

# ★ America the Beautiful ★

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this lesson is to teach students about the background and meaning of the country's "unofficial" national anthem. Students will complete a vocabulary and comprehension activity about the background and first verse of the song, "America the Beautiful."

## **Objective**

The student will explain the background and meaning of "America the Beautiful."

## **Theme - Freedom & Progress**

"America the Beautiful" praises the beauty of our free and beloved country in a physical and intellectual or conceptual sense. Further, this song serves to document the progress in America including geographic and economic changes.

## **Core Knowledge**

Grade 6 - Amer Hist & Geog. Sec I: Westward Expansion. What in the song, "America, the Beautiful" describes why people expanded to the west? What environmental or economic factors are described in the song?

## **Time**

30 minutes

## **Materials**

- ★ "America the Beautiful" activity sheet
- ★ Dictionaries
- ★ "America the Beautiful" song sheet (optional)
- ★ Website - [www.americanheritage.org](http://www.americanheritage.org)

## **Preparation**

- ★ Copy the "America the Beautiful" activity sheet for each student.

## **Focus**

Ask students to name our national anthem. Tell them that another song, "America the Beautiful," is so loved by many Americans that it is sometimes considered a second, "unofficial" national anthem. Ask students if they can sing or recite the words to the song.

## **Activity**

1. Have students read and/or discuss the handout on the song's history. Complete and discuss the vocabulary and comprehension questions.
2. Review the background and meaning of "America the Beautiful." Remind students that the song describes the beauty of our country. (See Links page of [www.americanheritage.org](http://www.americanheritage.org) for additional resources on "America the Beautiful.")
3. Discuss the specific meaning of the first famous verse of the song. Clarify words as needed. Sing the song together in class.

4. **Mapping America.** Students may create geographical or topographical maps of the country, labeling and illustrating and/or coloring items such as physical terrain characteristics and natural features. *For higher grades (middle school):* Other items to focus on or include might be climate, natural resources, area populations, transports, farming and crops, homes, inventions, industries, etc.
5. **American Landscape.** Students will draw and/or cut out magazine pictures of American landscapes and create a visual map or collage of the country and its varied landscapes, natural features, resources, crops, etc. In particular, students may illustrate their visual map with pictures or drawings of the scenes and features mentioned in the verses of “America the Beautiful.” Students may write captions or blurbs with the images providing information.
6. **Adapting to a Region.** *For higher grades (upper middle or high school).* Students might write brief map descriptions or a report/essay about how people have adapted to different regions in the U. S. Students may focus on one particular area or region and consider how it has developed over time given various factors. Think about the influences of climate, natural resources, lifestyle, time period, etc. Consider examples such as when the Pilgrims adapted to the new colonies by learning how to grow crops.

## Closure

Students will write in their own words a poem describing the beauty of America.

# "America the beautiful's" *History*

"America the Beautiful" first appeared in print in 1895. Katharine Lee Bates (1859-1929) wrote the poem in 1893. She wrote a second version in 1904 and the final version in 1913.

Katharine Lee Bates was born in Falmouth, Massachusetts on August 12, 1859. In 1880, she graduated from Wellesley College where she taught from 1886-1925. She wrote books of poetry and books about her travels around the world. She also enjoyed writing stories for children. Miss Bates loved animals and often had her picture taken with her collie, Hamlet, and her parrot, Polonius. She retired in 1925 and died four years later on March 28, 1929.

In the summer of 1893, Miss Bates was teaching at Colorado College. She joined a group of teachers one afternoon on a trip to the top of Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs, Colorado. When she reached the top of the mountain, she was inspired by the beautiful view to write the first four verses of her poem. She wrote in her journal:

*"One day some of the other teachers and I decided to go on a trip to 14,000-foot Pikes Peak. We hired a prairie wagon. Near the top we had to leave the wagon and go the rest of the way on mules. I was very tired. But when I saw the view, I felt great joy. All the wonder of America seemed displayed there, with the sea-like expanse."*

There was a contest in 1926 to find music for the poem, but none of the entries were chosen. The poem has been sung to a variety of music and Miss Bates never said which was her favorite. Today, "America the Beautiful" is almost always sung to Samuel Ward's *Materna*.



**O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!  
America! America!  
God shed his grace on thee  
And crown thy good with  
brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!**

Define: spacious, amber, majesties, grace, brotherhood

1. Who wrote the poem *America the Beautiful*?
2. Where was the poem first written?
3. What beautiful things are described in the poem?
4. What does "God shed his grace on thee" mean?
5. What does "from sea to shining sea" mean?



# America the Beautiful

Words by Katharine Lee Bates

Music by Samuel Ward

1. O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!  
America! America!  
God shed his grace on thee  
And crown thy good  
With brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!
2. O beautiful for pilgrim feet  
Whose stem impassioned - stress  
A thoroughfare for freedom beat  
Across the wilderness!  
America! America!  
God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul  
In self-control,  
Thy liberty in law!
3. O beautiful for heroes proved  
In liberating strife.  
Who more than self the country  
loved  
And mercy more than life!  
America! America!  
May God thy gold refine  
Till all success  
Be nobleness  
And every gain divine!
4. O beautiful for patriot dream  
That sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam  
Undimmed by human tears!  
America! America!  
God shed his grace on thee  
And crown thy good  
With brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!
5. O beautiful for halcyon skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the enameled plain!  
America! America!  
God shed his grace on thee  
Till souls wax fair  
As earth and air  
And music-hearted sea!
6. O beautiful for pilgrims feet,  
Whose stem impassioned stress  
A thoroughfare for freedom beat  
Across the wilderness!  
America ! America !  
God shed his grace on thee  
Till paths be wrought  
Through wilds of thought  
By pilgrim foot and knee!
7. O beautiful for glory-tale  
Of liberating strife  
When once and twice, for man's  
avail  
Men lavished precious life!  
America! America!  
God shed his grace on thee  
Till selfish gain  
No longer stain  
The banner of the free!
8. O beautiful for patriot dream  
That sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam  
Undimmed by human tears!  
America! America!  
God shed his grace on thee  
Till nobler men  
Keep once again  
Thy whiter jubilee!

