



THE NATIONAL
WWII MUSEUM
NEW ORLEANS

You Say “Po-tay-to,” I say “Po-tah-to”
Using music to learn about tolerance and acceptance

A Lesson from
the Education Department

The National WWII Museum
945 Magazine Street
New Orleans, LA 70130
(504) 528-1944

www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education

You Say “Po-tay-to,” I say “Po-tah-to”

Using music to learn about tolerance and acceptance

Music is a great way to start a conversation with students. Music can entertain, tell a story and sometimes educate. In this lesson, music from WWII takes on the subject of intolerance and of learning to accept (and maybe even appreciate) the differences we find in each other.

OBJECTIVE: In this lesson students will listen to the 1937 song “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off,” analyze and answer written questions about the lyrics, and discuss ideas of tolerance, based on how they and other people speak. This discussion can be followed by extension activities further exploring tolerance and bullying issues.

GRADE LEVEL: 3-5

STANDARDS: **Life Skills Standard 3**—the student works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations.

Life Skills Standard 4—the student displays effective interpersonal communication skills

Content Era 8 (1929-1945) Standard 3—the causes and course of WWII

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL—the student will engage efficiently in a range of collaborative discussions

TIME REQUIREMENT: One class period

DIRECTIONS: Introduce the lesson by asking students if they like listening to music and what kind they like. Ask them what the purposes for music are. Answers might be: for fun, for dancing, to tell a story, etc. Tell them that another possible reason can be to learn a lesson and that together they are going to use a song from the past to learn a lesson about themselves today.

Use the **Background Information** sheet to give students an introduction to the lesson. They can read silently or out loud as a class. Answer any questions students might have about vocabulary, like **intolerance** or **acceptance**.

Pass out the **Lyrics Sheet** and play the MP3 of “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off,” found at <http://www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-teachers/lesson-plans/music-to-teach-tolerance.html>. After playing the song, ask students what they liked about it and what questions they have about it.

Pass out the **Student Worksheet** for students to complete in class or as homework. A **class discussion** about students’ answers will give them an opportunity to further share their thoughts. This discussion should be closely monitored by the teacher to ensure that everyone is respectful of each others’ opinions.

ASSESSMENT: Components for assessment include the student worksheet and class discussion.

ENRICHMENT: Write a one to five paragraph essay about a time you were teased, how it made you feel and what you did about it. Write a creative story about the two people in the song and what happens to them before and/or after the song. Use the song “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off” to make a poster encouraging tolerance, acceptance and appreciation of differences at your school. Learn the song and perform it for your class or your school.



You say "Po-tay-to," I say "Po-tah-to"

BACKGROUND INFORMATION



WWII: A Time of Intolerance

World War II occurred from 1939-1945. It was a time when the United States fought to defeat countries that were trying to **dominate**—or take over—large parts of the world. The leaders and many people in Germany, Japan and Italy thought that their country was the best country, their way of life was the best way of life, and their way of acting, looking, believing, and thinking was the best way to act, look, believe, and think. If a person was different, he or she could be kicked out of school, could lose his or her job, be put in prison, be kicked out of the country or even be killed. It was a time of great **intolerance** and it led to the biggest war in history.

To **tolerate** something means to permit it to happen or accept opinions, beliefs, or persons that are different from you. A tolerant person doesn't mind that you may be different from him or her. An **intolerant** person does not like people or ideas that are different from him or her. Nearly everyone acts in an intolerant way sometimes. If you've ever teased someone or not included him or her for being different then you've acted in an intolerant way.

Intolerance is still around—and probably always will be. Maybe you have experienced it. Maybe you dress differently, or walk differently, or even think differently. And maybe other people have given you a hard time about it, teased you, or made you feel left out.

A Musical Lesson in Tolerance

Music is fun to listen to, but it can also make you think. This lesson uses music—a song that was popular around WWII—to help you explore some ideas of tolerance and accepting people's differences. It's a funny song about two people who are in love, but they think that their differences might get in the way of their happiness together. After you listen to the song and read the lyrics (the words to the song), you will get a chance to think about how you treat other people who are different from you and how other people treat you.

The Song

The song you will listen to is called, "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off," and was written in 1937 for the movie musical, *Shall We Dance*, by George and Ira Gershwin (Ira wrote the lyrics and his younger brother George wrote the music). The Gershwins wrote many popular songs for movies and stage musicals in the 1920s and 30s. They wrote love songs, ballads (songs that tell a story), and funny songs. Sometimes their songs were a combination of all three.

In “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off,” the two singers compare how they pronounce certain words. There are both regional differences in the accents and a difference in social class. Upper class people at the time (usually rich and from older American families), often placed emphasis on the longer a sound, as in “ahnt,” instead of “aunt.” Will their differences keep them apart? Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong sing a famous duet of the song.

Let’s Meet the Singers: Ella Fitzgerald

Ella Fitzgerald was a famous jazz singer. Among her many nicknames were the ‘Queen of Jazz,’ the “First Lady of Song,” and “Lady Ella.” She was born in Newport News, Virginia on April 25, 1917. She made her singing debut at age 17 in 1934, at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, New York. During her long performing career she sang with many well-known jazz musicians, including Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Dizzy Gillespie. She was known for her unique style of singing called “scat,” where she would use long strings of nonsense syllables to sing along with the music. Among other awards, she won 13 Grammy Awards, the National Medal of Art, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the George and Ira Gershwin Award for Lifetime Musical Achievement. Ella Fitzgerald died on June 15, 1996, at the age of 79. The archival material from Ella's long career is housed at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, and her personal music arrangements are at The Library of Congress, in Washington, D.C.



Louis Armstrong

Louis Armstrong was a famous jazz trumpet player, singer, and composer from New Orleans, Louisiana. He was born on August 4, 1901. He had the nicknames “Satchmo” and “Pops.” In the 1920s, Armstrong was part of an important development in jazz music—shifting the focus of jazz from group playing to solo playing. Besides his excellent trumpet playing, he became well known for his raspy singing voice and cheerful personality. During his long musical career, Armstrong played with many of the best musicians in the world, including Bing Crosby, Duke Ellington, and Bessie Smith. His duets with Ella Fitzgerald were some of his most popular recordings. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for his influence on rock and roll music. He also has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Louis Armstrong died on July 6, 1971, at the age of 69. On August 4, 2001, the centennial of Armstrong's birth, New Orleans's airport was renamed Louis Armstrong International Airport in his honor.



♪ Let's Call the Whole Thing Off ♪

By George and Ira Gershwin, 1937

© Warner/Chappell Music, Inc. (used with permission)

Things have come to a pretty pass
Our romance is growing flat,
For you like this and the other
While I go for this and that,
Goodness knows what the end will be
Oh I don't know where I'm at
It looks as if we two will never be one
Something must be done:

You say either and I say eye-ther.
You say neither and I say nye-ther.
Either, eye-ther,
Neither, nye-ther,
Let's call the whole thing off.

You like po-tay-to and I like po-tah-to.
You like to-may-to and I like to-mah-to.
Po-tay-to, po-tah-to,
To-may-to, to-mah-to,
Let's call the whole thing off.

But oh, if we call the whole thing off
Then we must part,
and oh, if we ever part, then that might
break my heart.

So if you like pa-ja-mas,
and I like pa-jah-mas.
I'll wear pa-ja-mas ,
And give up pa-jah-mas.
For we know we need each other so,
We better call the calling off off.
Let's call the whole thing off.

You say laugh-ter and I say larf-ter,
You say af-ter and I say arf-ter.
Laugh-ter, larf-ter,
af-ter, arf-ter,
Let's call the whole thing off.

You like va-nil-la and I say va-nel-la.
You sas-pi-ral-la, and I sas-pi-rel-la.
Va-nil-la, va-nel-la,

Chocolate, strawberry,
Let's call the whole thing off.

But oh, if we call the whole thing off,
Then we must part,
And oh, if we ever part,
Then that might break my heart.

So if you go for oy-sters,
and I go for er-sters.
I'll order oy-sters ,
And cancel the er-sters,
For we know we need each other so,
We better call the calling off off.
Let's call the whole thing off.

You say either and you say eye-ther,
You say neither and you say nye-ther.
Either, eye-ther,
Neither, nye-ther,
Let's call the whole thing off.

You like po-tay-to and you like po-tah-to.
You like to-may-to and you like to-mah-to.
Po-tay-to, po-tah-to,
To-may-to, to-mah-to,
Let's call the whole thing off.
But oh, if we call the whole thing off
Then we must part,
and oh, if we ever part, then that might
break my heart.

So if you like pa-ja-mas,
like pa-ja-mas,
I'll wear pa-ja-mas,
You got pa-ja-mas.
For we know we need each other so,
We better call the calling off off.
Let's call the whole thing off.
Let's call the whole thing off.

5. Is it OK to have disagreements or differences of opinion with people, but still be friends?
Can you think of an example like this in your own life?

6. Why do you think people sometimes tease people who are different from them?

7. Is it ever okay to tease someone? When?

8. Can you think of any other songs that contain lessons about tolerance and acceptance of other people's differences?