

***THIS TRAIN IS BOUND FOR GLORY:***  
**GOSPEL MUSIC AND**  
**AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY**

**TEACHER'S GUIDE**  
**FOR GRADES K-3**

# About the Book

National Board educator, speaker, historian, and award-winning author, Alice Faye Duncan, has written more than a dozen books for children. Her latest release, *This Train Is Bound for Glory*, is a delightful introduction to a traditional African American spiritual with a unique blend of story and music.

Perfect for Black Appreciation Month, Juneteenth, Black Music Month, or any time of the year, this book includes questions and activity ideas to help young children gain a richer understanding of the iconic song's history and meaning.

## Getting Started and Pre-Reading

- 1 Before reading the book, present the cover. Ask students to share their thoughts on what the story may be about. (Remind students that there are no right or wrong answers.)
- 2 The train is a main theme of the book. A train is a type of transportation that is made of connected vehicles and travels on a rail or track. Trains can be used to move people or objects from one place to another. More train facts for children are listed [here](#). Discuss the definition of trains with students.
- 3 Invite students to name different types of trains and/or any trains they have ridden on. Take the opportunity to show various types of trains such as locomotive (steam trains, electric trains, maglevs) and passenger trains (subways, high speed trains, monorail, trams).
- 4 Discuss other modes of transportation via land, water, and sea. Invite students to share and describe how they are different from trains.

# Discussion Questions and Activities

## Introduction to African American spirituals

Play a video or audio version of “This Train Is Bound for Glory” by Sister Rosetta Tharpe (a live performance version is available on [YouTube](#)). Invite students to listen to the song and invite them share their thoughts about it. Using the information in pages 4 to 6 of this guide, present the history of gospel music and the origins of African American spirituals to your students.

## Singalong

This activity is adapted from a virtual singalong lesson by *The Voices Foundation*. Watch their virtual singing assembly video of “This Train Is Bound for Glory” on [YouTube](#) and conduct a singalong session with your students. Refer to this [teaching resource](#) for more music extension activities.

## Your song in action

Throughout history, many famous musicians have created their own versions of “This Train Is Bound for Glory”. Each rendition contains new travelers and images in this lively song. Look in the back of the picture book by Alice Faye Duncan for information and ideas on how to invite students to create their own version of the song.

## Parts of a passenger train

Discuss passenger trains as mode of transportation and use the illustrations of the trains in the book as an example. Introduce simple nomenclature for parts and elements of a passenger train such as the engine, chimney, wheels, train track, train car, passenger, and train conductor. Pages 7 and 8 feature an activity sheet with an answer key.

# Discussion Questions and Activities

## Onomatopoeia: Train edition

In the story, the author uses sound words (also known as onomatopoeia) to bring the train to life. Discuss the sounds that you hear a train make (e.g., choo-choo, woo-wooo, zip, and zoom). Invite students to mimic some of the sounds one might hear from a train. Examples include: a loud train sound (e.g., a train whistle or the train wheels screeching), a soft train sound (e.g., the rumble of a distant train), a fast train sound (e.g., the whoosh of a train moving past), and a slow train sound (e.g., the sound of the wheels as a train begins to move). Use the worksheet in page 9 to list onomatopoeic words of sounds made by trains.

## Glory bound

Invite students to imagine their own glory train and the glorious place it is bound for. Discuss the definition of the word “glory” and its synonyms *splendor*, *great beauty*, *praise*, *honor*, or *a height of achievement*. Page 10 includes an accompanying worksheet for this activity.

## Coloring page

Refer to page 11 for a coloring page adapted from the picture book cover.

## Virtual author storytime

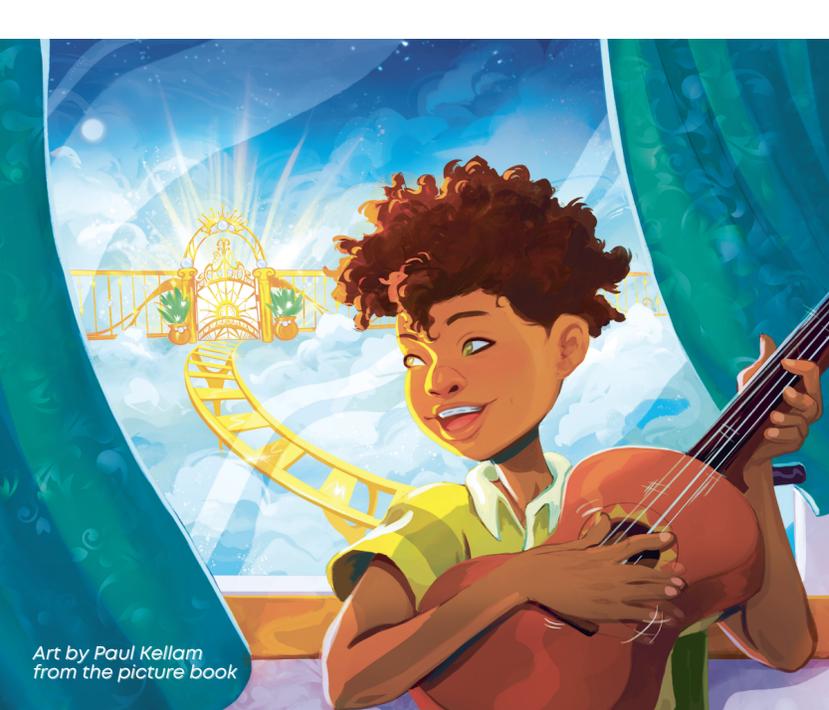
Join author Alice Faye Duncan as she hosts a virtual read-and-sing-along of *This Train Is Bound for Glory* on the *Brightly Storytime* YouTube channel: [bit.ly/thistrain-readalong](https://bit.ly/thistrain-readalong).

# The History of Gospel Music

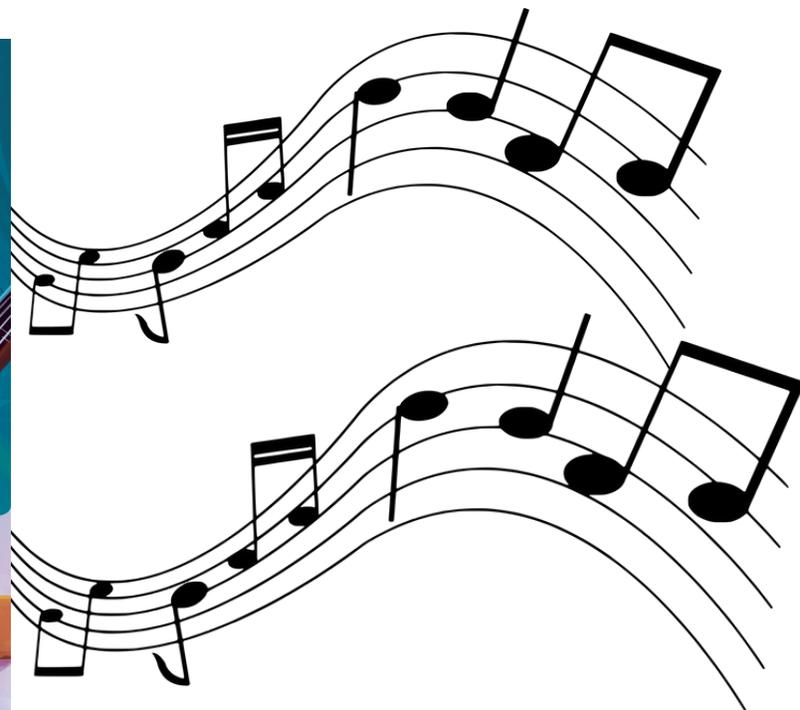
## Black gospel music and spirituals

Gospel music, which often includes instruments such as drums, bass, and the organ, has various roots but it is largely influenced by African American spirituals. Spirituals were originally sung by enslaved African Americans during the slavery period to express their emotions. Early Black music in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was shaped by the hardships of slavery. The songs that emerged were spirituals, work songs, and folk songs.

For many African Americans, music is a tradition and important cultural element. In the days of American slavery, it was illegal to teach enslaved people to read and write. For most enslaved people, music was a primary form of communication. Their songs helped them express what they believed and the things they cared about in celebrations. They also sang songs to keep a constant rhythm and pass the time while doing manual labor. In the face of oppression and seemingly hopeless conditions, enslaved people remained hopeful through music.



Art by Paul Kellam  
from the picture book



# The History of Gospel Music

## What is a spiritual?

According to the *Library of Congress*, African American spirituals, known as ‘spirituals,’ are “a type of religious folksong that is most closely associated with the enslavement of African people in the American South”. Spirituals are considered one of the largest and most important forms of American folk music.

Spirituals originated from a combination of African musical traditions and European Christian hymns. During the institution of American slavery, spirituals formed the secret language used as hidden codes to guide enslaved people to freedom on the Underground Railroad. The songs became widespread in the last decades of the eighteenth century, eventually leading to the abolition of legalized slavery in the 1860s. They gave many enslaved people hope for the future. Today, spirituals are an essential and important part of Black churches throughout the year.



Illustrations by Paul Kellam from the picture book

# The History of a Song: *This Train Is Bound for Glory*

## About the song

“This Train”—also known as “This Train Is Bound for Glory”—is an African American spiritual, written in a style of American folk music called gospel. It dates back to 1922 as a popular recording with lyrics evolving across the ages. Since then, famous singers like Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Louis Armstrong, Johnny Cash, and Big Bill Broonzy have added their own creative lyrics and recorded the song in various genres, including jazz, bluegrass, and a popular gospel tune.

## How did the song come about?

During the years of American slavery, enslaved African Americans freed themselves and ran away. They used lyrics in spirituals to share secret codes as they escaped on the Underground Railroad, a secret network of people who offered shelter and aid to enslaved people from the South.

The word “glory” was commonly used in sacred and spiritual spaces like churches, and often served as a metaphor for heaven. Thus, enslaved people used it as a hidden code for “freedom.” The Underground Railroad was associated with the song “This Train is Bound for Glory,” with glory referring to freedom.



# PARTS OF A PASSENGER TRAIN



# PARTS OF A PASSENGER TRAIN

chimney

train conductor

passenger



engine

wheels

train track

train car

# ONOMATOPOEIA



**WHAT SOUNDS WOULD YOUR TRAIN MAKE?**  
List examples of onomatopoeic words for sounds made by a train in the speech bubbles below.

Words that phonetically imitate the sound they describe

Used in stories to help readers 'hear' a word

The use of a word to represent a particular sound in stories

Used to make stories more engaging to read



# THIS TRAIN IS BOUND FOR . . .

Imagine your own glory train is headed for a glorious place!  
Draw and describe your train and its special destination in the space below.



THIS TRAIN IS  
BOUND FOR

GLORY



THIS IS A COLORING PAGE FROM THE BOOK, THIS TRAIN IS BOUND FOR GLORY

WORDS BY ALICE FAYE DUNCAN | ART BY PAUL KELLAM | VISIT [ALICEFAYEDUNCAN.COM](http://ALICEFAYEDUNCAN.COM) TO LEARN MORE



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