

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. Research writings during the Civil War about slaves and look for negative stereotypes. Define and discuss the concept of stereotypes.
2. Research the various accomplishments of African-Americans which belie the stereotypes of them.
3. Research the type(s) of music played by Tom Bethune.

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BLIND TOM: THE STORY OF TOM BETHUNE

Program BVH V221

Teacher's Guide

Exclusive School Building
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BLIND TOM: THE STORY OF TOM BETHUNE

Program BVH V221

Time—30:00

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- to dramatize the life and music of the slave Tom Bethune
- to show how the conditions of slavery affected both black and white people
- to show some stereotypes of African-Americans and how false they are when compared to the facts of their accomplishments

BEFORE VIEWING

Briefly discuss and define slavery as it existed in the U.S. before the Civil War, and the differences in living and working conditions for slaves who worked in the fields and those who worked in the houses.

SUMMARY

A dramatization of the true story of a Civil War-era slave—born blind—who was discovered to be a musical prodigy. In 1849, Thomas Bethune, known as Blind Tom, was born in Georgia. He possessed an unerring ear and a marvelous memory. He developed a repertoire of 7,000 musical pieces which he learned to play on the piano by having others play to him. Indentured all his life, Blind Tom found an artistic freedom in the music he composed and performed for audiences in America and Europe.

Blind Tom: The Story of Tom Bethune has won many awards including the Emmy, Ruby Slipper, and Gold Apple.

AFTER THE PROGRAM

1. As an adult, Tom Bethune recalls his childhood as a slave. Did his family work in the field or the house? What advantage did that give him over other slaves?

2. Why does Mary Bethune say "I'm going to be a concert pianist when I grow up, even though they say nice girls don't do things like that"? What does this say about what was considered proper regarding the arts and entertainment during this period in history?
3. Why is Tom afraid to touch the piano at first? What else were slaves, even slaves working in the homes, forbidden to do? How do you suppose some slaves learned to read and write?
4. General Bethune calls Tom's hands "clumsy." What does this tell us about how slaves were usually viewed by their owners?
5. How did the women react upon first hearing Tom play? What does Tom's own mother tell him he must remember? What does this tell you about how some slaves might have viewed themselves?
6. How does Tom's father react to the news Tom can play?
7. What does the General threaten to do if Tom can't find something useful to do? If Tom is sold, will his family go with him? Why is the General worried about whether Tom can do something useful? What does this tell us about the value of slaves to their owners?
8. What causes the General to change his mind about Tom's value? What does he do with Tom? How do his parents react?
9. How does the General get Tom back in his possession? How does he use Tom's music then? Why can't Tom's parents take him away from the General after the Civil War gives them freedom?
10. Discuss two ideas from the program: "freedom is just a word" and "your music is a better kind of freedom" as they apply to Tom and his mother, and to the experience of African-Americans during the Civil War-era.