



Post-Visit Lesson for the Abolition and Social Change Program

Radical Change and Music

Grade 5

Time: 45 minutes

Background:

This post-visit explores the way music has been used to combat injustice and oppression from the fight for abolition to the 21st century. During their visit to Old Sturbridge Village, students explored the roots of slavery in the North and its abolition. They have also seen how people in the Northern states remained complicit in the institution of slavery despite its abolishment. In this lesson, students will read or listen to music from three different time periods associated with calls for social change and examine the messages that these songs are trying to convey.

As the abolitionist movement gained momentum in the 1830s with the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society and more northern states abolishing slavery, music became an increasingly popular tool to bring more people to the cause. Abolitionists published songbooks with hymns and songs calling on New Englanders to take action. These songs were often performed at meetings and Concerts of Prayer to energize attendees and persuade more to join them. Since many were lyrics set to already popular tunes or hymns, they could be sung at work or in the home, as well as at organized anti-slavery gatherings.¹

Two songbooks from the collections of Old Sturbridge Village are used in this lesson. Both of these songbooks subscribe to the Garrisonian approach to abolition, namely the immediate abolition of slavery. These strongly emphasize Christian morality as well as on the hypocrisy of the rhetoric of freedom from the Founding Fathers of a nation that did not extend the promise of freedom to enslaved people. Note that this only condemns the oppression and injustice of slavery in other parts of the country and not the racism and inequality experienced by free people of color everywhere in the United States.

The other two groups of songs come from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and from the 21st century. The Civil Rights movement reclaimed many of the songs of the past as activists transformed spirituals associated with slavery into civil rights anthems. However, the works chosen for this lesson focus instead on songs created in the 1960s. "We Shall Overcome" is the exception to this, being one

¹ Sandra Jean Graham, "Abolition," *Grove Music Online*. 4 October 2012.

of the most recognizable songs from the Civil Rights Movement, though it is believed to have originated earlier in the twentieth century.

Songs from the 21st century selected here are centered around current struggles against racial injustice, some with close ties to the Black Lives Matter movement. Many modern protest songs harken back to the music of the Civil Rights Movement either in style, as in “Sing Out March On,” or in the lyrics, as in Hozier’s “Nina Cried Power.” Common threads of freedom, of hope for the future, and of resistance to oppression run through the songs from the 19th century up to the present day.

The perspective and identity of the songwriter or performer is an important piece to note in this lesson. The music of abolition was that of White abolitionists. While Black abolitionists may have used song, those published in association with William Lloyd Garrison were by white anti-slavery activists and were sung primarily by white abolitionists. This is important to note as the lesson moves on to civil rights and contemporary music, and the performers/writers of those works are mostly African American. There are two exceptions: Pete Seeger (1963) and Hozier (2018) are white composers. By examining perspective as well as the music itself, students will continue the work they did in lesson one and evaluate these songs as sources of their time.

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will analyze pieces of music from the abolitionists of the early 19th century, the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century, and contemporary examples.
2. Students will compare and contrast the music of different social movements.
3. Students will identify methods abolitionists used to oppose slavery and give examples of ways they can affect change today.
4. Students will create a song, poem, or sketch about an issue they believe in.

Essential Questions:

1. What is radical change?
2. What is freedom? What did freedom look like in the 1830s? How does it look today?
3. How can culture (music, art, literature, film, etc.) be a force of change or of protest?
4. How can we take what we have learned about abolitionists and radical change to speak up about an important issue we face today?

List of materials and resources:

This is a list of music used by musicians and activists to call for change. Select an example from each time period for students to analyze and discuss. See the **Music and Anti-Slavery Resources** document for links to recordings of many of these listed songs.

- Music of abolition
 - *Anti-Slavery Melodies: For Friends of Freedom*, 1843
 - “Freedom’s Banner” words by R.C. Waterson

- “Oppression shall not always reign” by Henry Ware Jr
 - “Now’s the day and now’s the hour” by Harriet Martineau
 - *The Anti-Slavery Offering and Picknick: A Collection of Speeches, Poems, Dialogues, Songs for Schools and AS Meetings*, 1843
 - “Song of the Abolitionist” by William Lloyd Garrison, sung to “Auld Lang Syne”
- Music of Civil Rights
 - “A Change Is Gonna Come” by Sam Cooke, 1964
 - “We Shall Overcome”
 - “If You Miss Me at the Back of the Bus” written by Charles Neblett and performed by Pete Seeger in 1963
 - “Freedom Highway” by the Staples Singers, 1965
- Contemporary examples
 - “Freedom” by Beyonce featuring Kendrick Lamar, 2016
 - “Nina Cried Power” by Hozier featuring Mavis Staples, 2018
 - “Change” by Mavis Staples, 2019
 - “Sing Out March On” by Joshua Campbell, 2017
 - “Glory” by John Legend and Common, 2014

Key Terms and Vocabulary:

- **Abolition:** The action or an act of abolishing a system, practice, or institution. In this unit, we refer mostly to the abolition of slavery.
- **Radical change:** Change that occurs quickly and modifies the essence of social structures or organizational practices.
- **Social movement:** A loosely organized but sustained campaign in support of a social goal, typically the implementation or the prevention of a change in society’s structures or values.
- **Civil rights:** An individual’s right to participate in the civil and political life of society and the state without repression or discrimination.
- **Spiritual:** A type of sacred song created by and for African Americans that originated in oral tradition. Grown out of the American culture of slavery, folk spirituals were hybrids of West African and Anglo-American music and ritual.²

Procedure:

1. From the list above (under **List of Materials and Resources**), select a song from each time period to analyze.
2. Print out lyrics for students to analyze.
3. Print out worksheets for students to organize notes on each song.
4. Pull up songs or videos for students to follow along.

² Graham, Sandra Jean. "Spiritual." *Grove Music Online*. 10 Jul. 2012.

Opening to Lesson (5-10 minutes)

Review some of the concepts from previous lessons.

- How were people who seemed powerless able to effect change and speak out for their cause?
- What were some of the ways abolitionists spread their ideas?

Many abolitionists came together to meet, write, and encourage others to join them in trying to effect change. They often used music as a tool to energize their cause. Sometimes, they changed or rewrote the lyrics to popular songs in order to protest the continuation of slavery.

Ask: Can you think of any songs with a specific message?

Body of Lesson: Listening to Songs about Social Change (30 minutes)

Today, we are looking at music as a force for change. Abolitionism was not the only movement to use music to reinforce their cause. Music played a powerful role in the Civil Rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s. Today there are countless examples of artists who use music to send a message of protest and raise their voices to inspire change.

We will look at examples of songs from all three of these movements and evaluate the way music is used to promote radical change. Students will have a worksheet to fill out after listening to each song. They can work on this in small groups to discuss each point.

Have students get into small groups and pass out the chart for analyzing songs. Begin by reading out (or if possible listening to) the song from the abolitionists. Give students time to discuss and take notes. They will answer the following questions:

- Who wrote or performed this song?
- Why is it important to know whose perspective the song comes from?
- What message is the song trying to convey?
- What words or lyrics are important to this song?

Repeat this with the next two songs.

The whole class comes back together. Allow groups to share out what they discussed about their song. The teacher takes notes to highlight similarities and differences between the songs of different time periods.

Questions for discussion:

1. What is this song about?
2. Is there a message or argument that it is trying to share?
3. Is the message or argument convincing?
4. Who wrote or performed this song? Why is their perspective important to our analysis?
5. What words or lines from the song do you find the most powerful? Why?
6. Many of these songs focus on freedom. How is the idea of freedom in the 1830s different from freedom in the 1960s and today?

Conclusion (10 minutes)

Students brainstorm contemporary issues that they would like to change. These can be local or community issues (classroom, school, town, etc.) or wider issues that affect their state, country, or world.

Students take what they have learned about the use of music as a method of change to advocate for their cause. Students can choose one of the following media to convey their message:

- a song
- a letter
- a poem
- draw/ sketch an illustration or poster

Students should remember their discussion on the types of language used in the songs and poems. How can they create something just as powerful?

Primary/Secondary Resources:

- <https://loc.gov/item/ihas.200197383>
- <https://folkways.si.edu/voices-struggle-civil-rights-movement-1945-1965/african-american-spoken-word-protest/article/smithsonian>
- Craig Werner, "Meeting Over Yonder": Using Music to Teach the Movement in the North, *OAH Magazine of History*, Volume 26, Issue 1, January 2012, Pages 41–45, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oahmag/oar056>

Extension Activities:

- Students take the line they find most striking from one of the songs and create a visual (poster, drawing, illustration) to go with it.
- Students can research contemporary issues in advance so they are prepared for the ending activity.
- Have students come up with further action they can take to promote their issue. Could they volunteer, donate, or write letters? Could they build on the last lesson plan about petitions and create a petition to send to their local government?