

PROCESS PAPER

When we discovered the theme of this year's National History Day, we brainstormed different topics. Later, we chose Cher Ami (a war hero who was a pigeon), Communication from the White House and its impact on the World, and Harriet Tubman, Communication through music as a few choices. When we researched, it was clear that Cher Ami did not have many primary sources, the topic Communication from the White House was hard to narrow down and did not have a clear focus, so we chose Harriet Tubman and communication through music, where we found lots of strong primary sources, this relates to our this year topic as music and songs were used by African American slaves and was a main mode of communication during slavery, and the key to their freedom.

When we started researching, we borrowed books from the local library and emailed the Harriet Tubman Museum and Education Center in Cambridge Maryland, and the National Museum of African Americans in Washington D.C and requested a virtual tour. Due to the COVID-19 situation, it could not be accommodated but they gave us permission to use the information on their website for primary sources. The other primary source was our interview with Ms. Gayle Lowery, whose ancestors had used music as communication during slavery, she explained about the origin of Negro Spirituals and how music was used as a communication strategy during slavery. We also searched online sources like the Library of Congress, to find newspaper clippings and got few primary sources. We used the Smithsonian website for some secondary sources. We also attended a Sacramento library workshop and took guidance from the Sacramento Public Library staff.

We chose to do the website group project since we can coordinate well. It also has the advantage that one can navigate through the materials easily and efficiently and since our topic is music-related, it's easier to add music to the project adding visual and sound effects to the onlookers. We decided on the website theme and divided the webpages among us. Each one had about 3 pages and we worked on the content, pictures, audio, and video files to be added on the respective pages. After the initial draft, we discussed and noted down all the feedback, inputs and changes to be made to each page. We had periodical meetings and revised until our project was complete.

Our topic relates to this year's theme because Harriet Tubman, an African American hero, used songs as a main mode of communication to convey messages when she was a conductor in the Underground Railroad and was on a mission to free the enslaved people during slavery. Songs were used to communicate with slaves that didn't know to read or write. These songs were called Negro spirituals, Map songs, Coded messages, which conveyed escape routes. These spirituals had a major impact in History in the evolution of protest songs and other genres of music and made a step stone for the freedom of African Americans.