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**HISTORY TO MUSIC:** Composer Lynda Roth has set American history to music.

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## **Laguna composer is an American muse**

### **Composer Lynda Roth sets American history to music for students.**

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STAFF WRITER

Lynda Roth has breathed new life into American history through music.

The Laguna Beach composer has set excerpts from American historical and literary documents to music to teach music across the curriculum, similar to how children learn the alphabet.

Through her nonprofit organization, The Muse Project, Roth is teaming with Penn Literacy Network, a University of Pennsylvania professional development program, to package her compositions for the classroom through lesson plans, workbooks and music on CDs and in sheet music.

This is Penn Literacy Network's first foray into music as a teaching method, said executive director Bonnie Botel-Sheppard, a lifelong friend of Roth's.

"It's another way of learning and making sense of text," Botel-Sheppard said. "Not only do they sing, but they listen and interpret text in a way that is quite unique."

Since coming up with the idea in June 2005, Roth has composed a little more than an hour's worth of choral and orchestral music with lyrics pulled from literature and historical documents.

The program will be piloted at Sage Hill School in Newport Beach and at Penn Manor High School in Millersville, Penn., this year.

The first course, "America Revealed," looks at America's origins and Manifest Destiny.

In this, Roth contrasts the ideals set forth in documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution with the reality of what happened through the eyes of various groups – Christopher Columbus, the Mayflower Pilgrims and Thomas Paine as well as the Native Americans who were displaced from their lands.

"As kids hear the music from literature, they understand the concept of the American Dream, but at what cost? It's not black and white," she said. "The purpose is to start to get a perspective on what the American Dream is and how it will expand and contract."

Botel-Sheppard's daughter, Lara, was the first teacher to use Roth's work in her Millersville, Penn., classroom last spring. When teaching about the Indian Removal Act of 1830, she had her 9th-grade students read the lyrics from Roth's song "You Will Go," which rewords the act, and then write poems based on the reinterpretation.

She said it helped her students internalize the dense historical document.

"When you're dealing with primary source document, it's not written for high school students to be reading," Botel-Sheppard said. "What Lynda's work has beautifully done is that she's not dumbed it down, ... but added more of an emotional... way into the documents, to understand what's really going on, making it something that they can relate to."

To see a video of the Sage Hill Singers performing selections from "America Revealed," or other samples of Roth's work, go to [www.lyndaroth.com](http://www.lyndaroth.com).

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