



# Voices of Change

## Materials List

- Audio recordings of protest/ social change songs from different eras
- Lyrics sheets of selected songs
- Instruments (if available) or digital music creation tools
- Historical context materials for each song
- Art supplies for visual components

## Vocabulary

- **Expression:** the act of conveying thoughts or feelings through music; the communication of ideas in civic discourse.
- **Voice:** the sound produced by a singer or instrument; metaphorically, one's opinion or right to express it in civic contexts.
- **Protest song:** a song associated with a movement for social change.
- **Composition:** the creation of music with deliberate structure and purpose.
- **Civic engagement:** working to make a difference in the civic life of communities.
- **Social movement:** an organized effort by citizens to accomplish a social or political goal.

## Addressed CONTENT Standard

### Social Studies Civics Standard

Understanding the concepts of authority, power, and influence, with emphasis on democratic skills and attitudes necessary to become responsible citizens.

## Addressed ARTS Standard

### Music Anchor Standard 10

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

## Lesson Overview

This lesson integrates music and social studies to help students understand how music has been used throughout history as a tool for civic engagement and social change. Students will analyze historical protest songs and create their own musical expressions related to civic issues they care about.

## Essential Questions

- How has music been used as a tool for civic engagement throughout history?
- How can we use our personal experiences and knowledge to create music that addresses social issues?

## Lesson Objectives

1. Analyze how music has been used as a tool for civic engagement.
2. Connect historical protest songs to specific social movements.
3. Synthesize personal experiences with social studies concepts to create original musical expressions.
4. Develop democratic skills through collaborative music-making.

## TEACHER NOTES

# Lesson Sequence

## Day 1: Historical Context and Analysis

### Opening (15 minutes)

Begin by playing "We Shall Overcome" as students enter the classroom. Display the lyrics on a slide or provide printed copies for students to follow along. After listening, have students write everything they know about the song or its message in shorthand for 60 seconds. Then facilitate a whole-class discussion asking students what message they think the song is trying to convey and how the musical elements (slow tempo, group singing, rising melody) support that message.

### Development (30 minutes)

Introduce these historical protest songs from different eras:

1. "We Shall Overcome" (Civil Rights Movement)
2. "Blowin' in the Wind" by Bob Dylan (Anti-War/Civil Rights)
3. "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holiday (Anti-Lynching/Racial Justice)
4. "This Land Is Your Land" by Woody Guthrie (Labor Rights/Economic Justice)

Prepare student resource packets with song lyrics and historical context for each song. Create colorful anchor charts that visually connect each song to its own social movement and time period.

Divide students into small groups and assign each group one song to analyze. Provide a graphic organizer with these questions:

- What social issue does this song address?
- What music elements (tempo, instruments, vocal style) emphasize the message?
- How did this song contribute to civic engagement?
- Why do you think this song was effective or ineffective in creating change?

As students work, circulate through the room to provide guidance and clarification. Offer additional historical context as needed.

### Closing (15 minutes)

Have each group share their findings with the class. Create a class chart connecting all songs analyzed to their respective social movements. Conclude by discussing how music has been used as a tool for democratic participation throughout history. Post this chart as a visual reference for the remainder of the unit.

## TEACHER NOTES

# Lesson Sequence

## Day 2: Personal Connection and Creation

### Opening (10 minutes)

Begin with a journal prompt: "What social issue matters to you personally? How might you express your thoughts through music?" After writing for 5 minutes, have students share their responses with a partner before volunteering to share with the whole class.

### Development (35 minutes)

Guide students to form groups of 3-4 based on shared interests in specific social issues (environmental concerns, bullying, inequality, etc.). Provide each group with a writing guide to help them brainstorm and begin creating a musical piece that:

- Addresses their chosen social issue
- Incorporates personal experiences and perspectives
- Uses musical elements effectively to convey their message

Play examples of contemporary protest songs to inspire students:

1. "Where Is The Love" by Black Eyed Peas (Peace/Unity)
2. "Alright" by Kendrick Lamar (Racial Justice)
3. "Fight Song" by Rachel Platten (Personal Empowerment)

Provide instruments if available (percussion, recorders, ukuleles) or digital music creation tools. For groups that need additional support, offer chord progressions or rhythm patterns they can build upon.

### Closing (15 minutes)

Have groups share their works in progress. Provide a structured feedback form for peers that focuses on:

- How clearly is the civic message communicated?
- What musical elements effectively support the message?
- What suggestions do you have to strengthen the connection between the music and the message?

## TEACHER NOTES

## Lesson Sequence

### Day 3: Refinement and Presentation

#### Opening (10 minutes)

Present a mini-lesson on effective civic communication through art using these specific examples:

1. "Imagine" by John Lennon - simplicity in melody and lyrics to convey a powerful message
2. "Fight the Power" by Public Enemy - rhythm and repetition to emphasize urgency
3. "What's Going On" by Marvin Gaye - questioning format and soulful delivery to express concern

Show brief clips of each song and discuss how the musical elements enhance the civic message.

#### Development (30 minutes)

Allow groups time to refine their musical pieces. Offer these options for final products:

- Traditional songs with lyrics and melody
- Spoken word poetry with musical backing
- Instrumental pieces with program notes explaining the civic connection
- Digital compositions using GarageBand or other accessible software.

Circulate to provide guidance and feedback. For groups struggling with melody creation, offer simple pentatonic scales they can use to build melodies that work well together.

#### Closing (20 minutes)

Organize a performance of completed works. Create a supportive atmosphere by establishing respectful audience behavior expectations. After performances, guide students through a written reflection answering these questions:

- How did creating this music help you understand your role as a citizen?
- What did you learn about how music can influence social change?
- How did your personal experiences inform your musical choices?
- What was challenging about expressing civic ideas through music?

## TEACHER NOTES

## **K-2 Adaptation**

Focus on simple songs about community helpers and being a good citizen. Create anchor charts with pictures representing community roles and responsibilities. Teach these songs with accompanying movements:

- "The More We Get Together" (community cooperation)
- "This Little Light of Mine" (personal responsibility)
- "If You're Helping and You Know It" (adaptation of "If You're Happy and You Know It")

Have students create simple rhythmic patterns using classroom percussion instruments to accompany songs. Guide students to draw pictures of ways they can be helpful citizens in their classroom/school and create a class book titled "Our Helpful Community."

## **3-5 Adaptation**

Introduce age-appropriate songs about American history and civic values:

- "Follow the Drinking Gourd" (Underground Railroad)
- "Yankee Doodle" (American Revolution)
- "This Land Is Your Land" (simplified version)

Create vocabulary cards with images to support comprehension. When analyzing songs, provide graphic organizers that help students identify the main message and musical elements. For the creation component, guide students to adapt verses of familiar patriotic songs rather than creating entirely new compositions. Have students perform their adapted songs for another class or during a school assembly.

## **9-12 Adaptation**

Facilitate in-depth analysis of protest music through these specific examples::

- "A Change Is Gonna Come" by Sam Cooke (Civil Rights)
- "Ohio" by Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young (Kent State shootings)
- "Sunday Bloody Sunday" by U2 (Northern Ireland conflict)
- "Fight the Power" by Public Enemy (Racial Justice)
- "Born in the USA" by Bruce Springsteen (often misrepresented patriotic song)

Have students research the historical and political context of these protest movements independently before class discussions. Guide students to create sophisticated original works that address complex social issues. Encourage students to develop multimedia presentations connecting their music to specific civic actions or organize a school event featuring student compositions addressing local issues.

## Assessment

**Analysis Component:** Provide a structured worksheet for analyzing historical protest songs. Include sections for:

- Historical context of the song
- Musical elements and their effect
- Lyrical content analysis
- Impact on social movements
- Personal response to the song

**Creation Component:** Assess original musical compositions using this rubric:

- Clarity of civic message (20 points)
- Effect use of musical elements (20 points)

## Extensions

1. Collaborate with the technology department to record and share student compositions.
2. Partner with community organizations to perform student works at civic events.
3. Create a digital archive of protest music throughout history with student analysis.
4. Develop a cross-curricular project with language arts to incorporate poetry and songwriting.

## Resources

- Library of Congress folk music and protest songs archive
- Smithsonian Folkways recordings
- PBS resources on music and social movements
- Digital audio recording and editing tools
- Local musicians who focus on social justice themes