

SESSION 2: PROTEST SONGS AND RACIAL INEQUALITY

Age range: 7–11 years

<p>Outline</p> <p>Learners will reflect on racial inequality, think about why it was significant during the Civil Rights Movement and consider how it manifests itself today. Using three songs, learners will explore how musicians across different genres have used their songs as a form of protest to fight for a more equal and fair society. They will explore the lyrics in detail, understand how they are structured to put a message across, and then critically reflect on them to pick out important ideas.</p>		
<p>Learning objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reflect on songs which have been used to protest against racial inequality. To use listening skills to explore different genres of music (jazz, folk and hip-hop). To understand that lyrics can have a serious purpose. 	<p>Learning outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners will identify and reflect on important messages in protest songs. 	
<p>Key questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do singers use their songs to communicate their message? What lyrics stand out to me the most? 	<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slideshow: <i>Raising Our Voices</i> (slides 11–14) Background notes for teachers Activity sheet: <i>Reactions to Freedom Songs</i> 	
<p>Curriculum links</p>		
<p>England Music</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners should appreciate and understand a wide range of recorded music. 	<p>Wales Music: appraising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss and evaluate music, making connections between their own and others' work. 	<p>Scotland Music</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have listened to a range of music and can respond by discussing my thoughts and feelings. I can give and accept constructive comment on my own and others' work EXA 1-19a / EXA 2-19a <p>Social Studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can gather and use information about forms of discrimination against people in societies and consider the impact this has on people's lives. SOC 2-16b



Session outline

Before Session

- Ensure you have access to the songs used in the main activity; they are available on all major music streaming sites. See background notes for teachers below for further information about the artists.
 - Nina Simone – I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free
 - Joan Baez – We Shall Overcome
 - J. Cole – Be Free*

***NB the original version of 'Be Free' includes inappropriate/difficult language so please be cautious; alternative 'clean' versions like the 2014 live performance on the Late Show with David Letterman may be preferable.**

Starter (10 minutes)

Board race

- Draw a vertical line down the middle of your whiteboard. Split the group into two teams and ask the teams to line up on different sides of the whiteboard. Explain that each person needs to run to the board and write one thing (a word or short phrase) which they can remember about rights or the Civil Rights Movement from the last session. When they have written their word or phrase they should run back, give the pen to the next person in the line and then sit down.
- The winning team is the first to have all its members add something different to the board and then sit down quietly.
- After the race, look at what people have written and discuss as a group what each word means.

Differentiation

Make it easier: If this activity is challenging for your group, then have a discussion based on what was covered in the last lesson and ask learners to contribute what they have remembered.

Activity 2.1 (45 minutes)

Exploring protest songs about racial inequality (Activity sheet)

- Explain to learners that many singers used their music to show their support for the Civil Rights Movement and that their songs were a form of protest. They hoped to persuade people in power to change America's laws to create a fairer and more equal society.
- Point out that despite the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, racial inequality still exists in the modern world. Can they think of any examples? Tell them that hip-hop artists are still using music as a form of protest.



- Distribute Activity Sheet 2.1 and read through the questions as a group to check learners' understanding.
- Use slides 11–14 to share three examples of artists singing about racial inequality. Listen to the songs as a group, or select one depending on the level of the group and the time available. You may also like to locate a copy of the song lyrics for your learners to follow.
 - **Nina Simone – I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free (1967)**
Nina Simone (1933–2003) was a singer and pianist who wrote and performed songs supporting the civil rights movement. Her music spanned several genres, including blues, folk and jazz. See Background notes for teachers for further information.
 - **Joan Baez – We Shall Overcome (1963: original recorded in 1948)**
Joan Baez (born in 1941) is a folk musician. Folk musicians also sang songs that became Freedom Songs. Joan was one of the first musicians to use her popularity as a vehicle for social protest; singing and marching for human rights, equality and peace.
 - **J. Cole – Be Free (2014)**
J. Cole (born 1985) is a hip-hop rapper, who uses his music to comment on racial inequality in America which persists despite the progress achieved since the Civil Rights Movement.
- After listening to each song ask learners to answer the following questions on Activity Sheet 2.1 in pairs:
 - What do you think the song is about?
 - What phrases or words stood out from the lyrics?
 - What mood is conveyed by the song's delivery?
 - How effectively do you think the song addresses its subject matter?
- After listening and responding to each song, split learners into six groups. Assign two groups to each song and ask learners to compare their thoughts on their given song. Follow this by asking groups to feed back and discuss as a class how the different songs address racial inequality.

Differentiation

Make it harder: Ask learners to consider the following questions:

- *Why were these songs known as Freedom Songs and not equality songs?*
- *Why did both Joan Baez and Nina Simone sing about freedom and not about equality?*

Plenary (5 minutes)

- Leading on from the discussion, ask learners to pick out the key words or phrases from each song which they feel express protest, for example “overcome”, “free”, “chains”.



- Ask the class what they think of when they hear the word chains. Discuss the fact that chains are used in these songs as a metaphor, rather than literally. Are black people “in chains” today? If so, how and why? Can they give examples? If there is time, this could lead on to a discussion about issues of racial prejudice in the police, as has been seen recently in both the UK and the US.

Further ideas

- Create a longer presentation about each song or artist. This could involve learners doing some research on the singer, trying to sum up the song in one sentence, picking out their favourite lyric and creating a drawing to illustrate it. For example, learners could depict the bird in the last verse of I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free.
- Write a diary entry for a protester who has just attended a rally, or for someone who has just travelled on the bus and witnessed Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat.

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Background notes for teachers

Nina Simone and her music

Nina Simone was musically gifted and quickly learnt to play the piano as a child. She intended to become a concert pianist but found that her race presented too many barriers, so she began to sing and play in bars and developed a career as a singer. Although she was once dubbed the 'Queen of Soul', she resisted this classification and her music spanned several genres including jazz, blues, soul, folk and pop. In the early 1960s, she became involved in the Civil Rights Movement, writing songs to inspire people to claim their rights. She said, "I stopped singing love songs and started singing protest songs because protest songs were needed." As time went on, she became increasingly interested in African-American history, living in Barbados and Liberia for a while. By the time she died in 2003, she had developed a powerful and passionate stage presence, as well as an international following.

The origins of jazz

Like Simone, many other black musicians found that they could not make their names in the world of classical music and so became jazz musicians. Jazz is a wide and diverse genre of music, originating from the southern states of America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is a fusion of many musical elements, combining European harmony with African influences such as improvisation and complex rhythms which were brought to America through the slave trade. Another influence from black slaves was church music, including spirituals, with gospel music finding its way into the roots of blues.

Jazz music became symbolically linked to the Civil Rights Movement because it had a culture in which people were judged by ability rather than factors such as race. Jazz musicians took up the cause, using their fame and their music to promote racial equality and social justice.

Folk revival

Folk is a general term for music that originates in traditional popular culture. Customarily folk music has unknown authorship and is transmitted orally from generation to generation. Guitar and vocals also feature heavily.

America saw a folk revival during the 1940s, peaking in popularity in the mid-1960s. Joan Baez, a high-profile folk artist in the 1960s, covered traditional material in her own style (such as the Freedom Song "We Shall Overcome") and was openly political in line with the Civil Rights Movement. The alignment of folk singers with Freedom Songs gave the genre new visibility and prestige during this time. Folk gradually became more mainstream, particularly with the rise of peace movements during the Vietnam War and the folk revival caused by Bob Dylan's pop-folk style.

Hip-hop

Hip-hop culture initially centered on the idea of updating classic recordings, attitudes and experiences for modern audiences. Hip-hop is rhythmic music which is often accompanied by rapping and often takes inspiration from soul, funk and rhythm and blues. It was established during the 1970s and was particularly popular among the African-American



youth residing in the Bronx. In the 1980s and early 1990s, hip-hop began to diversify and be influenced by other styles. By the mid-1990s, it had become a best-selling music genre and its popularity continued through the 2000s, with influences entering mainstream pop. In the UK, British hip-hop has been heavily influenced by the US hip-hop scene but is underpinned by elements of Jamaican music.

The lyrics of many early hip-hop and rap songs focused on social issues, such as the realities of life in housing projects. The genre gave young African-Americans a space for their issues to be heard.

"Young black Americans coming out of the civil rights movement have used hip hop culture in the 1980s and 1990s to show the limitations of the movement"¹

Various hip-hop artists in America have continued the tradition of focusing on social issues relating to race, using music to protest tensions with the police. In the UK, following the decline in popularity of grime music which focused on gangster lifestyles and violence, a new generation of socially conscious hip-hop artists have emerged who highlight injustices such as racism and war.

References

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jazz

jazz.about.com/od/historyjazztimeline/a/JazzCivilRights.htm

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_folk_music_revival

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hip_hop_music

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_hip_hop

¹ Diawara, Manthia. "Homeboy Cosmopolitan". In *Search of Africa*, 245–46. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998



What do you think the song is about?

What phrases or words stood out from the lyrics?

What mood is conveyed by the song's delivery?

How effectively do you think the song addresses its subject matter?