

# Global Music Lesson Plans

## Lesson 4: Songs of Mass and Individual Protest – USA, Jamaica and South Africa.

**For ages range 11-14.**

### **Time required:**

One 60 minute lesson.

### **Activity:**

Singing, listening to and appraising protest songs.

### **Aims:**

- To explore riffs, hooks and grounds.
- To explore how words and music can convey social, political and cultural messages.

### **Pupils will learn:**

- How music is used to convey social, political and cultural messages.
- That reggae is a strongly emotional music that communicates the tensions of race and lifestyle of the black Caribbean community.
- How the meaning of a lyric can be conveyed in song.

### **Web links you will need:**

- Streamed online video of [‘Demonstrations in Danville’](#), Virginia, 1963, WDBJ, University of Virginia. Note: you will need to scroll down to find this video resource.
- Audio file of [‘We Shall Overcome’](#).
- [Sheet music of ‘We Shall Overcome’](#)
- [History of ‘We Shall Overcome’](#) – (an excerpt from an online radio documentary).
- [Lyric of ‘Buffalo Soldier’](#) by Bob Marley.
- [Lyric to ‘Prisoner’](#) by Lucky Dube.
- [‘Prisoner’ by Lucky Dube](#) (audio)
- [‘Buffalo Soldier’ by Bob Marley](#) (audio)

**Useful Information**

Many of the best known protest songs in the Western world originated in the deep south of America where slavery and racial discrimination imposed social barriers that have only recently been eroded. Protest songs such as 'We Shall Overcome' became anthems for the oppressed black community. Rooted in slavery, it began as a field song, a work refrain (or hook) that helped men and women in bondage endure. The modern lyrics of this song derive from Charles Tindley's gospel song 'I'll Overcome Some Day' (1900), and the opening and closing melody from the 19th-century spiritual 'No More Auction Block for Me'. Protest songs of the masses tend to have simple, repetitive, memorable melodies with a matching repetition of key phrases e.g. the words 'We Shall Overcome' appear four times within the verse.

Reggae is a very emotional genre of music that communicates the tensions of the black Caribbean community and is commonly used as a vehicle for individual protest. More recently Reggae has been adopted by black-African communities across the globe. The song 'Buffalo Soldier' by Bob Marley protests against the unjust treatment of Black (Buffalo) soldiers and regiments during the American Civil war. Marley saw the "Buffalo Soldiers" as black men who performed with courage, honor and distinction despite endemic racism and prejudice. The song 'Prisoner' by Black South African Lucky Dube protests about feeling a prisoner within his own Johannesburg community.

Because of its potential for mass appeal, music has been increasingly used to convey social, political and cultural messages. There are many examples of songs from diverse cultures around the world that communicate the outrage of both individuals and the masses at all forms of social injustice.

<b>Lesson plan</b>	<b>Lesson 4: Songs of Mass and Individual Protest – USA, Jamaica and South Africa (Age range 11-14)</b>
Starter	<p>Watch a video clip of 'Demonstrations in Danville', Virginia, 1963, WDBJ, University of Virginia but do not reveal what the video is about. Ask pupils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do they think is happening in the video? (protest against black injustice).</li> <li>• When do they think that the protest took place? (1963).</li> <li>• What were the words of the song that the protesters were singing? ('I/We shall not, we shall not be moved'.)</li> <li>• Can they remember and sing the melody of the song?</li> <li>• Why do you think people sing when they protest? (e.g. feeling of solidarity, most effective communication of messages).</li> </ul>

	<p>Point out that during the lesson, pupils will be exploring songs of protest, all relating to black oppression and racial discrimination.</p>
Main	<p>Teach the song 'We shall overcome' (Using the audio file of 'We Shall Overcome' and Sheet Music of 'We Shall Overcome'). Outline the history of the song (see 'Useful Information'). Ask pupils what characteristics helped it to become an anthem for black oppression in America? (E.g. its roots in slavery, repetition of a simple message of protest that implies solidarity, short, memorable and repetitive melodic phrases – called 'hooks').</p> <p>Ask pupils to speak the words of the song to a neighbour in a way that conveys their discontent and conviction. Ask half of the class to chant the words of the song to the other half. Chant the words as a class. Sing the song a) sitting down, b) processing around the classroom and c) processing along the corridor of the school. Which was the best performance? Why? Did the context of a real procession with a potential audience make any difference to the way they felt and sang?</p> <p>Listen to part (or all) of the history of 'We Shall Overcome'. Point out that the simple, catchy melodic hooks of 'We Shall Overcome' make it appropriate for mass protest.</p> <p>Introduce Bob Marley's song 'Buffalo Soldier' as an example of a different type of individual protest song. Point out that reggae is a strongly emotional music that communicates the tensions of the black Caribbean community. Read through the Lyric of 'Buffalo Soldier' and, using the information provided (see 'Useful Information'), provide pupils with a historical context. Listen to a recording of the song (see resources). Ask pupils what they remember of the song i.e. which melodic hooks and which words stood out for them? Can they sing any fragments from the song? How do the musical characteristics compare with 'We Shall Overcome'? (They are very similar.)</p>
Plenary	<p>Listen to 'Prisoner' by Lucky Dube (see resources), displaying the Lyric to 'Prisoner' for pupils to follow. Discuss the meaning of the song. Point out that Lucky Dube is a song writer from Johannesburg. Why do the pupils think he writes songs in a Caribbean reggae style rather than a South African style? (This tells us that Reggae has been adopted by black-African communities across the globe as a symbol of black identity and solidarity).</p>