



SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

THE POWER OF NONVIOLENCE: MUSIC CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

Lesson Overview

Students explore how music can be used to attain social and political changes in society. The lesson continues the theme of nonviolence by exploring ways in which music helped advance the civil rights movement.

Suggested Grade Level

Middle and high school

Estimated Time to Complete

Up to two class periods

Lesson Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to

- discuss how music can positively influence social and political issues in society,
- identify how specific pieces of music have had an impact on the civil rights movement, and
- explain the motivation or inspiration of various composers for becoming involved musically.

Materials Needed

- A laptop, speakers, and internet connectivity *or* a tape recorder with preselected songs
- Lyrics and fact sheet for “We Shall Overcome” (Handout 1)
- Song list (Teacher Resource 1)
- Student direction sheet (Handout 2)

Before the Lesson

- Determine how the various musical selections will be shared with the class and with the groups.
- Decide how long the groups will have to gather information and then prepare for a short presentation to the class.
- Determine how long each group’s presentation will be.

Lesson Procedure

Day 1

1. *Beginning the lesson.* Using the blackboard or a screen, share the following quote from Berthold Auerbach: “Music washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.” Begin a class discussion by asking students what they think of this quote. Ask students to share the following:

- What do they think of music?
- What kind of music do they listen to and why?
- How often do they listen to music, and how accessible is it today?
- Provide current and historic examples of *negative* influences attributed to music.
- Provide current and historic examples of *positive* influences attributed to music.

To help transition from this discussion to the next segment, share one or more of the following quotes and ask students to discuss their meaning. Also solicit any examples the students can recall.

“Music can change the world because it can change people.” —Bono

“Music doesn’t lie. If there is something to be changed in this world, then it can only happen through music.” —Jimmy Hendrix

“One good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain.” —Bob Marley

2. *Music as an instrument of social change.* Play a modern-day popular protest song, such as Macklemore and Ryan Lewis’s “Same Love.” Lyrics can be found at <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/macklemore/samelove.html>. Engage your students in a class discussion:
 - Ask students to discuss the meaning of the modern-day protest song you have chosen and to explain why it has become popular.
 - What other social issues have been discussed through music? Name the issues and the songs.
 - How has music helped to bring about social or political change? Give examples.
 - Can you think of songs associated with the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s?
3. *A civil rights song—“We Shall Overcome.”* Play this song for the students and ask them to identify the song and its meaning. Below are two options. Many other renditions of this song are available online. The lyrics and a fact sheet for the song are provided in **Handout 1**. Discuss with students the origins of this song from gospel music and old spiritual songs. What other eras can they associate with spirituals?
 - Sung by Pete Seeger: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2b24Ewk934g>

- Sung by various artists: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jW2MRTqzJug>
4. *A songwriter and his or her song.* This group activity will allow students to research some of the most compelling pieces of music and the stories behind them. Divide the class into groups of four. Give each group one of the songs on the **song list (Teacher Resource 1)**. Students will first need to read the lyrics and, if possible, listen to the song. Ask students to complete the following activity:
 - Determine whether the song speaks specifically about a real-life event or incident, and compare what the song describes with the actual event, *or* whether the song is a general commentary on the state of affairs at the time. If so, what aspects of social injustice does the song describe?
 - Who was the singer/songwriter of the piece? What was his or her connection to the civil rights movement?
 - What impact, if any, does a song like this have on the social consciousness of a community or society? Please distribute the **student direction sheet (Handout 2)** provided. This should be the stopping point for the first class. Tell students how long the groups have to complete the research and compile the responses for the activity.

Day 2

5. *Reconvening the group.* Divide the class into the groups formed for the activity. Give them a few minutes to prepare themselves for sharing their work.
6. *Sharing.* Ask each group to share with the rest of the class their chosen or assigned song and their responses to the questions. Have the songs on hand in the event that the other students have not heard the song before. You may wish to have them listen to at least one or two songs, depending on how much time you have.
7. *Concluding the lesson.* Once all the groups have shared, ask the students to reflect on what they have heard and conduct a class discussion. Some questions that can be used are as follows:
 - What have you learned from this exploration?
 - The music in this activity spanned almost thirty years. Why did it take so long to have an impact?
 - What role did the songwriters and singers play in this movement?
 - Could music have the same impact today? Why or why not?