

Teaching American History Grant: Learning Experience 2006-2007  
(Heidi Coffey - Ulster BOCES)

**Topic Title: Music and the Civil Rights Movement**

**DATE: July 20, 2006**

**Grade Level: 7/8**

**Overview of the Learning Experience:**

- Students will become aware of how music impacted and reflected the thoughts and feelings of the Civil Rights Movement and how there are similarities in today's music.
- Students will create an original song, poem or collage about a current social issue.
- Students will interpret popular music of today and the Civil Rights Movement
- Students will engage in meaningful discussion.

NYS Standard 1: Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments and turning points in the history of the US and NY-study about the major social, political, economic, cultural and religious development in NYS and US history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups.

**Essential Question(s):**

- How did the music of the Civil Rights Movement shape a generation?
- What did the music say to those that listened to it?
- Can music be a gauge of the social climate?
- How is music of today similar or different from music of the past?

**Time Allotment (classroom time):** 2-72 minute class periods

**Vocabulary (key terms):** Medgar Evers, lynch, pawn, epitaph, civil rights, social issues

**Materials/Resources: (Please include all documents containing directions for students)**

- Access to computers
- Handout included in packet
- Lyrics to Bob Dylan's "Only a Pawn in Their Game"  
<http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/pawn.html>
- and Sam Cooke's "A Change is Gonna Come"  
[http://www.metrolyrics.com/lyrics/48361/Sam\\_Cooke/A\\_Change\\_Is\\_Gonna\\_Come](http://www.metrolyrics.com/lyrics/48361/Sam_Cooke/A_Change_Is_Gonna_Come)
- Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit"  
<http://www.bluesforpeace.com/lyrics/strange-fruit.htm>

- the lyrics to “People Get Ready”  
[http://www.lyricsfreak.com/r/rod+stewart/people+get+ready\\_20117591.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/r/rod+stewart/people+get+ready_20117591.html)
- and Jonathan Mayer’s, “Waiting on the World to Change”  
<http://www.completealbumlyrics.com/lyric/130680/John+Mayer+-+Waiting+On+The+World+To+Change.html>
- please note that you can use lyrics to any song you choose, these are the songs I found
- Notebooks, writing materials

**Procedure:**

- Handout copies of Jonathan Mayer’s song, “Waiting on the World to Change”.
- Read and discuss the meaning with the class. Point out that there was a time period when young people did want to and made changes to our society, the Civil Rights Era. Brainstorm things that people wanted to change or did change during this time period
- Explain that today they will be looking at some song lyrics from the Civil Rights Movement and discussing their meaning
- Handout copies of Bob Dylan’s “Only a Pawn in Their Game” and Sam Cooke’s “A Change is Gonna Come” Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” and “People Get Ready” and read them with the students. Please note that “Strange Fruit” is very graphic.
- Give students 10-15 minutes to write what they think each selection is about then discuss. Point out that “Strange Fruit” was from 1938. Ask students why they think it was included. Also point out that there is a spiritual side to many Civil Rights era songs and connect it with the church and the role that the church played in the movement.
- Play the songs (if attainable) \*\*\* try imeem.com
- Ask the students why people would listen to these songs. Why were these songs so popular? Ask if they could describe the political/social climate of the world based on these songs.
- Ask students if there is any music that they listen to that has a similar message about social change. List on the board.
- Explain that they will be locating current songs with a message of social change using the internet. Brainstorm social issues with class. First they will interpret the song (generally what is the song about with reference to specific lines). Then students will choose one of the following: A. creating a collage for the song or the social issue or B. using the theme of social change compose an original song or poem
- Handout worksheet that outlines the assignment for locating and interpreting the songs (attached at end of lesson plan) (Day one)
- Handout the worksheet for the collage (attached at the end of lesson plan) (day two)
- Please be aware that some issues may be very sensitive to some students. Some of the artists tell about instances or abuse, bullying and suicide. Please let them

know that this is a safe environment. Artists chosen have a positive message. I did not choose any artists that promote gratuitous violence.

- As an extra credit assignment students can locate lyrics to other songs of the Civil Rights Movement or current songs and interpret them or they can read or perform their original work.

**Assessment:**

- Rubric attached

**Student Work:**

**Student Work – score 3.5**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Music for Social Change**

Directions: Use the internet to locate song lyrics for recent songs dealing with social issues. Attach lyrics to this page. On the front of this page write what the lyrics are about. Remember to include what social issue the song is about and what point the artists is making about that issue. Please make reference to specific song lyrics when you can. (If you type in “music about inequality” you will get a list, this may be easier than searching an artist)

You may choose from the following artists:

Chumbawamba	Lauren Hill	Erika Badu	Suzanne Vega
Dave Mathews Band	U2	James Taylor	Indigo Girls
Pearl Jam	India Arie	REM	Pink
USA for Africa	Tracy Chapman	Martina McBride	
Metallica	Bob Marley	John Michael Montgomery	
Maryann Brooks	Blessed Union of Souls	Depeche Mode	
Artist United Against Apartheid			
Bruce Springsteen	Lenny Kravitz	En Vogue	
Billy Joel			

Song Title buffalo soldier\_\_\_\_\_

Artist Bob Marley\_\_\_\_\_

What is this song about?

Inequality – this song is about the history of the buffalo soldiers and how they were took from Africa and then had to fight for the people who took them from Africa.

“There was a buffalo soldier in the heart of America stolen from Africa, brought to America, fighting on arrival, fighting for survival.”

**Student Work – score 3**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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- |                                 |                        |                         |              |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Chumbawamba                     | Lauren Hill            | Erika Badu              | Suzanne Vega |
| Dave Mathews Band               | U2                     | James Taylor            | Indigo Girls |
| Pearl Jam                       | India Arie             | REM                     | Pink         |
| USA for Africa                  | Tracy Chapman          | Martina McBride         |              |
| Metallica                       | Bob Marley             | John Michael Montgomery |              |
| Maryann Brooks                  | Blessed Union of Souls | Depeche Mode            |              |
| Artist United Against Apartheid |                        |                         |              |
| Bruce Springsteen               | Lenny Kravitz          | En Vogue                |              |
| Billy Joel                      |                        |                         |              |

Song Title Jeremy

Artist Pearl Jam

What is this song about?

It is about a kid who never gets attention and gets picked on. They also unleashed the lion in him. The artist sang about the kid Jeremy nobody ever paying attention to him. He also committed suicide.

**Student Work – score 4**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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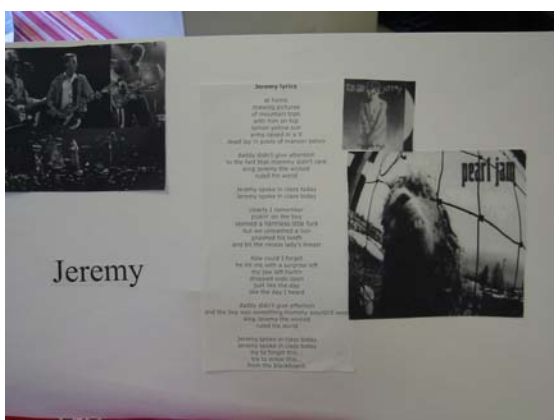
Song Title Bag Lady

Artist Erika Badu

What is this song about?

It's about a lady with too much worries and fears on her mind and its crushing her life down to the ground slowly. One day it's going to drive her love of her life away from her. That's what these words mean, “one day he gone say you crowdin' my space” “so pack light” “baggage” – means what's full of sorrow, fears and thoughts.

# Samples of collages



Name \_\_\_\_\_

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Billy Joel			

Song Title \_\_\_\_\_

Artist \_\_\_\_\_

What is this song about?



Social Issues Project

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Choose option A or option B.

A. Create a collage to express the song and lyrics you have previously interpreted or create a collage about the social issue of the song. You can use picture or words from magazines or newspapers and you can use pictures from the internet. The entire page should be covered and the viewer should be able to understand the song or social issue from the collage.

B. Using any of the themes about social change, compose an original song or poem. For extra credit you can read or perform your original work.

Rubric of Social Issues in Music

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Use the scale to rate each area.

Poor	Fair	Good	Better	Best
1	2	3	4	5

Quality of Information

Information demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the social issue chosen

Information is organized in a logical, cohesive manner

Information is appropriate to task and interpretation

Rating \_\_\_\_\_

Grammar

Grammar and spelling are correct

Rating \_\_\_\_\_

Understanding

Interpretation is clear and concise, no extraneous information

Conveys an understanding of the social issue

Leaves reader with a better understanding of the song

Knowledge of social issues is sufficient

Rating \_\_\_\_\_

Requirements of project met

Followed classroom directions

Followed assignment directions

Used computers appropriately

Assignment is complete

Rating \_\_\_\_\_

Creativity

Clear, neat and original

Conveys appropriate message, effective layout

Rating \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL \_\_\_\_