

Using Music as a Common Language to Fight Racism

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Rationale

Participating in the seminar, *The Rise of the New South*, has given me an avenue of meeting my students' academic and social needs. Most of my students are African American, but they do not seem to know or understand their history or heritage, and so they choose to follow others instead of being their own person. They also do not have a firm grasp on the historical context of racism. Many times they do not understand how much blacks struggled in the late 1800's up until, and through, the Civil Rights Movement. Through this unit, I want to instill in my students an appreciation and respect for the struggles that others went through to give them the opportunities they have today. Many of my students have been through their share of struggles and life trials, already at such a young age. However, many of them take for granted the rights they have today as citizens. A large number of my students also do not believe in themselves. They have been beaten down by society because of their disabilities. Through these lessons, I hope to have my students realize that no matter what your disability or skin color is, you have to stand up for what you believe in just as African Americans have been doing since the Civil War.

Academically, I want my students to understand that music is not just for entertainment. For most of African American history, music has not always been about the money and fame. Even from the early slave songs, blacks have used music as a way of expressing feelings and as a non-violent approach to end injustices. Music has many different purposes and can be the sender of very powerful messages. Music can unite us all through a common language. We can overcome anything as long as we are united. I hope that my students begin to see music as a pathway to unity and as a tool to fight against racism or any other social injustice.

I teach K-12 General Music at a public separate school in Charlotte, North Carolina. A public separate school is designed for students who need a more restrictive setting, but is also still part of the public school system. Charlotte is the largest city in North Carolina, and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System is one of the twenty-five largest school districts in the United States. CMS is an urban school district with a very diverse population. The school where I teach is centrally located in the city, as our enrollment

includes students from every part of the district. My school is designed for students with severe emotional and behavioral disabilities, and is one of only two separate CMS schools for exceptional children. All students that are enrolled are entitled to, and ensured, a proper public education which is accommodated through their Individualized Education Plans. The average class size is eight to ten students with one teacher and a teacher assistant. These students have been found to be best served in the most restrictive setting, due to their need for a highly structured environment, the use of a behavior plan, and the need for a small class size. A very high percentage of these students receive free and/or reduced lunch and live in poverty. Additionally, most of these students come from a background of intensive restrictive settings and residential facilities, where they have fallen behind in their academic achievements, as well as fallen behind socially. Although I teach K-12 Music, this unit would be geared towards my high school classes because of the intensity of some of the songs and images selected. However, it could be modified to fit older middle school grades by replacing some of the more intense songs (“Mississippi Goddam”) with other protest songs such as Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On”.

Even though I teach in a unique and challenging setting, I think all teachers are faced with the challenge of showing students that violence is not the answer. Granted, many of my students often turn to fighting or physical aggression due to their disabilities and not being able to control their feelings/emotions appropriately. However, I feel that part of any educator’s quest should be to teach students to replace negative behaviors with positive behaviors. Showing my students how music, not violence, was used to combat racism will hopefully give my students the solid evidence they need to practice replacement behaviors in their own lives. Through the lyrics of the chosen songs in this unit, students will hopefully see that violence is not the only option and that other tools such as music, can provide the same, if not greater effect.

Objectives

For this unit, I have chosen seven songs that my students will study closely, from the lyrics to the events surrounding them. We will discuss the historical context of these events, the context and meaning of the lyrics, and how music can be used to express an idea or certain stance. I want to express to my students that music is what feelings sound like. We may not have lived in the era of lynching, but we can experience what it might have felt like through the power of song. Throughout various activities in this unit, the

students will strengthen various music skills. First, they will learn how to use music to express and convey feelings that otherwise may not be heard. They will also learn how to compose music and lyrics for a certain purpose. Students will also be expected to analyze music of a certain era, between the 1930's and the 1970's, listening for commonalities and contrasting differences.

Although music is the main focus of this unit, it is definitely not the only focus. Through this unit I will be able to strengthen literacy skills and fluency by reading lyrics to certain songs. Comprehension skills will also be strengthened through the reading of lyrics and discussions on what the lyrics mean. Interdisciplinary connections will also be apparent and will help students to link learning to other content area classrooms. For example, students will be able to link their learning of reading, reciting, and writing lyrics to their English and Literacy classroom. Also, students will be able to link their knowledge of the slave trade, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement to their Social Studies and History classrooms. Last, this unit will help strengthen critical thinking skills by forcing my students to think outside of the box and see things from others' perspectives.

Background

This unit will focus heavily on the history of racism in the southern United States. Students will need to understand certain events in order to make the connections of how the selected songs relate to the historical events. Therefore, I will provide students with the necessary historical background information needed to understand the songs and events.

Atlantic Slave Trade

The Atlantic Slave Trade, also known as the transatlantic slave trade, lasted from the 16th to 19th centuries. The slave trade consisted of primarily African people who were enslaved and transported to the colonies of the "New World." Most of the North American colonies were along the Atlantic coast, which made transportation of slaves by boat much more convenient. These African "slaves" were brought to the New World to labor on plantations, in fields, and in houses. In the early days of the new colonies, the Europeans practiced "Indian slavery," using the Native Americans to provide labor. However, Africans quickly began replacing the Indians due to their high death rates from

diseases such as Malaria, and the increased availability, after the 1680s, of African slaves at affordable prices. Most historians estimate that between 9.4 and 12 million Africans arrived in the New World, including Central and South America. However, the actual number of people taken from their home is higher due to millions of Africans dying during transport. Not only did these people die during transport, but many did not even make it to the ship. More than 10 million Africans captured and sold into slavery died on the march to the sea. With such grave conditions at sea during the “Middle Passage,” it is no wonder that most did not make it to the New World alive. Most slave ships were packed closely with Africans who were poorly fed, and made to sit in uncomfortable spaces with their limbs twisted to save space. Among the obvious diseases caused by the germs and infections aboard the ship, slaves often had to suffer through delirium and insanity. Showing your students a diagram of a slave ship may help them to visualize what it might have been like.

Slavery was an element in what is known as the “triangular trade” which involved four continents and millions of people. The first side of the triangle was the export of goods from Europe to Africa. African merchants and/or royalty would trade enslaved people to the Europeans. In return, the Europeans would pay the merchants a certain amount of goods for each captive traded. These goods would range from guns and ammunition to other factory produced goods such as textiles. The second side of the triangle exported enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World. Slaves would work to produce sugar, coffee, cocoa, and cotton. They would also at times work in mines, rice fields, logging, and construction. Plantation owners could buy and maintain slaves much cheaper than they could hire help to work the fields; they only bought a slave once. The third and final part of the triangle was the exportation of goods to Europe from the New World. The goods consisted of products from slave labor plantations such as cotton, sugar, tobacco, molasses, and rum.

The Civil War

On November 6, 1860, Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States. This outcome enraged the southern states who wrongly accused the moderate Lincoln of being an abolitionist. Not long after the vote, in December of 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union. By February of 1861, six more states (Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas) had seceded, and by that summer the total rose to eleven. These states became known as the Confederate States of America, under the leadership of Jefferson Davis.

In his inaugural address, Lincoln vowed not to abolish slavery where it already existed. Although this statement infuriated and horrified Lincoln's black supporters and their white allies, it was his hope that this proclamation would help him to prevent several border states from seceding, and perhaps, convince the Confederate States to rejoin the Union. However, this did not appease the Confederacy, and on April 12, 1861 they attacked Fort Sumter, thus beginning the Civil War.

Slaves began trying to escape and fled across Union lines. The government had not set a clear-cut rule about how to deal with escaped slaves. This quickly became a problem, as hundreds of slaves escaped to the North. There was not enough land for everyone, and soon escaped slaves found themselves in crowded camps, where many died of disease and starvation. Then, on August 6, 1861, Union officials labeled escaped slaves "contraband of war" and set some free. However, Lincoln still insisted that the war was being fought to uphold the Union, not to free slaves.

By 1862, the war had become a total war with enormous casualties on both sides. Union citizens were complaining about the horrible human costs of the war, and the Confederates were now forcing slaves to aid in the war effort. Lincoln realized that if he didn't make this war about freedom and union, the cause might be lost. So, on January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation which declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are and henceforward shall be free." However, this did not free those slaves in Union territory, and Lincoln had no real power to free those in enemy territory. The Emancipation Proclamation may not have ended slavery altogether, but it did signal the federal government's willingness to end slavery, and this motivated slaves to free themselves whenever a Union army was near. The Proclamation also set in motion the enlistment of blacks to fight for freedom as Union soldiers, which was a major turning point in the Civil War and in African American history.

13th Amendment

The 13th Amendment to the Constitution declared that "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude...shall exist within the United States." Formally abolishing slavery in the United States, the 13th Amendment was passed by the Congress on January 31, 1865, and ratified by the states on December 6, 1865. All Confederate States had to agree to this amendment before they could rejoin the Union. There were some advantages of rejoining

the Union and going forward with Reconstruction. This allowed males to vote, hold office as a United States Senator or Congressman, hold local and state offices, and helped advance the state in terms of their economy.

Still, even after the passing of the 13th Amendment, blacks in America (particularly the South) were fighting for their freedom. Although in the eyes of the government they were “free,” many blacks still faced oppression. Whites would only hire blacks for certain jobs, mainly sharecroppers or servants, and other low-pay and low-skill jobs where they could easily be cheated or fired. Whites assumed that blacks could not climb the social, educational, or economic ladders to success. So, they enforced that assumption with discrimination and violence, and blacks continued to live in poverty and fear. After the end of slavery, the federally-patrolled South began to change, and blacks experienced temporary citizenship. However, the Ku Klux Klan (the terrorist arm of the Democratic Party) and other groups continued racial persecution of blacks. After 1877, northern reformers seemed to give up on the South and conservative white southerners took over the state governments. These leaders gradually introduced various methods of control over the black population, instituting Jim Crow laws across many states. This system, which included sharecropping, disfranchisement, discrimination, segregation, convict-lease, chain gangs, and lynching, all but re-enslaved African Americans in the South. The Jim Crow era would last through most of the 1960s, finally ending with the Civil Rights Movements and federal legislation.

Protest Songs

This unit will focus heavily on certain songs I have chosen to represent the fight for racial equality in the United States, especially during the Civil Rights Movement. Since I am pairing each song with the historical events surrounding the same time, it is easier to list these songs in chronological order. However, the songs could be listed or paired in any order to best suit the needs of the unit.

“Strange Fruit”, by Billie Holiday

“Strange Fruit” actually began as a poem written by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish high school teacher from the Bronx. He wrote this poem in the 1930’s after seeing a gruesome photo of a Southern lynching of two black men. The metaphor of black lynching victims hanging like “fruit from blood-stained trees” with “bulging eyes and twisted mouth”

creates an image that is hard to forget. This poem condemned American racism in any facet, but particularly describes the lynching of African Americans in the South.

Contrary to some beliefs, Meeropol actually put the poem to music himself. The song was performed at political meetings and benefit gatherings to raise awareness of the problem in the South. In 1939, Meeropol got the song to Barney Josephson, a nightclub owner where Billie Holiday performed. Holiday put her own spin to the song with her lyrical interpretation and sorrowful tone. She began performing it nightly to an integrated audience. Although it was a big hit in the nightclubs, getting the song recorded was not an easy task. Holiday's label, Columbia Records, refused to have any part of the song, fearful of the backlash it might receive considering that "this was during a time in which the segregationist 'Southern Dixiecrats' played a leading role in the Democratic Party, as well as the Roosevelt administration." However, Holiday knew the impact that this song could have on the people, and continued trying to find a label that would record the song. Eventually, she turned to her friend Milt Gabler, who was in charge of Commodore Records. As he listened to Holiday sing the song, he wept. He immediately agreed to record the song.

"Strange Fruit" was very rarely played on the radio during the era of Jim Crow. Many radio stations were afraid of the backlash if the song received air-time. Some government officials even began asking if the song had been commissioned by the Communist Party and if Meeropol was linked to it. Some nightclubs even refused to allow Holiday to sing what had become her signature at the end of her shows.

This song became Holiday's biggest selling record. It may have seemed like a win-win for Holiday; she was able to deliver her message of anti-racism and make money in the process. However, her accompanist, Bobby Tucker, recalled that singing this song was all but easy for Holiday. Tucker stated that Holiday "would break down and weep after each time she sang it." The visual imagery of the lyrics was almost too much for anyone to bear. Her version of the song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1978. It was also given a spot on the list of *Songs of the Century* by the Recording Industry of America and the National Endowment for the Arts.

"I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free", by Nina Simone

Eunice Wayman, better known as Nina Simone, was born in the small town of Tryon, North Carolina in 1933. Although slavery had ended decades before, racism still existed

in this Jim Crow state, and Simone experienced it at an early age. She also discovered early that she had a talent for playing the piano. So, it was no surprise that she was asked to play in a local piano recital at the library in her hometown. As she was ready to play, with her parents in the front row, Simone recalled that “one of the white leaders in town came over and quietly asked them could they please move to the back, as was the custom then, because another white couple had come in and should have the front-row seat.” Simone spoke up from the stage and stated that they would not move and announced to everyone in attendance that if she was going to play she would be looking at her parents in the front row. She recounted that this moment changed her world completely. She later wrote that this was the moment when “racism became real to me like the turning on of a light.”

This was the beginning of a long journey for Simone. After attending the Julliard School of Music her senior year in high school, Simone applied for the Curtis Institute of Music. However, she was rejected from the Curtis Institute’s classical piano program, and felt that she was not given entrance because she was black. Soon, Nina Simone added vocals to her piano playing, and began fighting racism through song. She is known as one of the most influential civil rights activists, and many of her songs became anthems of the Civil Rights Movement.

“I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free” was written by Billy Taylor and Dick Dallas, and originally recorded by Simone. This song was a cry for freedom in the 1960s, amid race riots, segregation, and Jim Crow laws. Powerful lyrics such as, “I wish I could break all the chains holding me...remove all the bars that keep us apart, I wish you could know what it means to be me, then you’d see and agree that every man should be free”, equated Jim Crow with slavery and became a common language amongst civil rights activists around the nation.

“Mississippi Goddam”, by Nina Simone

You will want to clear the use of this song with administration and with your students’ legal guardian(s) before use in the classroom. If you do not feel comfortable using this song due to the title, the unit can stand without it. If you want to add another song in place of this one, you should research songs or anthems of the Civil Rights Movement.

This song is Simone’s response to two major events in the story of racism in the United States. On June 12, 1963 Medgar Evers was murdered in Mississippi, killed in

front of his house by the KKK. Evers was a very famous black leader in the Civil Rights Movement. He was also influential in the desegregation of the University of Mississippi and led boycotts against white merchants for the wrongful killings of blacks accused of crimes they did not commit. The second event occurred on September 16, 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama. The 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed by Klan members, killing four young black girls. Simone was so upset by these actions that she actually thought about making guns out of spare parts and killing members of the KKK. However, she realized that she knew nothing about killing people and that “an eye for an eye” would not solve the problem. Therefore, she turned to what she did know something about -- music.

In the introduction of the song, Simone cynically announces the song as "a show tune, but the show hasn't been written for it yet". The song begins with a lively, show tune feel, but demonstrates its political focus early on with its refrain "Alabama's got me so upset, Tennessee's made me lose my rest, and everybody knows about Mississippi *goddam*". Simone's main argument throughout the song is that the idea of bringing about change slowly, suggested by many civil rights activists, would only indeed cause more of the same tragedy. She consistently held the view that blacks should rise up and fight and not delay in their actions. This was representative of the younger generation of black activists who believed that Martin Luther King Jr. and his followers were going too slow. This is seen in the lyrics of the verse “You keep on saying ‘Go slow! Go slow!’ But that’s just the trouble (do it slow), Desegregation (do it slow), Mass participation (do it slow), Reunification (do it slow), Do things gradually (do it slow), But bring more tragedy (do it slow).”

The song was first released on a recording of concerts Simone gave at Carnegie Hall in 1964. The song was then released as a single, but was boycotted in most Southern states due to the word ‘goddam’ in the title. Simone also performed this song in front of 40,000 people at the end of one of the Selma to Montgomery marches, when she and other black activists crossed police lines. To this day, “Mississippi Goddam” is one of Simone’s most famous protest songs and self-written compositions.

“A Change Is Gonna Come”, by Sam Cooke

Samuel Cooke was born on January 22, 1931 in Clarksdale, Mississippi to a Baptist minister and his wife. Cooke got his musical start by singing with his seven siblings in a

gospel group called *The Singing Children*. He continued his gospel career into his teenage years and at the young age of nineteen became lead singer of the landmark gospel group *The Soul Stirrers*. Although Cooke had performed gospel music all of his life, he wanted to branch out into the pop genre. This was looked down upon by the gospel fan base, so he began recording under the name "Dale Cooke". However, this did not fool anyone. His signature sound and distinctive vocals gave him away instantly. It was not until Cooke left his record label, Specialty Records, in 1957 that he began recording pop music under his real name.

"A Change Is Gonna Come" is a 1964 single written and first recorded in 1963 and released under the RCA Victor label shortly after Cooke's death in late 1964. Even though it was not a top hit on the charts, the song came to exemplify the 1960's Civil Rights Movement. Upon hearing Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" in 1963, Cooke was greatly moved that such a poignant song about racism in America could come from someone who was not black. While on tour in May 1963, and after speaking with sit-in demonstrators in Durham, North Carolina, Cooke returned to his tour bus and wrote the first rough draft of what would become "A Change Is Gonna Come." The song was also a reflection of Cooke's own inner turmoil. Known for his refined image and cheerful songs such as "You Send Me" and "Twistin' the Night Away," he had long felt the need to address the situation of racism in America, especially in the southern states. However, his fear of losing his largely white fan base prevented him from doing so until now.

The song reflected two major incidents in Cooke's life. The first was the death of his 18-month-old son, Vincent, who died of an accidental drowning in June of that year. The second major incident came on October 8, 1963, when Cooke and his band tried to register at a "whites only" motel in Shreveport, Louisiana. Instead of being given a room, they were arrested for disturbing the peace. Both incidents are represented in the weary tone and lyrics of the piece, especially the final verse "There have been times that I thought I couldn't last for long, but now I think I'm able to carry on. It's been a long time coming, but I know a change is gonna come."

Though only a moderate success in sales, "A Change Is Gonna Come" became an anthem for the Civil Rights Movement, and is widely considered Cooke's best composition. Over the years, the song has received significant praise and, in 2005, was voted number 12 by representatives of the music industry and press in *Rolling Stone* magazine's 500 Greatest Songs of All Time. The song is also among three hundred songs deemed the most important ever recorded by National Public Radio (NPR) and was

recently selected by the Library of Congress as one of twenty-five selected recordings to the National Recording Registry as of March 2007.

Cooke died at the young age of thirty-three on December 11, 1964. He was shot and killed by a motel owner who claimed she was defending herself from the raging, drunk Cooke. Many of Cooke's family members still do not believe the owner's testimony and instead believe it was a conspiracy to murder Cooke and rob him of his belongings. Although he died young, Cooke left a legacy in the music world. Even in his short time as a musician, Cooke had twenty-nine singles on the Top 40 pop charts, and even more than that on the Top 40 R&B charts. In 1986, Cooke was inducted as a charter member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 1999, he was honored with the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, and in 2004 he was listed as #16 on *Rolling Stone's* 100 Greatest Artists of All Times.

"We People who are Darker than Blue", by Curtis Mayfield

Curtis Mayfield was a singer, song-writer, and record producer, born in June 1942 in Chicago, Illinois. Mayfield's father left the family when Mayfield was only five years old. At this time, Mayfield's mother moved the family into the Chicago projects, and eventually to the Cabrini-Green projects. Influenced heavily by music, Mayfield dropped out of high school early to become the lead singer for The Impressions. Shortly afterwards, Mayfield went on to have a successful solo career. There were two distinct factors to Mayfield's music. First, instead of tuning the guitar to the normal white keys of the piano, he would tune the guitar to the black keys of the piano, giving him an open F-sharp tuning. F-sharp is one of the guitar's most popular open tunings. Tuning this way opens up new tonic possibilities and is suited for musicians who like to play slide guitar. He would use this method throughout his music career. Also setting him apart from other musicians, Mayfield would sing most of his songs in falsetto. Although this was not a unique way of singing, most musicians sang in the tenor voice instead.

In his song, "We People who are Darker than Blue", Mayfield tackles not only the social injustices against blacks, but also the black on black violence that was spreading through the country. In the first part of the song, Mayfield focuses on the racial tension during the Civil Rights Movement with phrases such as, "We people who are darker than blue, are we gonna stand around this town and let what others say come true... This ain't no time for segregatin', I'm talking 'bout brown and yellow two...". He then continues

on to speak out against the race riots and black on black violence with lyrics like “If your mind could really see, you’d know your color the same as me...learn to know your side, shall we commit our own genocide...”. The most powerful phrase comes near the end when Mayfield sings, “Loving one brother and killing the other, when the time comes and we are really free, there’ll be no brothers left you see.”

Curtis Mayfield would become one of the first African-American R&B artists to speak out in his music about racial injustices and the struggles of the black community. Many of his songs lyrics contained hard-hitting commentary on the state of affairs in the black urban ghettos of his time. Mayfield would also go on to write many songs that would become anthems for the Civil Rights Movement.

On August 13, 1990, a tragic accident at an outdoor concert paralyzed Mayfield from the neck down. While performing in Brooklyn, New York, stage lighting equipment fell on Mayfield unexpectedly, ending the concert. This accident set Mayfield back, causing him to not be able to play the guitar. However, Mayfield did not give up. He would continue to write, sing, and direct the recording of his last album. This was not an easy task, as Mayfield would sing line-by-line lying on his back to ease the pain.

Mayfield was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on March 15, 1999. He was not able to attend the ceremony due to his health, and later died on December 26, 1999 in Roswell, Georgia. However, his legacy lives on through his songs and awards that he received even after his death. Many of his songs with The Impressions became anthems of the Civil Rights Movement. His most famous album, *Super Fly*, is still seen as an all-time great album that helped to invent a new style of modern black music. He received the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1995. Mayfield was also inducted into the Vocal Group Hall of Fame in 2003, and in 2004 Rolling Stone magazine ranked Mayfield #99 on the list of 100 Greatest Artists of All Time.

“Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud”, by James Brown

"Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud" is a funk song written and recorded by James Brown in 1968. It is notable both as one of Brown's signature songs and as one of the most popular "black power" anthems of the 1960s. The song was released as a two-part single which held the number-one spot on the R&B singles chart for six weeks, and peaked at number ten on the Billboard Hot 100.

In the song, Brown addresses the prejudice towards blacks in America, and the need for black empowerment. He proclaims that "we done made us a chance to do for ourself/we're tired of beating our head against the wall/workin' for someone else". The song's call-and-response chorus is performed by a group of young children, who respond to Brown's command of "Say it loud" with "I'm black and I'm proud!" Ironically, as the song was recorded in a Los Angeles area suburb, most of the children that Brown was able to recruit for the recording session were actually white and Asian, with only a few black children included in the ensemble.

"Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud" was an immediate hit for Brown. It became a highlight of his concerts, where arena crowds would shout out the "I'm black and I'm proud" response section. However, within a year of the release of the studio recording, it had largely disappeared from Brown's concert repertoire, as he was concerned with how its message was being interpreted. In his 1986 autobiography Brown wrote:

The song is obsolete now... But it was necessary to teach pride then, and I think the song did a lot of good for a lot of people... People called "Black and Proud" militant and angry -- maybe because of the line about dying on your feet instead of living on your knees. But really, if you listen to it, it sounds like a children's song. That's why I had children in it, so children who heard it could grow up feeling pride... The song cost me a lot of my crossover audience. The racial makeup at my concerts was mostly black after that. I don't regret it, though, even if it was misunderstood.

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame included "Say it Loud" as one of their 500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll. In 2004 "Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud" was ranked number 305 on *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the 500 greatest songs of all time.

"War", by Bob Marley

Robert Nesta Marley was born on February 6, 1945 in a small rural town in Jamaica. From an early age, Marley knew what it was like to be discriminated against due to race. Marley's father was a Jamaican born white man from British decent, and his mother was a Jamaican born black woman. Because of Marley's mixed heritage he was not accepted by many as a child and struggled with his own racial identity. His only friend in grade school, Bunny Livingston, saw past Marley's skin color and helped find Marley's musical talents. While in their early teenage years, Marley and Livingston would make

guitars out of sticks and cans, or whatever they could find lying around, and sing songs their mothers had taught them or make up their own. At the age of sixteen, after dropping out of school, Marley formed a band with fellow musician and friend, Bunny Livingston. Marley began recording in a small studio in 1962, but it was not until the next year that his band would release “Simmer Down”, which would become the #1 hit on Jamaica’s JBC Radio chart.

The popular song “War” first appeared on Bob Marley and the Wailers' 1976 Island Records album, “Rastaman Vibration.” This was Marley's only album to chart in the USA, which it did at number ten. The lyrics are almost entirely derived from a speech made by Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I before the United Nations General Assembly in 1963. Emperor Haile Selassie I was worshipped as the incarnation of God in the Rastafarian religion. Marley mentions the Emperor in many of his songs referring to him as “Ras Tafari”, “Jah”, and “The Lion”. The song uses the part of Selassie’s speech that calls for equality among all without regard to race, class, or nationality in his cry for peace. The lyrics call for action against racial inequality and international injustice. An example of this is apparent in the first verse of the song, “that until there are no longer first class and second class citizens...until the colour of a man’s skin is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes – me say war.”

“War” quickly became one of Marley’s greatest classic songs with its meaningful lyrics and deliverance of the Rastafarian message. No matter where the lyrics originally came from, Marley had a way of understanding and translating the pain of the oppressed into uplifting and inspirational song. This is what makes him possibly the greatest reggae artist of all times, and an inspiration to musicians to come.

Strategies

Throughout this unit, I will be using many different strategies to deliver material and keep my students engaged. Due to the large amount of history that needs to be taught prior to diving into the songs and lyrics, I will be using many organizing strategies for the students to keep their information structured and in one place. Also, in order not to lose the students with the vast amount of historical context, certain strategies such as videos and music clips will be used to deliver historical facts needed to understand this unit instead of note-taking activities.

Socratic Seminar

The Socratic Seminar method is based upon the Greek philosopher Socrates' method of engaging his pupils in finding their own answers. He wanted his students to be able to think for themselves, rather than fill their heads with all the right answers. This seminar method calls for the facilitator to answer a question with a question, rather than answering a question with a definite answer.

Students are given a form of text, which can be a poem, short story, piece of art, or a song to examine. Students should read the text first and be able to let it soak in. Then, the teacher should give an essential question and have students re-read or refocus on the text with that question in mind. A group discussion, lead by the teacher, is then developed around key questions about the piece. These questions, chosen by the teacher, should be formed to where they help guide the students' opinions. The goal of a Socratic seminar is for students to carry on discussions with their peers, supporting or refuting statements made by one another while also learning to listen and respect the opinions of others. Before the first seminar session, it is a good idea to set a list of norms, or rules, for the session. One norm that should be set for example is how students will know when it is their turn to talk. A squish ball or talking stick is a great way to make sure students do not interrupt one another and only talk when they are holding the item (ball or stick). Also, students can take ownership of the seminar by choosing who they would like to talk next by throwing them the ball or passing the stick. It is also best practice to have students sit in a circle, whether it is around a table or just in chairs, to best emanate the feeling of a round table discussion.

The teacher should open up the discussion with the essential question. Then, after responses, the teacher can use follow-up questions to assess students' understanding of the essential question. The teacher should try to refrain from commenting and allow students to have dialogue with one another, without the input of the teacher. As students share their opinions of the text, they should be able to reference certain parts of the text to use as evidence to support their opinion. It is also important to note to students that there are no "correct answers". This will help students see that everyone can have their own opinion without being right or wrong. At the end of the seminar, students should be asked to write their reflections in a journal or daybook. This will allow the students to process the session, or give them a chance to write down a thought that they may not have been able to verbally express.

Solution Station

Students will have access to a solution station in the classroom where they can access information that they may have trouble with or have trouble remembering. The solution station will include a timeline foldable, complete with important historical events and dates. Due to the high number of absences in my classroom, it is important to have information readily available for students who miss class. Having a solution station will allow students to catch up on information missed without having to stop instructional time to do so. This solution station will also play a key role in the culminating activity for the students. When working on their final project, they can visit the solution station to remind them of information they may have learned at the beginning of the unit.

Graphic Organizers

Students will use a variety of graphic organizers to help them better understand all of the history and facts given to them. They can also be used to help students organize their creative thoughts that develop through this unit. When students apply their knowledge to something that they have been creatively engaged in, there is a better chance of the brain recalling that information. The graphic organizers that will be used in this unit are Chain of Events Chart, KWL Chart, Venn Diagram, and the Shutter Foldable.

Chain of Events

The chain of events chart will be used to help students organize information in chronological order. The history in this unit has many key dates and important events that students will need to be able to know.

KWL Chart

The KWL Chart helps students realize what they already know, what they want to learn, and what they learn along the way. This chart can be used as a great pre-assessment piece for the teacher, as well as a post-assessment for students and teacher. The K stands for what you already KNOW. The W stands for what you WANT to know. Last, the L stands for what you LEARN.

What you KNOW

What you WANT to know

What you LEARN

Venn Diagram

The Venn diagram is used when wanting to compare and contrast information. For this unit, students will use the Venn diagram to compare and contrast different songs, lyrics, or musicians. Two circles are drawn to where they overlap each other in the center. The left and right circles are used to display the differences between two things. The middle parts of the circles, where they overlap, are used to display what both things have in common.

Shutter Foldable

This foldable is best for organizing information into categories and defining vocabulary terms. To create this foldable take a sheet of standard printer paper (bright colors work better than plain) and hold it lengthwise and fold it in half (this makes a long skinny rectangle). Open the sheet of paper and turn it widthwise and fold it in half (this makes a shorter fatter rectangle). Fold it in half again (making a smaller long skinny rectangle).

When you open the paper up you should have eight rectangles. Take the top and bottom sections and fold toward the middle (this looks like window shutters), cut the flaps along the fold to the second crease line, this will create a set of four flaps that can be individually opened and closed. On the front of each flap, students will write the key terms or questions, and on the inside, students will record the answers or definitions. In this unit, the shutter foldable can be used to notate important vocabulary terms. The foldable can also be used where the students would write certain phrases from the lyrics on the outside and on the inside they would write the meaning of the lyrics.

Daybook

The daybook is an excellent tool to use in the classroom for students to share their thoughts, ideas, and perceptions. It also allows students to expand on new objectives and new material learned. More importantly, the daybook is a safe space for students to write without the incorrect red marks of a teacher's pen. Students can write a draft of a paper or in this unit a song, and let the teacher know when they are ready for it to be read. Then, the teacher uses post-it notes to make comments or suggestions, instead of writing on the students' work. Research and findings on using the daybook can be accessed through the National Writing Project.

Multimedia Video Clips

In an effort to have students engage in the history of the lesson, I will be using various clips from Discovery Education on the Atlantic Slave Trade, the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Civil Rights Movement. Students in my classroom are better visual learners versus aural learners. Students will watch video clips of these events that give the historical details needed to understand the unit. I will then provide students with video viewing guides or have students make foldables to organize information gathered from the videos.

I will also be using a set of video clips from YouTube that discuss the relevance of the songs chosen. Compiled by the web user Jay Munday, these clips set images from the times with these powerful lyrics and songs. Munday has chosen eight songs to pair with images from the past, seven of which are highlighted in this unit. These short clips show how the attitude towards racism has changed and how music and racism are connected.

Windows Movie Maker

This program will be used for the culminating project of this unit. Students will be asked to use Movie Maker to create a digital narrative of their experience with this unit. The students will research to find visual images that will be set to their words. The students may also use an audio recording of their own protest song they will write to add to the movie.

Activities

Activity 1

You will want to clear the use of the following activity with your administrator and/or legal guardian(s) of students, as graphic images are used in this activity.

Explain to students that they will be taking part in a Socratic Seminar. Tell students that the class will now view and discuss the kind of violence that inspired the great protest songs being examined in the unit. Explain that they are going to see several graphic images of lynching and will then dialogue with one another. Explain that the class will be viewing these images on a website called “Without Sanctuary.” You will want to focus on only one or two images for this class period. After students have looked at the images, ask students to focus on other things in the image, not necessarily the victim. Then, begin facilitating the seminar by asking a leading question such as, “What do you see in this image other than a victim being lynched?” After students have responded, continue to facilitate by asking questions such as, “Why do you think this was displayed as a public event?” or “How did whites dehumanize blacks to the point that they could kill them and display them this way?”

This will more than likely be a very heated discussion, full of emotions and feelings that your students may not be able to express. Therefore, at the end of the seminar, have students reflect in their daybooks on what has been discussed. Students can either express their feelings through words or by drawing pictures/images. Remind students that the daybook is a safe place for them to display their thoughts and that you will not read it without their permission. A great way of letting the student be in control of what pages you view is to have the student either fold the page down that they do not want you to read, or put a bright colored post-it note on the page they do not want read.

Many students may ask how this process or activity is being graded. The teacher should let the students know, before beginning the seminar, that this activity will be graded according to participation. The teacher should keep a “map” of where each student is sitting in the circle. The teacher should use tally marks to chart each time a student makes a contribution to the discussion. The teacher can also draw lines to and from students’ to chart if one student continuously responds to a certain student’s comments.

Activity 2

Explain to students that today they will begin writing lyrics to their own protest song. Before beginning the activity, play one or two famous protest songs as examples. These songs could be from the songs used in this unit, or other protest songs that you know or have researched. For example, songs by Creedence Clearwater Revival, such as “Fortunate Son” or “Who’ll Stop the Rain?” protested the Vietnam War. Other great protest songs include “Redemption Song” by Bob Marley, “What’s Going On” by Marvin Gaye, “Blowin’ in the Wind” by Bob Dylan, and “Revolution” by the Beatles. Discuss the impact these songs may have had on the events surrounding them. Then, have the students choose a topic or injustice that they are passionate about. Give students some examples to help them get started with ideas. For example, students could choose to write a song about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Or they could write about a world event, such as global warming. Students could also write about personal issues in their lives, such as wearing uniforms to school or being made to do chores. Allow students to be creative with the topic they choose. The only stipulation is that the topic has to be something they want to change or that they think should change. If needed, students should be allowed time to research their topic for more information. For example, if a student chooses to focus on the wars in other countries, they may need to research names of influential people involved. If a student chooses to protest uniforms at school, they may need to research if this is a school rule or a district rule.

After students have gathered information on their topic, they should begin a rough draft of their lyrics. The daybook is a good place for the students to start this process, as it is a safe space for them to work in. While students are working, I will circulate the room to provide support where needed. I will also be making sure that students are using

correct meter to ensure that the lyrics flow easily. I will also be on hand to help with rhyming words, spelling, and overall needs students may have.

For your more advanced music students, you may have them write their own music as well. Students could be asked to create only a melody or could be asked to do melody and harmony. Adding rhythmic beats always interests my students and makes them feel as if they are a “real DJ” or rapper. This part of the activity could also be used on music software, such as Finale or Sibelius, if available in your music program. My students are not that advanced in composing, so we would use simple melodies that have already been produced, or I would help them create a simple melody.

Activity 3

Explain to students that they will be listening to the protest songs listed above. The songs will be paired, so that the students will only be listening to and focusing on two songs per day. The first time the song is played, students should focus on listening to the music and the words. Then, students will write a reflection on what they heard in their Daybook. Explain to students that they should be writing what they thought the song was written about, why it was written, and any other thoughts they may have. Next, display lyrics on the SMART board screen and provide as a hand out for students who want a copy to keep. Then, students will listen to the same song again, this time following along with the lyrics to see if their thoughts were on target. Repeat this process for the next protest song.

After both songs are heard and reflected upon, have students draw a Venn diagram on a piece of paper. Explain to students that they will be comparing and contrasting the two songs they just heard. Provide an example for students to see before beginning this task. Students can base comparisons and contrasts on lyrics, style, tone, instruments used, vocals, tempo, and mood.

Another extension of this activity could be having students compare and contrast one of the above protest songs with a protest song from today. Students could research modern day protest songs and use a Venn diagram to show likes and differences of the protest songs in this unit. Examples of modern protest songs are “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue” by country singer Toby Keith, “Seeds” by Bruce Springsteen, “American Idiot” by alternative band Green Day, “We Shall Be Free” by country artist Garth Brooks, “Fight the Power” by Public Enemy, and “Diamonds from Sierra Leone” by rapper Kanye West.

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Implementing District and State Standards

Throughout this unit, many district and state music standards will be addressed. Writing the state standards in student friendly terms provides the students with a better understanding of what they are to be learning in class. It is important to do this in the classroom, so that when you assess the students they know what they should be studying and what they should have learned. Below, I have listed the state standards that will be addressed through this unit in student friendly terms.

- 2.01 – Student will play the electronic keyboard with correct posture and fingering when performing their original protest song.
- 4.01 – Student will create and compose an original song.
- 4.02 – Student will plan and organize thoughts to create an original song.
- 5.02 – Student will identify and use music notes, rests, basic symbols, time signature, and dynamics in songs reviewed and written.
- 6.02 – Student will know basic vocabulary needed to analyze and describe music.
- 7.01 – Student will learn how to make an informed decision about music.
- 7.02 – Student will evaluate music by comparing and contrasting them to similar models.
- 8.01 – Student will use rules of standard written English to explain the main idea of a song.
- 9.02 – Student will examine situations to determine conflict and resolution in relation to music in history.
- 9.03 – Student will understand and identify ways that music reflects history.

Endnotes