



The Fisk Jubilee Singers

Read the article about the Fisk Jubilee Singers. As you read, highlight or underline the most important ideas.

Today just about everyone can go to school. But years ago, most black Americans weren't allowed to get an **education**. That was because they were **slaves**. Most slaves never learned to read or write. But in 1865 the slaves were freed. That meant that they could go to school.

5 Going to school was important to the freed slaves, but it wasn't always easy. Sometimes there were no schools that would **accept** black students. Sometimes there were not enough teachers. Sometimes there just wasn't enough money. That was the problem at Fisk University.

10 Fisk University was started in 1866, in Nashville, Tennessee. It was the first American university to accept all men and women. When Fisk opened, classes were held in old army hospital buildings. The buildings weren't much. But going to school was a **thrilling** experience for these students.

15 Five years later, in 1870, money became a serious problem for Fisk. The university needed money to repair old buildings and to build **permanent** buildings. Money could save the school. But where would the money come from?

1. So far, the article has been about _____

Continue reading to find out what the students at Fisk did to earn money for the school. Keep underlining or highlighting the most important ideas.

George White was a music teacher at Fisk University. He decided to create a singing group. He thought the group could travel across the country and sing. Each **concert** they gave would help raise the money that the school needed.

20 The group White started in 1871 was made up of nine Fisk students. He named the group the “Fisk Jubilee Singers.” He got the idea for the name from the Bible. The Bible says that in the “year of jubilee,” all slaves will be set free. Most of the Fisk students had been slaves. The “Fisk Jubilee Singers” seemed like the perfect name.

25 The Fisk Jubilee Singers began singing all over the country. Their first concerts were held in small towns in the northern states. The group sang popular **ballads** and **traditional** American songs. The concerts were good, but not very successful.

30 But George White had an idea. He thought that the group should sing slave songs, the songs of their **ancestors**. Some of those songs had been sung by slaves for many years. They had been passed down from **generation** to generation.

35 The Jubilee Singers weren’t sure that they wanted to share those songs. But they gave it a try. They began to sing the slave songs called “**spirituals**.” They sang for people who had never heard spirituals before.

At first people were surprised by the spirituals. But very quickly, they grew to love the songs and the group who sang them. Soon the group started singing in big cities, not just in small towns. In 1872 the President of the United States invited them to sing at the White House.

40 The Jubilee Singers had done something special. They were the first group to sing traditional slave songs in front of an **audience**. As they became famous, they made spirituals popular. This allowed them to keep alive the songs of their past.

2. George White was _____

3. The Fisk Jubilee Singers were special because _____

ballads (noun)
songs that tell a story

ancestors (noun)
the people in your
family who lived long
before you were born

spirituals (noun)
religious songs
developed by black
communities

Finish reading the article to find out what how the Fisk Jubilee Singers saved their school.

45 In 1873 White added two more people to the Jubilee Singers. Also in that year, the singers went to Europe for the first time. They performed in Europe for many years. While they were there, they sang for many important and famous people. They even sang for the Queen of England. She thought the music was so beautiful that she cried.

50 The Jubilee Singers **earned** over \$50,000 their first year in Europe. It was enough money to save Fisk. The university used that money to build their first permanent building. The building was finished in 1876. It was called Jubilee Hall. It was named after the singers.

Fisk University continues to grow today. And the Jubilee Singers continue to sing new songs as well as the spirituals sung by the first singers.

55 Every October 6, Fisk celebrates Jubilee Day. This is to honor the original Jubilee Singers. Without their help, the school might not be here today.

4. The Fisk Jubilee Singers were able to save their school by _____

5. What do you think would have happened if the Fisk Jubilee Singers hadn't started singing spirituals?

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