavery and members of the Eastern establishment).

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Can you think of examples when fear has been used to persuade voters to cast their ballot against candidates in a modern election? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?

Does negative campaigning promote or discourage political participation? Why or why not?

NOTE

Charles Lynch was a Revolutionary War commander who used summary executions and hangings to terrorize loyalists. Jack Cade was mentioned in Shakespeare’s Henry VI as the leader of a bloody uprising in Britain in 1450 when authorities were executed by peasant mobs.

NOTE

Nero was a Roman emperor notorious for his brutality. Juggernaut, originally from the Hindu tradition, has come to mean a massive force that crushes all in its path.

NOTE

“Jobbing” means political corruption.

ADDITIONAL INFO

The lyrics of this song were adapted from a newspaper article from July 30, 1828 in the pro-Democratic Cincinnati Gazette. The pro-Jackson paper wrote that “war, pestilence and famine’s comin’” if Adams won a second term. The Adams campaign turned the words around to create this musical attack on Jackson.

Andrew Jackson’s political rise threatened conservative Eastern interests, which supported John Quincy Adams. Some people felt that Jackson’s lack of political experience and schooling made him unfit to govern or that his military history indicated that he might threaten American democracy.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Fear
Music