

Political Debates Through Songs from Hamilton: An American Musical

Hamilton is one of most popular musicals of all time, combining political commentary and hip-hop, R&B, and pop music. It directly confronts the issue of slavery in American life and government. Activities explore how Hamilton portrays history and then write your own Hamilton-style lyrics about issues of importance.

Hamilton: *An American Musical* written by Lin-Manuel Miranda tells the story of Alexander Hamilton and the founding of the United States using hip hop, R&B, pop, and soul music as well as Broadway-style show tunes. It opened in February 2015 and won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Drama as well as numerous Tony Awards that same year.

Lin-Manuel Miranda described the musical as about "America then, as told by America now" ([The Atlantic](#), September 29, 2015, para. 2).



[Watch on YouTube](#)

Hamilton is not the only musical to explore the Founding Era. *1776* which premiered on Broadway in 1969 and on film in 1972 was an amusing satirical take on the writing of the Declaration of Independence. It is returning to Broadway in Fall 2022 with a racially diverse cast of all women, nonbinary, and trans actors ([It's No Hamilton. But Maybe Its ... Better?](#) *History Tech*, September 16, 2022).

Activity 1: Analyze the Lyrics from *Hamilton*

1. Listen to the songs from *Hamilton*:
 - [Cabinet Battle #1](#)
 - [Cabinet Battle #2](#)
 - [Cabinet Battle #3](#)
2. Listen to the songs again while reading the lyrics. Feel free to take a look at the way that Genius analyzes the lyrics after forming your own opinions and takeaways.
 - [Cabinet Battle #1](#)
 - [Genius Lyrics](#)
 - [Cabinet Battle #2](#)
 - [Genius Lyrics](#)
 - [Cabinet Battle #3](#)
 - [Genius Lyrics](#)
3. Then, either:
 - **Write a Yelp or Amazon review** for each song based on the accuracy, credibility, relevance, and presentation of historical events and issues (see example [Amazon Review template](#) by Madeline Hill; [make your own copy to remix](#)).
 - **Or, design a podcast, video, or website** in which you discuss the following questions:
 - Are these songs factual? To what degree? Do they leave anything out? How do they complement what you've learned in social studies classes?
 - How is Manuel-Miranda able to make these historical moments contemporary? How does Manuel-Miranda utilize music and lyrics to convey history?
 - Does seeing history in a more contemporary light aid your learning? How can this be applied to other disciplines and/or mediums?
 - What parallels can you draw between the points Hamilton and Jefferson bring up in these cabinet battles and contemporary political issues/debates?

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Hamilton Podcast Planning Sheet](#) by Lydia Jankowski, Suhyun Shin, Emily Inman

Activity 2: Write Your Own *Hamilton*-Style Lyrics

Hamilton highlights the [Federalist/Anti-Federalist debates](#) of the time - a set of tensions between federal and state power that still dominate U.S. politics today as different levels of government seek to solve problems of racial justice and inequality, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, the struggling economy, and attacks on truth and democracy.

1. Choose an issue that interests you and investigate how federal, state, and local government are dealing with it.
 - o You could look at:
 - Pandemic policies such as mask mandates, vaccine requirements, or school reopenings.
 - Environmental and climate change initiatives such as plastic bans at grocery stores.
 - Automobile emissions and other fuel-saving transportation regulations.
 - Food safety and agricultural regulations.
 - Another area where there is disagreement between levels of government.
2. **Write your own Hamilton-style debate lyrics** about the topic of your choosing. Focus on the tensions between federal and state power related to your issue.
3. Bonus Points: Perform and record your rap song on TikTok, Snapchat, or Flipgrid.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[The Great Mask Debate](#) by Lydia Jankowski, Suhyun Shin, Emily Inman

Additional resources:

- [Hamilton Cast Read Along entirely in Spanish](#)
- [Linking Letters with Lyrics: "Hamilton" Songs Draw on Original Library Documents](#), Library of Congress
- Hamilton Cast Read Along of ["The Storyteller's Candle/La Velita de los Cuentos"](#) in Spanish (with English close captions)

Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[Building Democracy for All: The Federalist-Anti-Federalist Debates](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - *Compare and contrast key ideas debated between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists over ratification of the Constitution* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Science) [8.T2.4]
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
 - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data, or other resources.
 - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
 - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
 - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
 - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
 - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
 - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
 - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9
- [English/Language Arts Common Core Standards](#)



This content is provided to you freely by EdTech Books.

Access it online or download it at

https://edtechbooks.org/mediaandciviclearning/Hamilton_musical.

