Do Now: Listen and Analyze

Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?

**Purpose:** To examine the lyrics to a popular American song.

**Context:** In 1932, songwriters “Yip” Harburg and Jay Gorney worked together to create songs for a Broadway show called “New Americana.” One of their songs, “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?” became immensely popular with the American public, and two different recordings shot to the top of the charts in 1932.

**Directions:** Listen to Bing Crosby’s recording of the song, while reading along with the lyrics below. Write down answers to the following questions:

1) What is the message of the song?
2) What is the tone of the song?
3) What words or musical devices reveal the message and the tone?

"Brother, Can You Spare a Dime," lyrics by Yip Harburg, music by Jay Gorney

They used to tell me I was building a dream, and so I followed the mob,
When there was earth to plow, or guns to bear, I was always there right on the job.
They used to tell me I was building a dream, with peace and glory ahead,
Why should I be standing in line, just waiting for bread?

Once I built a railroad, I made it run, made it race against time.
Once I built a railroad; now it's done. Brother, can you spare a dime?
Once I built a tower, up to the sun, brick, and rivet, and lime;
Once I built a tower, now it's done. Brother, can you spare a dime?

    Once in khaki suits, gee we looked swell,
    Full of that Yankee Doodly Dum,
    Half a million boots went slogging through Hell,
    And I was the kid with the drum!

Say, don't you remember, they called me Al; it was Al all the time.
Why don't you remember, I'm your pal? Buddy, can you spare a dime?

    Once in khaki suits, gee we looked swell,
    Full of that Yankee Doodly Dum,
    Half a million boots went slogging through Hell,
    And I was the kid with the drum!

Say, don't you remember, they called me Al; it was Al all the time.
Say, don't you remember, I'm your pal? Buddy, can you spare a dime?

Now listen to Rudy Vallee's recording of the song, while reading along with the lyrics above. Write down answers to the following questions:

1) What is the message of the song?
2) What is the tone of the song?
3) What words or musical devices reveal the message and the tone?

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2 For our purposes, the tone that we are examining is the mood created by the author.