

## TAH Lesson Plan

**Title:** Understanding the music of the civil rights movement

**Possible Subject Area(s):** social studies- High school grades 11/12

**Overview:** “Viewed as an original historical source, popular music reflects the diverse attitudes of the American public at different times in history. Music presents insights and multiple points of view as well as an emotional impact which other historical documents, particularly written, often lack. Through music, history comes alive and students can connect directly with people and events which may otherwise seem remote to them. As such, rock and roll can be a particularly powerful tool to introduce recent historical events and issues.” *Quote: Rock and Roll Hall of Fame*

This lesson focuses particularly on “protest” or “message” songs associated with the civil rights movement of the 1960s, a cause which inspired large numbers of Americans--and performers in particular--to civil disobedience and significantly influenced subsequent events and attitudes in this country.

**Essential Understanding:** Always supportive of populist causes, 1960s folk music first embraced the civil rights movement. Although music had not been a direct organizing force in the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycotts of 1955 and 1956, by the 1960 lunch-counter sit-ins, “freedom songs” had become central to the movement.

**Essential Questions:** Can a song written in response to a specific event transcend time and place and have a lasting appeal?

**CT Standards:**

**Objectives:**

**Students will be able to:**

1. understand the emotional impact of popular music associated with the civil rights movement;
2. identify connections between particular songs and historical events, attitudes and/or figures;
3. recognize multiple points of view toward the issue of race relations in America both historically and in contemporary society;
4. evaluate selected songs as effective tools for social protest and as historical documents
5. describe the role music played in the civil rights movement of the 1960s;

**Materials Needed:** CDs, tapes, records of selected civil rights music; lyrics to selected songs; primary source material (i.e. newspaper/magazine articles, photographs, etc.)

### **Suggested Activities/Procedures:**

#### **Day 1**

- **Details of the activity:**

1. Play Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" (also recorded by Peter, Paul and Mary and Stevie Wonder) as an introduction to the period and to the idea of a "protest" song. Lead class discussion. What are the main themes and attitudes expressed? Why would this song become an anthem of civil rights movement?

#### **Day 2**

- **Details of the activity:**

- What emotions are expressed by the song (lyrics and/or music)?
- 1. Divide class into small groups of 3 to 5 students. Assign one song to each group and distribute the lyrics. Instruct each group to listen carefully to the song and relate it to material covered in class, keeping in mind the following questions:

To whom is the song addressed?

What issues, problems, or events are presented in the song?  
Does the song seem to be written in response to a specific event?

What points of view or attitudes are revealed?

What were the circumstances at the time the song was released?

Does this song suggest any solutions to the issues/problems addressed?

How effective is this song as a social protest?

What, if any, relevance does this song have to American society today

Have groups report back to class on answers to these questions. Have class compare and contrast the multiple points of view found in the songs.

**Homework:** Have students find a current struggle for rights that exists today. They are to use a news article or a periodical to help describe the particular struggle. Bring the article to the following class.

### **Day 3**

- **Details of the activity:**

The entire class will sit in a circle and a Socratic seminar will be led by the teacher. Each student will present a brief summary of the article that was chosen for homework. Clarifying questions may be asked by the teacher or by fellow students.

Divide the class into groups of 3 to 5 students . Each group will choose a social issue presented by one of the group members(ie. Homework , and seminar) and compose an original three verse song or poem that outlines the points of their struggle.

## **Suggested Assessment/Evaluation**

- **Selected Response:** Have students write an essay integrating popular music of the period with other primary source material.
- **Open-ended Questions:**

In your opinion, which of the songs listened to in class have such an appeal?

Is there a contemporary song dealing with the issue of race relations that in your opinion will stand the test of time? Why?

## **Possible Extensions**

Compare attitudes found in 1960s protest songs to attitudes toward race relations as found in contemporary popular music. Ask students to consider the lasting impact of the civil rights movement. Suggested songs include: "Fight the Power" by Public Enemy, "Black Is Black" by Jungle Brothers, "Black to the Future" by Def Jef, "Black or White" by Michael Jackson and "Ebony and Ivory" by Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder. Students may also have suggestions.

## **Resources:**

### **Selected Recordings**

There are many songs which could be used in this unit.

"Abraham, Martin and John" Dion (Laurie, 1968)

"If I Had a Hammer (The Hammer Song)" Peter, Paul and Mary (Warner, 1962)

"The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" Bob Dylan (Columbia, 1964)

"Keep On Pushing" Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions (ABC-Paramount, 1964)

"People Got to Be Free" The Rascals (Atlantic, 1968)

"Respect Yourself" The Staple Singers (Stax, 1971)

"Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud(Part 1)" James Brown (King, 1968)

"Stand" Sly and the Family Stone (Epic, 1969)

"Think" Aretha Franklin (Atlantic, 1968)

"We Shall Overcome" Joan Baez (Vanguard, 1963)

**Websites**

[www.voicesofcivilrights.org/civil5.html](http://www.voicesofcivilrights.org/civil5.html) - 28k

[www.laborheritage.org/musicafricanamerican.html](http://www.laborheritage.org/musicafricanamerican.html) - 24k

[streams.wpsx.psu.edu/The\\_Role\\_of\\_Music\\_in01132.html](http://streams.wpsx.psu.edu/The_Role_of_Music_in01132.html) - 12k –

Submitted by Dennis Killian – May 6, 2008