

ST. CROIX, DEAR ST. CROIX

Migration, Youth Voice, Community & the Future of St. Croix

A Kallaloo Framework Lesson Plan for High School Students

Grade Level	High School
Time	45–60 minutes
Theme	Migration, identity, youth voice, civic responsibility
Primary Source	Historic song associated with Virgin Islands folk performer and poet Marie Richards

Essential Question

What does it mean for young people to have faith in St. Croix?

Objective

Students will use a historic Virgin Islands song to compare challenges facing St. Croix in the early 1900s with issues facing young people today. Students will consider why people leave, what keeps them connected to home, and how youth can contribute to St. Croix's future.

Historical Background

During the early years of U.S. Navy rule, St. Croix faced serious economic challenges. Declining sugar production, limited investment in agriculture and economic development, and long periods of drought weakened the island's economy. Prohibition, which was extended to the Virgin Islands in 1921, created additional economic challenges by restricting the production and sale of alcoholic beverages and affecting St. Croix's rum industry. Together, these conditions contributed to economic hardship during the 1920s and encouraged many Virgin Islanders to seek opportunities elsewhere, particularly in New York City. Between 1917 and 1930, the population of the Virgin Islands declined by approximately 15 percent, while St. Croix experienced an even greater population decline. These changes reflected a period when many Virgin Islanders were searching for greater economic opportunities while maintaining strong connections to their home islands.

Song Write-Up

The song associated with Virgin Islands folk performer and poet Marie Richards provides a meaningful reflection on migration, identity, and love of home during a difficult period in St. Croix's history. Written during a time when economic hardship, declining sugar production, drought, and limited opportunities contributed to many Virgin Islanders leaving the islands, particularly for New York City, the song captures the emotions surrounding migration and separation from home. Addressed to St. Croix with affection and hope, it encourages young Virgin Islanders to remain connected to their homeland and to consider their role in shaping its future. More than a song of love for St. Croix, it serves as a cultural record of a generation experiencing migration and change in the early 1900s.

Through the Kallaloo Framework, the song can help students explore the connections between history, music, migration, family memory, identity, and community while considering what it means for Virgin Islanders—whether at home or abroad—to remain connected to the islands and contribute to their future.

About Marie Richards

Marie Richards (1890–1960) was a Virgin Islands folk singer, musician, poet, nurse, and cultural figure associated with St. Croix. Born in St. Maarten, she came to St. Croix as a young woman. Her songs and poems reflected Virgin Islands history, culture, places, Carnival, and everyday life. She performed her folk songs while playing the drum or guitar, bringing the stories and traditions of the Virgin Islands to her music. Historical sources also connect Richards directly to “St. Croix, Dear St. Croix,” identifying the song as one of her works. Her music and writings provide important examples of Virgin Islands cultural memory.

Suggested Visual: Marie Richards – Folklore Melodies album cover. The St. John Historical Society preserves information from the album notes describing Richards singing her folk songs while playing drum or guitar.

Core Lesson Activities (45–60 Minutes)

Activity 1 – Why Were People Leaving?

Briefly introduce the economic conditions of the 1920s. Ask students to imagine that they were young people living in St. Croix during that period.

Discussion question: Would you have considered leaving St. Croix for better opportunities? Why or why not?

Activity 2 – Listen for the Message

Play the historic recording of “St. Croix, Dear St. Croix.” Ask students to listen for three things:

- What problem do you hear?
- What hope do you hear?
- What responsibility is being placed on young people?

Focus line: “St. Croix, we have not lost faith in you.”

Ask students what they think this message meant to young Virgin Islanders at the time.

Activity 3 – St. Croix Then and Now

As a class, compare concerns from the historical period with concerns young people may have about St. Croix today. Allow students to supply the present-day ideas from their own experiences and observations.

St. Croix Then	St. Croix Today
People leaving for opportunities	Are young people still leaving? Why?
Economic difficulties	What challenges do young people see today?

Concern about the island's future	What concerns do students have about St. Croix's future?
Youth encouraged to believe in St. Croix	What would strengthen young people's faith in St. Croix today?

Activity 4 – Dear St. Croix

Students create a short response beginning with:

“Dear St. Croix, we have not lost faith in you because...”

Their response should include:

- One thing they love about St. Croix.
- One challenge they believe needs attention.
- One way young people can help St. Croix move forward.

Students may present their response as a letter, poem, spoken-word piece, poster, drawing, photograph, short video, or audio recording.

Students should connect their response to at least one idea they heard in the historical song.

Optional Kallaloo Extensions

Community Connection (Optional)

Students speak with a parent, grandparent, elder, or other community member and ask: “Have you ever considered leaving St. Croix for better opportunities? Why or why not?” Students may share what they learned during the next class discussion.

Kallaloo Framework Connection

This lesson combines history, music, student voice, community knowledge, oral history, and civic engagement. Students are not only learning about migration in the past; they are using their own experiences and the voices of community members to think about St. Croix's present and future. Students become active storytellers and stakeholders in how Virgin Islands history and identity are understood.

Kallaloo Framework Standards Alignment

This lesson aligns with the following Kallaloo Framework Cultural Standards:

CS.C.B.1 – Interdisciplinary Virgin Islands Cultural Education

Students explore migration and Virgin Islands culture through history, music, civics, discussion, and creative expression.

CS.C.B.2 – Cultural Systems Over Time

Students compare conditions in St. Croix during the early 1900s with issues affecting St. Croix and young people today.

CS.C.B.3 – Virgin Islands Pride

Students reflect on what they value about St. Croix and consider how young people can contribute to the island's future.

CS.C.C.1 – Oral Tradition and Cultural Knowledge

Students engage with a historic Virgin Islands song and may incorporate family and community stories to explore migration, identity, and connections to home.

CS.C.D.2 – Students as Stakeholders

Students use their own experiences and observations to discuss issues affecting St. Croix and consider ways young people can contribute to their community.

CS.C.D.3 – Social and Interpersonal Learning

Through class discussion, reflection, and optional community interviews, students learn from one another and from family members, elders, and other community members.

CS.C.D.4 – Technology for Documenting and Sharing Knowledge

Students may use photography, video, audio recordings, and other digital formats to document and share their responses.

CS.C.E.1 – Active Learning and Critical Thinking

Students interpret a historic cultural source, compare past and present conditions, and consider its message in relation to migration, community, and St. Croix's future.

CS.C.E.2 – Preserving History and Customs

Students engage with Virgin Islands music, oral history, cultural memory, and community stories as sources for understanding and preserving Virgin Islands history and culture.

CS.C.E.3 – Civic Engagement

Students consider the role of young people in their community and identify ways they can contribute to St. Croix's future.

CS.C.E.4 – Emerging Technology

Optional multimedia activities allow students to use contemporary tools to document and communicate Virgin Islands history, culture, and community experiences.

Creative Extension (Optional)

Ask: If this song were rewritten by young Virgin Islanders today, what would it say about St. Croix?

As an extension, students can work individually or in groups to create a modern response to the historic song through poetry, music, art, photography, or video.

Simple Assessment

Assess students based on participation in discussion, their ability to connect the historical song to migration and community issues, and completion of the “Dear St. Croix” response.

Sources

- St. John Historical Society. “Marie Richards in Folklore Melodies.”
<https://stjohnhistoricalsociety.org/media/music/marie-richards-in-folklore-melodies/>
- The St. Croix Avis, February 23, 1945. Article recalling “St. Croix, Dear St. Croix” and identifying Marie Richards as its poet. Library of Congress digital newspaper collection.
- Zoop Zoop Zoop: Traditional Music and Folklore of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. Notes for “Clear the Road,” Marie Richards, St. Croix, 1957.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Census of the Virgin Islands of the United States, November 1, 1917*. Washington, D.C., 1918.
<https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1918/dec/1917-census-virigin-islands.html>
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. *1930 Census: Population—Virgin Islands*. Washington, D.C. Includes population data for the Virgin Islands and St. Croix for 1917 and 1930.
<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1930/population-volume-1/03815512v1ch11.pdf>