

Freedom Songs of the Civil Rights Movement

Museum Connection: Art and Enlightenment

Purpose: Students will examine the historical context of music and the way that music was used as a voice of the people by studying and singing freedom songs of the Civil Rights Movement.

Course: High School General Music Classes with cross-curricular connections to Social Studies and English/Language Arts.

Time Frame: 6-7 class periods

Correlation to State Standards: High School General Music ELOs

II. A. 1 – The student will identify various roles in society performed by musicians and will describe contributions of representative individuals for each role.

II. A. 2 – The student will identify various functions of music in diverse cultures throughout history.

II. A. 4 – The student will demonstrate knowledge of the diversity of musical expression and the creative processes from which these endeavors emerge.

II. B. 1 – The student will demonstrate knowledge of the historical, musical, and cultural background of a representative sample of musical works.

II. B. 2 – The student will identify social and political events that have affected the writing style of great composers.

Objectives:

- Students will identify various roles in society performed by musicians and will describe contributions of representative individuals for each role.
- Students will identify various functions of music in diverse cultures throughout history. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the historical, musical, and cultural background of a representative sample of musical works.
- Students will identify social and political events that have affected the writing style of great composers

Vocabulary and Concepts:

Boycott	a concerted effort to get people to stop buying goods and services from a company or person in order to punish that company or to coerce its owner into changing policies.
Desegregate	to eliminate the practice of segregation, including any practice or law that requires isolation of individuals due to their race.
Discrimination	prejudice that is usually based on race, religion, class, sex, or age.
Grassroots	the ordinary people in a community or the ordinary members of an organization, as opposed to the leadership. The origin, basis, fundamental aim, or basic meaning of something.
Integration	the process of bringing a group into equal membership in society.
Jim Crow Laws	laws that separated people on the basis of race; aimed primarily at creating disadvantages for African-Americans after the Civil War.
Segregation	the separation of, or isolation of, a race, class, or ethnic group from the rest of society.
Sit-in	a form of demonstration used by African Americans to protest discrimination, in which the protestors sat down in a segregated business and refused to leave until they had received service equal to that of non-African American customers.

Materials:

For the Teacher:

“A Time for Justice” – Video which is part of a teaching kit entitled “America’s Civil Rights Movement” available from **Teaching Tolerance**. “I’m Gonna Let It Shine” CD by Bill Harley or “Sing for Freedom” CD – Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

<http://www.tolerance.org/kit/america-s-civil-rights-movement-time-justice>

<http://www.splcenter.org/what-we-do/teaching-tolerance>

<http://www.tolerance.org/teaching-kits>

For the Student:

Song sheets with the lyrics to the songs used in each lesson. Lyrics for many civil rights songs may be found and reproduced from this website:

<http://www.soulful-gospel-music-lyrics.com/CivilRightsLyrics.html>

Student Resource Sheet 1: Civil Rights Movement Word Bank
Student Resource Sheet 2: Graphic Organizer (several copies needed)
Student Resource Sheet 3: Civil Rights Movement Writing Prompt

Articles from *The African American Experience* text published by Globe Fearon.

http://www.pearsonlearning.com/microsites/_deleted/catalog/pdfs/PLGSE0405_091_126.pdf

Resources:

Publications:

I'm Gonna Let It Shine CD by Bill Harley, Round River Recordings #401, p1995.

Sing for Freedom CD – Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, p1992.

The African American Experience, Globe Fearon, c1992.

Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Its Songs by Guy Carawan and Candie Carawan, Sing Out Publications, c1990.

Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965, African American History by Juan Williams and Julian Bond, Penguin, c1988.

Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s Through the 1980s by Henry Hampton, Steve Fayer, Sarah Flynn, Bantam Publications, c1991.

Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories by Ellen Levine, Putnam Publishers, c2000.

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis, Laurel Leaf Publishers, c2000.

Freedom School, Yes! by [Amy Littlesugar](#), Philomel, c2001.

Freedom Summer by Deborah Wiles, Aladdin Publications, c2005.

Web Sites:

“A Time for Justice” – Video which is part of a teaching kit entitled “America’s Civil Rights Movement” available from **Teaching Tolerance**.

http://www.tolerance.org/teach/resources/civil_rights_movement.jsp

Historical Background:



Important figures in the Civil Rights movement.

Left – Martin Luther King, Jr., Right – Rosa Parks

Photos from:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King,_Jr.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Martin_Luther_King_Jr_NYWTS.jpg

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa_Parks

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s in America was a primarily non-violent political movement to encourage the US Government to outlaw discrimination against people. It developed as a movement to extend equal rights for all people, regardless of the color of their skin or their ethnic heritage. It also worked toward providing suffrage (voting rights) to African Americans particularly in the southern states.

Many people who were active in the Civil Rights Movement prefer the term "Southern Freedom Movement," because the struggle was about more than just civil rights under the law; it was also about fundamental issues of freedom, respect, dignity, and economic and social equality.

During the period 1955–1968, acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience produced crisis situations between activists and government authorities. Federal, state, and local governments, along with the police, and other lawmakers often had to respond immediately to defuse crisis situations. These crisis situations would then be reported in newspapers, on the radio, and on television. As a result, they brought attention to the inequities suffered by African Americans throughout the United States and particularly in the southern states.

During the Civil Rights movement, protesters employed civil disobedience tactics – deliberately breaking the law to highlight laws that were unfair. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat when a white passenger on a bus demanded the seat, and she was arrested for this act. This led to the

Montgomery Bus Boycott. African Americans would also stage sit at “whites-only” lunch counters and would be arrested for this practice. As a result, this highlighted the senselessness of discrimination – the demonstrators were not doing anything violent or subversive – they were simply sitting down. As a result they were arrested, because the color of their skin prevented them from receiving the same rights as white people.

Successful protests included boycotts (Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott of 1955-1956), sit-ins (Greensboro, NC sit-in of 1960) and marches (March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 1963).



**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. acknowledges the support of the crowd at the
March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 1963**

Photo from:

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martin_Luther_King_-_March_on_Washington.jpg

Many important laws were passed by the United States Government during the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned all discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment and in public accommodations. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibited discrimination in voting. Specifically, Congress intended the Act to outlaw the practice of requiring otherwise qualified voters to pass literacy tests in order to register to vote, which was a tactic that southern states used in order to prevent African Americans from voting. The Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965 allowed entry to the US to immigrants other than from Europe. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 banned discrimination in rental and sale of housing.

The Civil Rights movement was led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and was largely successful in its purpose of altering the way that Americans treated each other because of perceived cultural differences. Throughout much of the movement, music was used for solidarity and inspiration. A new era of folk singing and folk song writing was influenced by and inseparable from the political motivation of the movement. For many Americans today, the memories of the songs of the movement remain some of the most palpable links to this pivotal time in US history. We

must continue to sing these songs and to perform them, in order to honor the sacrifices made by Dr. King and many others during this era.

Lesson Development

All songs used in this lesson can be found on the *I'm Gonna Let It Shine* CD by Bill Harley.
http://www.billharley.com/store_level3.asp?ProductID=26

Motivation: Sing “Get On Board” from the *I'm Gonna Let It Shine* CD. Encourage students to join in as they get to know the song and feel comfortable with the melody. Keep working with the song until most, if not all, students are joining in some way by either singing or clapping. Explain how the most important thing is not the quality of the music making, but the amount of participation by everyone in the musical experience. Introduce call and response form, and show how it is used in this song. Explain how a song leader can use call and response form to change the lyrics of a song to share information. Mention how easy it is for others to join in using this singing technique. Discuss how this was used in the freedom songs of the Civil Rights Movement. Look for references to the movement in the words of the song. Discuss the historical background leading up to the Civil Rights Movement.

Activities:

1. Explain to students that they will be creating a timeline of the following events from the Civil Rights Movement, i.e. Bus Boycott, Little Rock, Sit-Ins, Freedom Rides, Birmingham, Freedom Summer, and Bloody Sunday. They will use readings from the chapters on the Civil Rights Movement in the textbook *The African American Experience* as a resource, as well as other resources. Students will also watch segments of the video “A Time for Justice” to correlate with each event and complete the circle graphic organizer while viewing each segment.
2. Have students listen to Freedom Songs from the Civil Rights Movement for information about the events in the lyrics. Students may recall information about the bus boycott when the song “If You Miss Me from the Back of the Bus” is presented.

<http://www.cocojams.com/content/african-american-civil-rights-songs>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ODLwix8DGM>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXTUf7pS-jU>

Share with students the connection between the sit-ins and the “Welcome Table” mentioned in the song by that title <http://www.cocojams.com/content/african-american-civil-rights-songs> and how that compares to getting a sandwich at a restaurant today for African Americans. The “Calypso Freedom” song mentions the bus burning that was part of the Freedom Ride experience.

<http://www.songsforteaching.com/calypsofreedom.htm>

<http://grooveshark.com/#!/search/song?q=Sweet+Honey+in+the+Rock+Calypso+freedom>

Have students make note of the sequence of historical events for the Freedom Riders as they are shared in that song. Explain that this song was sung partly to spread the “news” of what had happened on the freedom rides with other freedom fighters in other parts of the south at the time. The following songs may be used to introduce each event. Encourage students to join in the singing just as the freedom fighters of the Movement did:

- Bus Boycott – “If You Miss Me From the Back of the Bus” (focus on bus rides then and now).
- School Desegregation – “Oh Freedom” (focus on the freedom to get an education).
- Sit-ins – “I’m Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table” (focus on dining facilities then and now).
- Freedom Rides – “Calypso Freedom” (focus on the sequence of events shared in the song).
- Birmingham – “Hold On (Keep Your Eyes on the Prize)” (focus on who is represented by the mention of Paul and Silas in the song – Martin Luther King and aides, make connection to Paul and Silas from the Bible, Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 16).
- Freedom Summer – “Wade in the Water” (focus on what children like to do in the summer and the dangers of swimming in rivers and streams when denied access to the public swimming pool).
- Bloody Sunday – “Woke Up This Morning with My Mind on Freedom” (focus on the energy in this song and the use of the song to help the freedom fighters gather courage in mass meetings even while facing the dangers of the non-violent actions they were about to take).

3. Go over vocabulary specific for each event and include definitions for the words on **Student Resource Sheet 1: Civil Rights Movement Word Bank**. Assist students in completing **Student Resource Sheet 2: Graphic Organizer**. Complete a graphic for each event while watching the video. Provide any additional information from outside reading as well as background knowledge to help complete the graphic organizer. At the end of each class, have students write a paragraph summarizing the information about each of the events covered in class using information from their graphic organizer.

4. Encourage students to recognize that the Civil Rights Movement involved a large number of people and groups joining together to work for a common goal, and that they used music as a voice to get their message out as well as to unite them in their purpose. Music also gave them the strength and courage to go out and face the dangers and challenges that the freedom fighters had to face in their struggle.

5. Have students divide into presentation groups for each event. Information from the graphic organizer for their event should be used to assist in scripting the

presentation. Each group should be prepared to share their presentation with the class using one of the following formats:

- Eyewitness news report
- Talk show interview
- Dramatize the event
- Debate the two sides
- Oral history presentation – take the position of someone who was there
- Analysis – “we think they should have...”
- What if – change one thing and predict what might have happened if ...
- Application – How can someone use what happened from the event to change or work on one of today’s issues?
- Abstraction – If an event like this happened today, how would things be different?
- Presentation ideas of their own (with teacher approval).

6. After each group presentation, review the freedom song that correlates to their event so students have an opportunity to sing the song again and be reminded of the connection between the music and the history.

Assessment:

There are two elements to the assessment of this lesson – Group Presentation, and Individual Writing. You should decide how to weight these according to the skills and comfort level of your students. For example, for a class that loves to perform but finds writing to be difficult, you could weight the assessments 60/40; for a class that has difficulty with group work, but enjoys writing, you could weight it 40/60. You may also give students their choice of weighting the assessment if you wish.

Group Presentation Assessment:

Scoring tool for the group presentation:

- 4 – Information shared by all members of the groups was historically accurate and showed a clear understanding of the issue(s) surrounding the event.
- 3 – Information shared by all members of the groups were generally historically accurate but showed a limited understanding of the issue(s) surrounding the event.
- 2 – An attempt was made to share information about the event but was not completely historically accurate and did not show an understanding of the issue(s) surrounding the event.
- 1 – Limited attempt was made to share the information about the event.
- 0 – Students did not participate.

Individual Writing Assessment:

Distribute **Student Resource Sheet 3: Music Writing Activity**, and assign students to respond individually to the following prompt:

Pretend you are a freedom fighter in today's world. Select a political or social issue that you feel needs people's attention (for example: drugs, weapons, violence, or education). Write a speech to a group of today's freedom fighters telling them how you feel about this issue. Include information about what you feel needs to be changed. Describe how you might use something you learned from the Civil Rights Movement to help make changes. In your speech, name a freedom song that you could use for the issue you have selected and write down new words you might sing in the song to speak about your issue and reflect the time period that you are living in.

Scoring tool for the writing prompt:

- 4 – Prompt is completely written in the style of a speech with a clearly stated position on a political or social issue and with a connection made to the Civil Rights Movement.
- 3 – Prompt is generally well written in the style of a speech with a somewhat clear position on a political or social issue and a connection made to the Civil Rights Movement.
- 2 – Attempt is made to answer the prompt but position was unclear or there was no connection to the Civil Rights Movement.
- 1 – Limited attempt is made to answer the prompt.
- 0 – Students did not respond.

Closure:

Share the “theme song” of the movement – “We Shall Overcome.” Discuss the way the freedom fighters would come together and join hands when this song was sung. Review the key points about the movement including the efforts of many people and the role of music in uniting those people. Also, review how music tells the “story” of history. Encourage students to find songs today where people share their feelings about what needs to be changed in the world in their music.

Thoughtful Application:

What issues are of concern to people today? What songs are students familiar with in today's music which illustrate contemporary issues? Have students listen carefully to songs they hear on the radio and see if they can spot any songs that reflect contemporary political opinion. A good example may be John Mayer's song “Waiting on the World to Change.”

Lesson Extensions:

1. Look for information in the exhibits and offerings at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture about how Marylanders were involved in the Civil Rights Movement, as well as what impact the Movement had on African Americans in the 50's and 60's in Maryland.
2. Talk to older relatives about the 1960s, and find out if they have recollections of some of the songs from this era. Also, address what it means to sing these songs, or listen to them especially during the time when equality was hoped for in the nation.
3. Look for an opportunity to have the class share their group presentations with a social studies class, during a Black History Month program, or for a parent meeting.
4. Look for other historical time periods where music tells the “story” of the history. Look for this in the music of other cultures.

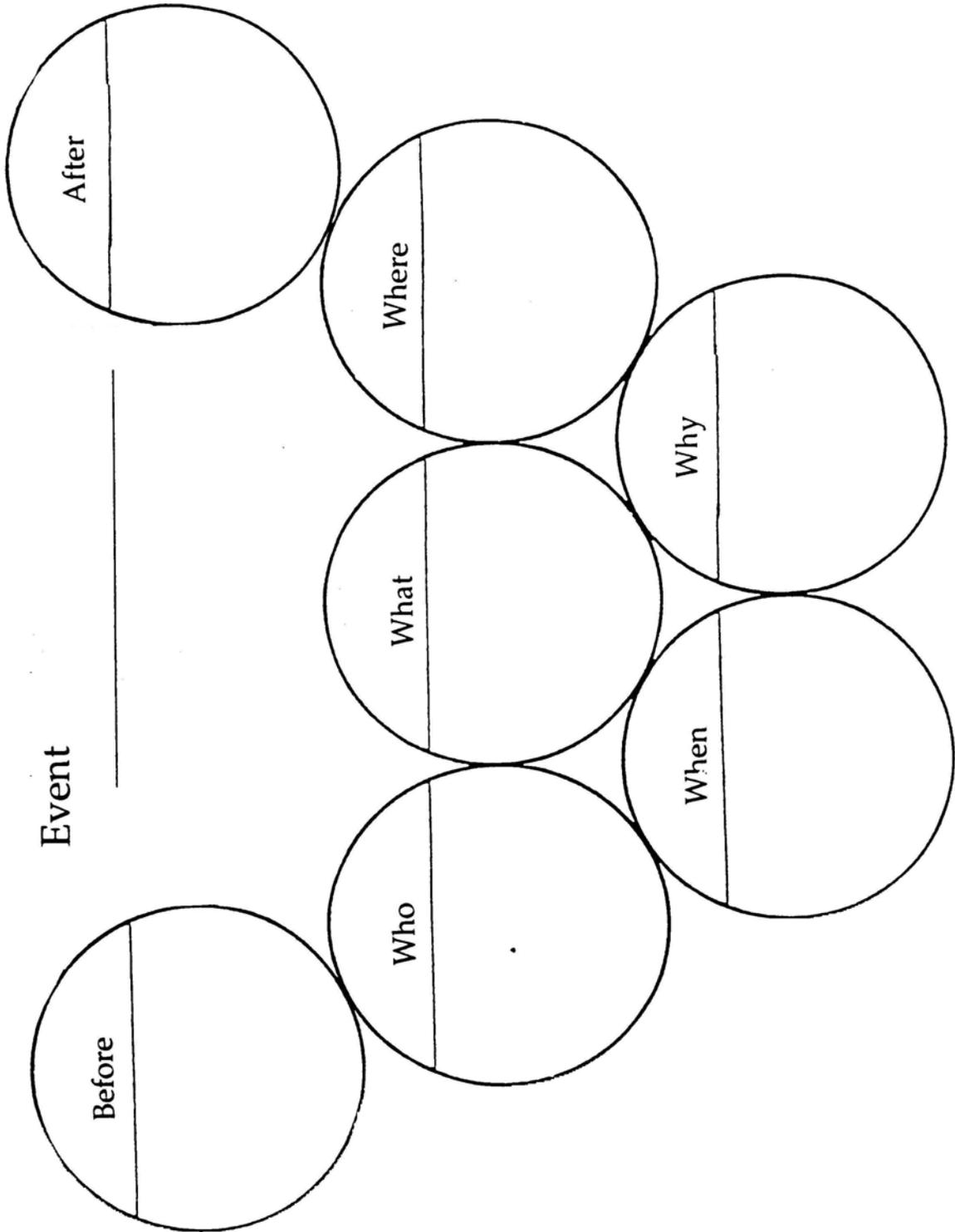
Student Resource Sheet 1

Civil Rights Movement Word Bank

Bus boycott	
Segregation	
Desegregation	
Integration	
Jim Crow laws	
Sit-in	
Non-violent	
Protest march	
Discrimination	
Mass Meetings	
Voter Registration	
Voting Rights	
Grassroots	

Student Resource Sheet 2

Graphic Organizer



Student Resource Sheet 3

Music Writing Activity Freedom Songs of the Civil Rights Movement

Name _____ Class _____

Pretend you are a freedom fighter in today's world. Select an issue you feel people need to work on (for example: drugs, weapons, violence, education). Write a speech to a group of today's freedom fighters telling them how you feel about this issue.

Include information about what you feel needs to be changed. Describe how you might use something you learned about from the Civil Rights Movement to help make changes. In your speech, name a freedom song that you could use for the issue you have selected and write down new words you might sing in the song to speak about your issue.

As you write you may want to do these things:

PRE-WRITING

Select an issue that you have strong feelings about. Write down what you would like to see done about this issue. Make a web of things people might do to help change things. Refer to the graphic organizers about the events of the Civil Rights Movement for ideas on how the same actions or strategies would work to help the issue you are writing about.

DRAFTING

Write a rough draft of your speech.

REVISING

Read your rough draft and think about what you have written. Imagine that you are listening to the speech.

Think about the questions below:

1. Does this speech share feelings about the issue as well as what people might do to help make a change?
2. Have you included information about the Civil Rights Movement to make a connection to this issue in today's world and how the past might help change the future?
3. Would you feel like getting involved from the language being used in the speech?
4. Have you included the name and new words to one of the freedom songs so that the topic of the new words fits the issue you have selected to write about?

After you have thought about whether your speech includes answers to these questions, you can write the final copy. Use notebook paper or computer for the final copy of your speech. Turn in all of your work.