The Sound of Change
Examining Social Movements Through Music
Tai M. Basurto

Focus/Summary
Students will become historians and use their literary analysis skills to uncover the voices of the labor movement, the civil rights movement, and the women’s liberation movement. Using songs as poetry will allow students to understand the development of these social movements by critically engaging them in discussion around the motives, themes, and ideologies of the participants in each movement.

Vital Theme and Narrative
Patterns of Social and Political Interaction

Habits of Mind
- perceive past events and issues as they were experienced by people at the time, to develop historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness
- acquire at on and the same time a comprehension of diverse cultures and of shared humanity

Guiding Questions
What is the role of music in changing people’s ideas?
How does music reflect the ideals and values of a society?
What is the language of music used in social movements?

Objectives
Students will be able to analyze historical data through exercises in visual and information literacy.
Students will discuss the conflicts that have led to social movements.
Students will develop an increased understanding of human behavior and social issues related to historical time periods.
Students will identify recurring themes in the lyrics of music of various social movements.
Students will analyze the poetic language of music of change.

Illinois State Learning Standards
STATE GOAL 2: Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras and ideas.
A. Understand how literary elements and techniques are used to convey meaning.
2.A.3a Identify and analyze a variety of literary techniques (e.g., figurative language, allusion, dialogue, description, word choice, dialect) within classical and contemporary works representing a variety of genres.
2.A.3d Identify ways that an author uses language structure, word choice and style to convey the author’s viewpoint.

B. Read and interpret a variety of literary works.
2.B.3a Respond to literary material from personal, creative and critical points of view.
2.B.3b Compare and contrast common literary themes across various societies and eras.

STATE GOAL 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.
B. Compose well-organized and coherent writing for specific purposes and audiences.
3.B.3a Produce documents that convey a clear understanding and interpretation of ideas and information and display focus, organization, elaboration and coherence.

C. Communicate ideas in writing to accomplish a variety of purposes.
3.C.3a Compose narrative, informative, and persuasive writings (e.g., in addition to previous writings, literature reviews, instructions, news articles, correspondence) for a specified audience.
3.C.3b Using available technology, produce compositions and multimedia works for specified audiences.

STATE GOAL 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess and communicate information.
B. Analyze and evaluate information acquired from various sources.
5.B.3a Choose and analyze information sources for individual, academic and functional purposes.
5.B.3b Identify, evaluate and cite primary sources.
C. Apply acquired information, concepts and ideas to communicate in a variety of formats.
5.C.3a Plan, compose, edit and revise documents that synthesize new meaning gleaned from multiple sources.
5.C.3c Take notes, conduct interviews, organize and report information in oral, visual and electronic formats.

STATE GOAL 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations.
A. Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.
16.A.3b Make inferences about historical events and eras using historical maps and other historical sources.

STATE GOAL 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.
A. Compare characteristics of culture as reflected in language, literature, the arts, traditions and institutions.
18.A.3 Explain how language, literature, the arts, architecture and traditions contribute to the development and transmission of culture.
THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Procedures

Opening the Lesson—

Divide the class in half. Have half the class read the lyrics to “Strange Fruit” by Lewis Allen (sung by Billie Holiday) and the other half of the class read the lyrics to “The Death of Emmett Till” by Bob Dylan. Distribute art materials and have students produce a picture that the text creates in their heads. After students have created a visual representation of an image or feeling conveyed in the song, have students partner with a classmate who read the other song. Have each pair explain their illustration and why it captures, for them, the theme, message, emotions, etc. of the song.


Optional activities:
Read and discuss Ida B. Wells “Lynch Law in America” essay published in 1900.
Read and analyze primary source document, a letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Walter White written in 1936. Discuss why the federal government did not interfere with the “lynching situation”.

Developing the Lesson—

Read and discuss the lyrics of “Mississippi Goddam” by Nina Simone.

Listen to and discuss “Ella’s Song” by Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Concluding the Lesson—
Divide the class into three small groups. Have each group listen to and discuss “When Will We Get Paid for the Work We’ve Done” by the Staple Singers, “People Get Ready” by Curtis Mayfield, or “Going Down to Mississippi” by Phil Ochs. Have each small group complete the “Analyzing the Music of Social Movements Tic-Tac-Toe Response”.


**Assessing Student Learning**

Students should compose a newspaper editorial on the issues they have discussed while studying songs of the Civil Rights Movement.

**Resources**


Analyzing the Music of Social Movements

Song Title: _____________________________________________________

Writer(s) & Artist(s): _____________________________________________

Listen to and/or read the lyrics once in their entirety. Note images and or words that stand out to you.
Listen to and/or read the lyrics again. This time, listen to and/or read the song line by line or stanza by stanza.
Carefully, consider the lyrics, the social movement the song was written or recorded in, and the language the writer chose to express his/her message.
Complete three of the following responses. You must create a “tic-tac-toe” line going across, down, or horizontal.

**Tic-Tac-Toe Response**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who was the target audience of this song? What can be learned from the lyrics of this song?</th>
<th>Who would not want this song recorded and listened to? Who is not the target audience? Why would this group/ these groups be opposed to the message(s) in the song?</th>
<th>Carefully consider your understanding of the period in history when this song was written or recorded. Does this song support or contradict your historical understanding? Explain.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify the imagery in the song’s lyrics. How has the artist used language to convey a message?</td>
<td>Design an album cover appropriate for this song. What image(s) would you use to capture the message of the song? Why?</td>
<td>Identify the theme of the song. Is this a recurring theme? What other songs, poems, pieces of literature have you seen this theme illustrated in? Explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was the purpose of this recording? Do you think the writer of this song achieved his/her goals?</td>
<td>What was happening at the time this song was written or recorded? What can be learned by listening to this song?</td>
<td>If you had to pitch this song to a music producer to record, what would you say? Summarize the content of the song and identify reasons it should be recorded.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analyzing the Language of Music of Social Movements

What is the title of the song? What does the title mean?

How would you summarize the song? What words stand out? Is there repetition? How is repetition used in the song?

Is the song meant to be taken literally? What is the underlining meaning of the song?

What is the tone of the song? How has the author used language to convey his/her tone?

Has the author used similes and/or metaphors? Identify and explain.

From whose point of view is the song written? How is this point of view unique?

What has influenced the author of this song? Identify specific concerns, issues, and ideas of the author.