

Using Music as a Primary Source

Describe:

- Background of piece- Title, composer and composer's background, date, events happening in the country/region at the time, venue
- What did you hear? How would you describe the music?
 - Is it an instrumental piece? What instruments (brass, woodwinds, string, percussion) are being used?
 - Is there a voice in this piece? What language/dialect is being sung?

Analyze:

- Compositional and Performance Style: Use musical terms to analyze the music you just described (beat, instrumentation, crescendo, dissonance, foreground, background, melody, percussion, phrasing, range, register, rhythm, tempo, texture, timbre, vibrato, vocals, etc.)
- The words and syntax of the song lyrics.
- Do you sense any themes/connections in the music?

Interpret:

- Motivation of the composer
- Purpose/intentions of the piece
- Impact on the audience
- How did it make you feel?
- Determine what the composer is trying to do.
- What is the music doing?

Using Music to Teach American History

Mariana Whitmer

One of my most enduring memories of elementary school is of my fourth (or was it fifth?) grade teacher announcing, "Take out your music books." We did not have a "special" music class with a separate teacher; this was our music lesson. We had small songbooks full of wonderful illustrations that we kept in our desks. I remember they smelled like fresh ink, probably because they were brand new and perhaps too rarely used. As we pulled them out, our teacher would set her autoharp on her desk and, with lots of bravura, begin to play. I do not remember if she was a good or bad singer. I do not remember if I was a good or bad singer, or whether we were even in tune. I certainly could not read music, but I could read the words, and she knew the melody. We sang maybe a half dozen songs once or twice per week. It did not take a great deal of class time, but it would be the highlight of my day and I often wondered why we did not do it more often.

The delight I felt when it was time to sing demonstrates the emotional associations present in music. Music is laden with feelings, and because of that we will typically remember activities it accompanies. Conversely, when we hear certain music the memories attached to it easily emerge. In simple terms, this is because incoming information initially passes through the nonrational part of

our brain and the brain must determine whether or not, and how, to recall this new information. Experiences with a high emotional content (either good or bad) will be most easily remembered. Using music as a means to communicate knowledge is particularly effective because the emotional content music carries will often ensure that the information will be remembered quickly and more completely.



Charles Todd (left, foreground) records Mr. and Mrs. Frank Pipkin (center, foreground) and other musicians at the Migratory Labor Camp in Shafter, California, 1940. Mrs. Pipken was thought to be the archetype for "Ma Joad" in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Photograph by Robert Hemmig. (Image courtesy of the Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant-Worker Collection, American Folklife Center AFC 1985/001:P9-p1)

As a primary source document for teaching history, music makes a great deal of sense. Music not only opens a window to the past, but carries with it emotions and sentiments—feelings that were incorporated into the music when it was composed—that can be shared by all. The image shown here (left) refers to this sense of "recording history", just as the songs of these people experiencing hard times are recorded for posterity. The history of our country—indeed, all countries—is documented through music.

What is the best way to integrate music into a history (or other social studies) curriculum? This issue of the *OAH Magazine of History* suggests several different approaches. While many teachers may already have experience with using songs to complement a lesson,

music without words can, in some cases, be even more effective. Lyrics are certainly useful, as Peter DiNardo's lesson plan on the search for an

American identity demonstrates. Yet Robert Stinson's lesson plan provides a wonderful example of how to use instrumental music to teach about cultural nationalism during the Depression. Similarly, Joseph Horowitz's article on Dvořák demonstrates how historical events and personalities can be linked to the music through its conception. Music is not composed in a void; although there may not be lyrics, the music captures the sentiments of its time.

When using music to teach history, another important question is whether the music should be contemporary to the era or retrospective. Is it the same to utilize music that was sung or listened to at the same time as the events as it is to use recently composed music that reflects on what happened in the past? One of the hazards of using the latter is that often a different perspective can be superimposed on the events, intentionally or not, which is a necessary by-product of our current lives. Teaching the battle of New Orleans, for example, using Jimmy Driftwood's 1959 song will necessarily bring with it extra-musical connotations, while the 1815 song, "Battle of New Orleans," reportedly composed by the soldiers who fought the battle, provides a different and perhaps more candid viewpoint.

In some cases, however, utilizing recent songs can provide a useful and additional point of view. Teaching about labor rights and Joe Hill, for example, using Alfred Hayes and Earl Robinson's "I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill" (composed in 1936, 21 years after Joe Hill was executed) presents the historical perspective of how Joe Hill's work was perceived in the years after his death. When combined with the music he wrote for *The Little Red Songbook* (1904)—see my article on "Songs of Social Significance" in this issue for more information—a fascinating study emerges.

Finally, what is the best way to use music when teaching history? Is it enough to play music as the students enter the room, or should it be integrated into the lesson plan? As Deane Root outlines in his article, there are important uses of music. Sadly, music has become so ubiquitous that we often tune it out. Active listening, as opposed to passive hearing, is a learned skill. We need to learn to listen to the sounds around us, not just hear them and let them pass by unnoticed. Playing music in the classroom as a way of establishing a setting for a lesson plan is certainly a wonderful way to "set the scene." The lesson will be greatly enhanced, however, by including an active listening component to ensure that it will be remembered. Kathryn Haines's profile on *Voices Across Time* provides background and description of one resource that



Working for the Farm Security Administration, Russell Lee photographed these elementary school children as they sang in Pie Town, New Mexico, in 1940. (Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-fsac-1a34151 DLC.)

can help facilitate this result.

Singing in the classroom is a wonderful way to engage students and guarantee active listening. As troubador Bill Schustik relates, there are many ways to make this happen. In his lesson plan, David Hsiung introduces spirituals which were adapted and sung during the civil rights movement. He similarly suggests that actively performing some of these spirituals will reinforce the instruction. Working collaboratively with a music teacher is highly recommended, as it will further enhance the performance and deepen the understanding of any music integrated into a lesson plan.

To assist with bringing the sounds of history into the classroom, we have provided with this issue of the *OAH Magazine of History* a companion CD that includes many of the songs and compositions that are discussed throughout these pages. The songs are performed in a historically accurate style, with appropriate accompaniment and instrumentation (or absence thereof), to facilitate the sense of being transported back in time. We hope that this CD will become a regular feature in your classroom, and will perhaps inspire live singing, as the songbook did in my grade school. I recall that one of my favorite songs was "Waltzing Matilda." It was only when I was much older that I learned that this song is the unofficial national anthem of Australia. Quite possibly, my teacher could have covered more of her required curriculum had she turned that memorable singing activity into a social studies lesson. □

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Music as a Cultural Mirror

Music has been missing from our history. Generations of students and their teachers have viewed the past as if it had been silent. We have read the documents, the words of the people who created that history, and we have looked at their pictures, but we have not heard the sounds through which they shaped their culture.

In the late twentieth century, educators and publishers successfully infused original written sources (such as archival papers, historic documents, and literary works) as well as visual ones (art works, photographs) into textbooks and curricular materials to stimulate students' imaginations and to help them understand earlier cultures through closer familiarity with diverse forms of expression at specific points in history. What has been missing from this mix, however, is one of the most widely used and appealing forms of communication: music, and songs in particular. There have been many impediments.

For publishers of hardcover textbooks, music notation and sound recordings present obvious challenges; teachers not trained in music may be uneasy trying to explain it, and historians who are used to extracting messages from written documents and material culture artifacts may feel that the messages in music are elusive and unclear. Many educators have seen music as a distraction from the substantive factual materials and concepts to be learned in the history classroom.

And yet some teachers have found their own ways of using music in their history courses because they know that music is a mirror of society's events and systems of beliefs, and that each piece can be a richly packed time capsule from its period. Those teachers have developed their own methods, since using music as source materials is not a part of the pre-certification training offered by schools of education. Why not make music available to all teachers?

In the twenty-first century some publishers have begun packaging music CDs into their textbooks on American history. Even so, the music is not fully integrated into the narrative. Nor do the editors seem to understand fully how music can be used to evoke history for students.

This issue of the *OAH Magazine of History* is devoted to overcoming such barriers.

The Uses and Functions of Music

The analytical techniques of anthropologists, sociologists and musicologists help us understand how music works as an element of culture (1). People initiate musical events—i.e., they compose, perform, or listen—for many different reasons, which we can call “uses.”

The most common use of music is for play or entertainment, which humans of all ages engage in to stimulate feelings of joy, tension, and interaction, and enrich their experiences by adding mental complexity, counteracting boredom and lethargy. A related use of music is as a social activity: performing music in a group provides both practice for social life and a rewarding means of both physical and aural interaction with other performers; likewise, music can simultaneously serve as a physical stimulus and regulator for group activity such as dancing and singing along.

The use of music in communication gives rise to its most important values for teaching history. Song lyrics are usually carefully matched to the compositional style (more about that later) to enhance the meanings of the words themselves. Music, of course, is commonly used to express emotions such as love, sentiment, or anger. Adults use songs to entertain children, or lull them to sleep. Music in advertising and films is used to communicate feelings even when the audience is unaware of its purpose. And in many types of events—particularly in ritual or formal ceremonies—music is used to key or signal the beginning, the end, and important moments or points of transition from one part of the event to another.

Particularly in pre-electronic media culture, music was a means of disseminating information, as, for example, through broadside ballads about elections, natural disasters, shipwrecks, and other current events. But especially for topics rich in controversy, music is still often used as “an acceptable channel of communication in a situation where open criticism or complaint would be unacceptable” (2). Song lyrics that advocate partisan points of view, or that allow performers to make personal though public comments, or that serve to rally supporters around a common interest can be used to enhance a group's identity and to demarcate its boundaries with other groups. In this way, ethnic groups often use music to communicate what is distinctive about themselves, but so do nations and states, political parties, age groups, and social classes.

Another important use of music is to accompany and regulate physical exertion. The pieces played by aerobics instructors to provide a tempo (“a beat”) for exercise have their origins in the tunes written and performed for dance. A related aspect—largely overlooked in this age of mechanized industry—is to coordinate labor. Work songs coordinated the muscular motions and even the breathing by sailors rais-

ing sails or weighing anchor ("chanties"), crews laying or straightening rails, and soldiers marching. The words to such songs convey only part of their meaning.

There are many other uses to which music has been put. Use implies intention, but music also exerts other influences on each person who experiences the event. These are often unintended results, the consequences of the musical event, sometimes affecting the participants subconsciously. We may call these results the "functions" of music.

In analyzing music, we should be aware that music may have different functions for each of the participants and observers, depending on their roles in the event (as performer, listener, funder, technician, unintended bystander, etc.). The meanings—conscious or subconscious—that each of the participants draws from the music depend on the intended uses, but also are determined in part by their past experiences, and by the associations or relationships they draw between their personal history and the event at hand.

Venue, Style, and Meaning

Part of that meaning is shaped by the venue in which the musical event occurs, that is to say the space and its physical attributes, but also the time (duration and time of day, week, or year) and the locations of the other participants. For example, for centuries many churches

have resisted the use of secular songs because of their associations; yet in the twentieth century, the Catholic and Episcopal churches opened their doors to jazz and folk music. By moving the music from one locale to another, at a different time of the day and week, for audiences seated in pews rather than around tables or dancing, and by setting the sounds to sacred words, the composers and performers created entirely different meanings for the participants.

Music has at least two other elements that help determine its historical meaning. Song lyrics contain language (words and syntax) that can be analyzed. But all music—texted or not—has both a compositional style and a performance style. Compositional style includes the composer's choice of melody (rising or falling, wide range or narrow disjunct with wide gaps or conjunct, among many other choices) rhythm and meter (rapid or slow, regular or irregular), harmony and scale (simple or complex; major, minor or modal), form (verse/chorus, repetitive or through-composed), and more. Performance style includes the performer's interpretation of the composer's instructions (or of unwritten conventions), such as the choice of voices and instruments (imagine the contrast between a song performed by a solo voice and the same music arranged for marching band, or between an acoustic guitar and a pipe organ), as well as of the compositional style filling in or elaborating on notes of the melody, or omitting certain notes entirely, dynamics levels (loud, soft, or changing); and harmonic language. Performance practices, like other forms of human activity have changed markedly from one generation to the next, and can vary widely within a given time period. Thus, it is important to see not only the music score and lyrics, but also to hear how performers interpreted the music at that time in history.

Conclusion

Thus the multiple meanings embodied within every song are carried in the combination of its uses, functions, words (lyrics), style and venues of performance. As teachers of history, we seek to unpack the meaning by studying each of these elements when we utilize pieces of music as original documents with embedded historical information.

Each piece of music, each song, originated in a particular moment in time and responds to events that we teach about in history and social studies. It has the potential to reveal its rich contents for present-day listeners. Just as language arts teachers interpret literary texts from other eras, and art historians describe the meanings of visual images we can now understand the messages carried by music. Using song to teach history is training future generations to hear the voices communicating to us across time. □

Endnotes

1. One of the most helpful analyses of this aspect of music is by John E. Kaemmer, *Music in Human Life: Anthropological Perspectives on Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), particularly chapter 6, "Uses and Function: of Music," 142-69. My discussion is deeply indebted to Kaemmer's much more extensive account.
2. Kaemmer, *Music in Human Life*, 156-57.

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LESSON 2

Nonviolence

Framework

Three constitutional amendments extending rights to African Americans—on paper at least—were ratified during Reconstruction. They ended slavery, made African Americans citizens and extended voting rights to former slaves and their descendants. Despite this, African Americans, particularly in the South, were often denied these rights. They endured segregation, were often prevented from voting, and faced intimidation, threats and violence, all of which made it difficult—often impossible—to live freely.

Civil rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s chose nonviolence as a way to secure and exercise legal rights for African Americans. Inspired by the successes of Mohandas Gandhi in the Indian independence movement, civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. came to believe that a nonviolent approach was the best way to address African-American inequality. Why did they choose nonviolence? How did they implement it? In this lesson, students learn what nonviolence means, identify different nonviolent strategies that civil rights activists used, and explore why those strategies were so often successful.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- understand the philosophy of nonviolence
- explain why civil rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s chose nonviolence as a way to attain equal rights
- identify and evaluate the efficacy of a variety of nonviolent strategies that civil rights activists used

Materials

- Handout: Six Principles of Nonviolence (*page 15*)
- Handout: SNCC Statement of Purpose (*page 16*)
- CORE Rules for Action (available at <http://crmvet.org/docs/corerules.pdf>)
- Workshops in Nonviolence—Why? (available at www.crmvet.org/docs/nv_core_workshop.pdf)

Activities**The Theory of Nonviolence**

1. This lesson focuses on nonviolence, which was at the heart of the modern civil rights movement. (*Note: Write the word “nonviolence” on the board.*) Brainstorm what you think it means to be nonviolent. List your ideas on the board.

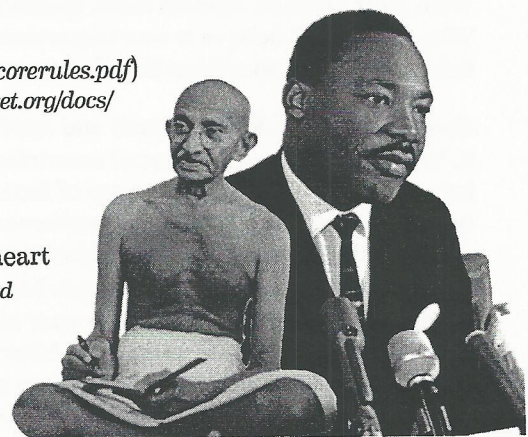
Essential Questions

What is nonviolence?

Why did many civil rights activists choose nonviolence as a way to pursue equal rights?

What nonviolent strategies did they use?

Why were nonviolent strategies often successful?



2. An important leader in the development of nonviolence as a political strategy was Mohandas Gandhi, who led India's successful nonviolent struggle for independence from Britain in the early 20th century. Martin Luther King, Jr. was greatly influenced by Gandhi's teachings; through Reverend King, nonviolence became a cornerstone of the movement for African-American equality in the mid-20th-century. Much of what you will learn about nonviolence in this lesson can be traced back to Gandhi.

Look at the handout "Six Principles of Nonviolence." (*Note: Randomly call on six students to read aloud the principles of nonviolence. You may want to draw from a deck of cards with a student's name on each card as a way to ensure that you choose students randomly.*) After students have read aloud the six principles of nonviolence, compare these six items to the list your class brainstormed, revising your class list as necessary.

Nonviolence in Action: Primary Sources

3. What did the theory of nonviolence look like when civil rights activists used it? To find out, you're going to read some primary source documents—that is, documents that were actually written during the civil rights movement. First you will look at the "SNCC [pronounced "Snick"] Statement of Purpose." The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee started in 1960, formed by students—both black and white—who had been involved in the lunch-counter sit-ins. Read the "SNCC Statement of Purpose" and answer the questions that follow. Doing so will help you understand what nonviolence meant to the members of SNCC, and why they believed it was the best way to create a more just society.

4. Then read "CORE Rules for Action." You can find the document at: <http://crmvet.org/docs/corerules.pdf>. CORE is the Congress on Racial Equality. It was founded in 1942 and became a key organizing force during the activism of the 1950s, '60s and beyond, and was firmly committed to nonviolence. After you read the CORE document, discuss with a partner what it adds to your understanding of nonviolence in the civil rights movement.

5. Finally, look at a third document. You can find it at: www.crmvet.org/docs/nv_core_workshop.pdf. This one is from CORE, too. Read "Workshops in Nonviolence—Why?" With your partner, discuss these questions: What is the purpose of this document? Why did CORE believe it was important to train people in nonviolence? What, if anything, surprises you about this document? Why?

Nonviolence in Action: Research and Application

6. What did those principles of nonviolence look like in practice? With your partner, join another pair to form a group of four. With your group, choose one of the following events from the civil rights movement: Montgomery Bus Boycott; integration of Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock; lunch-counter sit-ins; voter registration drives; Birmingham Children's March; 1963 March on Washington; march from Selma to Montgomery. Research your chosen event in sources you will find on the Resources list in the Introduction. After you have read about the event, copy the "Six Principles of Nonviolence" onto a piece of paper. With the members of your group, see how—or if—each principle was part of the action you have read about. Present

your findings to the class, with each group ending its presentation by assessing how much or how little the event demonstrated the six principles.

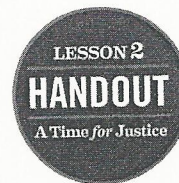
Nonviolence Today

7. Think about how nonviolence might be a way to approach injustice today. As a class, brainstorm some current examples of injustice. The problems might be in your own community—for example, maybe there are homeless people living on the street—or they might be larger-scale—for example, racial profiling by police or workplace discrimination faced by Muslim Americans. With the two other people you worked with on the “Six Principles” activity, choose one of the problems to focus on. Recall the different nonviolent strategies that were used during the civil rights movement. Which, if any, of these strategies might be useful for addressing the problem you’re looking at? Why do you think they would be useful? Which, if any, might not be so useful for addressing the problem? Why do you think they would not be useful? With your group, prepare a presentation for the class in which you assess how well nonviolence might work in dealing with a current problem. After all the groups have shared their presentations, discuss the following: How effective might nonviolence be in dealing with current problems?

Six Principles of Nonviolence

- 1** Nonviolence is not passive, but requires courage
- 2** Nonviolence seeks reconciliation, not defeat of an adversary
- 3** Nonviolent action is directed at eliminating evil, not destroying an evil-doer
- 4** A willingness to accept suffering for the cause, if necessary, but never to inflict it
- 5** A rejection of hatred, animosity or violence of the spirit, as well as refusal to commit physical violence
- 6** Faith that justice will prevail

Source: www.thekingcenter.org/ProgServices/Default.aspx



SNCC Statement of Purpose

We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action. Nonviolence as it grows from Judaic-Christian traditions seeks a social order of justice permeated by love. Integrating of human endeavor represents the crucial first step towards such a society. SNCC believes that through nonviolence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate. Acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. Peace dominates war; faith reconciles doubt. Mutual regard cancels enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice. The redemptive community supersedes systems of gross social immorality. SNCC is convinced that by appealing to conscience and standing on the moral nature of human existence, nonviolence nurtures the atmosphere in which reconciliation and justice become actual possibilities.

— EXCERPT FROM *This is SNCC*, 1960

According to the SNCC Statement of Purpose:

On what would a nonviolent social order rest?

How does integration relate to that social order?

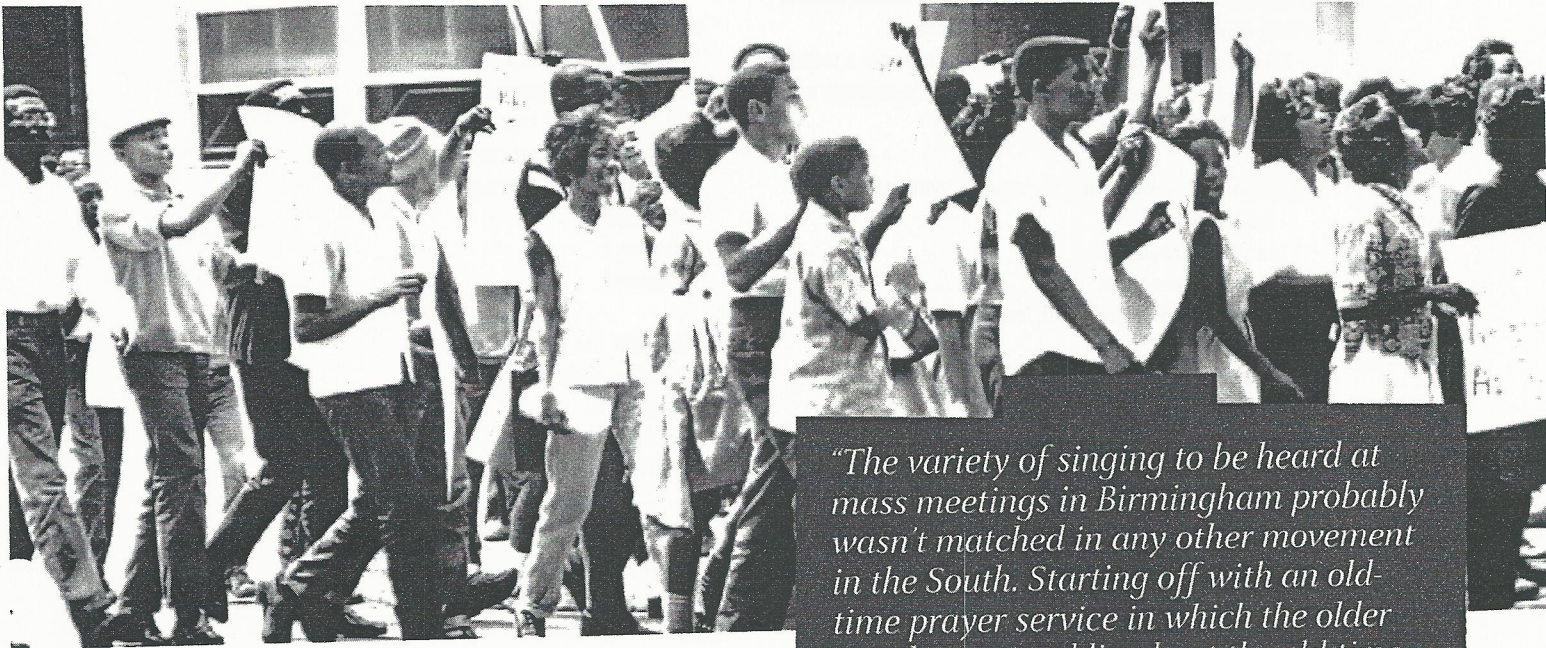
What can nonviolence bring about?

How does nonviolence bring about those realities?

Source: http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/This_Is_SNCC.pdf

ACTIVITY 4

Music and the Movement



OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the role of protest songs in the Birmingham youth movement.
- Students will identify their own political agendas and write protest songs.

TIME AND MATERIALS

- Three class sessions (one to brainstorm ideas, one to write and one to present)
- Materials for writing

FRAMEWORK

The civil rights movement was once described as the greatest singing movement in our nation's history. Many of the songs grew out of the rich culture of the black churches in the South, with songs to fit any mood or situation. Songs for joy. Songs for sorrow. Songs for determination. Songs for irony. Songs for humor. Songs to get you past the fear. Songs to celebrate.

In the summer of 1963, it appeared that the movement had stalled in Birmingham. Adults had to pay

"The variety of singing to be heard at mass meetings in Birmingham probably wasn't matched in any other movement in the South. Starting off with an old-time prayer service in which the older people sang and lined out the old-time spirituals and 'Dr. Watts' hymns in a style which went back to slavery days, the meetings were then turned over to the songs of the movement's sixty-voice gospel choir accompanied by the organ playing of its leader. After the church had rocked and spirits were jubilant, it was time to hear their leader, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth."

Guy Carawan, civil rights activist and musician

the bills, and involvement in the movement came with economic threats to their families.

The Rev. James Bevel, one of the founders of SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), first suggested it: Let the children march. And, after receiving training in nonviolence, Birmingham's young people did just that.

ACTIVITY 4

The children of Birmingham sang a new song that summer. It went to the tune of *The Old Gray Mare*. The fusion of marching and song was strategic. The Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, speaking to the young people about nonviolence, had said, "It's to be a silent demonstration. No songs, no slogans, no replies to obscenities." Everyone nodded in agreement. "However," Shuttlesworth added, "when you're arrested, sing your hearts out."

That's exactly how it played out. So when a policeman shouted, "You're all under arrest!" hundreds of voices united in song:

Ain't a-scared of your jail, 'cause I want my
freedom,
I want my freedom,
I want my freedom.
Ain't a-scared of your jail, 'cause I want my
freedom,
I want my freedom now!

Ain't a-scared of your dogs, 'cause ...

Ain't a-scared of your hose, 'cause ...

Music always has been a part of political movements. In this lesson, students will identify political issues that are important to them, choose a song and then rewrite the words to fit the music's rhythm.

Step One Ask students to individually list at least five political issues that deeply concern them. Then encourage students to share with the whole group topics they might be interested in. List these on the board. Among them you may find eating disorders, sexual harassment, bullying, race relations or war.

Step Two Notice that the Birmingham youth chose a simple and familiar song. In this way, they didn't need to learn a new song. They didn't have to concentrate on the musical rhythm but could focus on the passion of the message. This remains a great strategy.

As a first step, select a simple song from childhood and wed it with important activist messages. Consider using the following songs:

- *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*
- *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*
- *Michael, Row the Boat Ashore*
- *You Are My Sunshine*
- *The Itsy-Bitsy Spider*

Teacher Model

First model what you want students to do. Choose an issue dear to your own heart or choose one that you are sure will show up on the students' lists. The model below is based on *This Little Light of Mine* and tackles the inequality of boys' and girls' sports teams:

We want the same resources
that the boys' team gets.
We want the same resources
that the boys' team gets.
We want the same resources
that the boys' team gets.
Equity!
Equity!
Equity!

We want the prime time slot,
Friday night at 8 ...
8 o'clock!
8 o'clock!
8 o'clock!

How many women athletes
can you name out loud? ...
Name one!
Name one!
Name one!

Step Three Have students create their own political songs. The short format of the children's songs listed above is a good place to begin. Ultimately, though, allow students to use contemporary songs of their choosing. Include songs that reflect racial and ethnic diversity in the classroom. Use this lesson as a foundation and then let students get creative. Let them choose the artist and genre they like most and connect their political issues to that music.

Action Step Take this lesson beyond the classroom. Encourage students to write protest songs for things they really want to change. Practice the protest songs in your classroom and then take them into the hallways and out into your community.

Freedom Songs and the Modern Civil Rights Movement

Ordinary people fueled the modern civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. They held mass meetings, marched in the streets, defied the Klan, registered to vote, and filled the jails. Music helped them in every phase of these activities. "I have stood in a meeting with hundreds of youngsters," wrote Martin Luther King Jr., "and joined in while they sang 'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round.' It is not just a song; it is a resolve. A few minutes later, I have seen those same youngsters refuse to turn around from the onrush of a police dog, refuse to turn around before a pugnacious Bull Conner [chief of police in Birmingham, Alabama] in command of men armed with power hoses. These songs bind us together, give us courage together, help us march together" (1). The following lesson plan can help students understand the vital role these freedom songs played by providing examples of how traditional songs were used and adapted to specific circumstances.

National Standards

This activity will fulfill the following standard in the *National Standards for United States History*.

Era 9: Postwar United States: Standard 4a: Demonstrate understanding of the "Second Reconstruction" and analyze its advancement of civil rights.

Time

This unit can take from three to five class periods. At least one period should be devoted to the larger context of the civil rights movement. For one or two periods students could learn traditional spirituals as well as their adaptations and examine situations in which activists used such music to support their efforts. On the final day or two students could analyze a different set of situations and adapt traditional pieces to create their own freedom songs.

Student Objectives

1. To identify the major issues, contexts, and figures (especially local leaders and participants) of the civil rights movement.
2. To appreciate the role of music in southern African American culture during the civil rights movement.
3. To understand the significance of freedom songs in the civil rights movement.
4. To understand the processes by which freedom songs were created.

Background

The process of changing existing songs to fit new situations did not begin with the civil rights movement. In a parody of "My Country 'Tis of Thee," abolitionists wrote:

My country 'tis of thee
Stronghold of slavery.
Of thee I sing

Similarly, the Industrial Workers of the World and others in the labor movement of the early twentieth century used the tune of "The Battle

Hymn of the Republic" to create "Solidarity Forever."

Solidarity forever, Solidarity forever,

Solidarity forever, For the Union makes us strong (2)

Freedom songs evolved most frequently from traditional spirituals, hymns, and gospel songs. These included "Guide My Feet While I Run This Race," "I'll Be All Right," "Walk Together Children," "We Are Soldiers in the Army," "Everybody Says Freedom," "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round," "Keep Your Hand on the Plow," "Oh Freedom," "I Woke Up This Morning With My Mind Stayed on Jesus," "This May Be the Last Time," "This Little Light of Mine," and "Jacob's Ladder."

Sometimes participants changed the songs in a premeditated way. "I asked people," recalled Sam Block, a native of Mississippi who worked in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) voter registration drives, "to think about a song they might want to sing that night and then change that song. Think about freedom, interject your own feelings, your own words . . . Out of that came freedom songs we'd be singing all across Mississippi" (3). Other times, the changes occurred on the spur of the moment. One day in 1961, Bernice Johnson Reagon participated in a silent march that circled the courthouse in Albany, Georgia, twice. Immediately afterwards the marchers gathered in a church and she was asked to sing a song. Reagon recounted, "I began to sing 'Over my head I see . . . ' Usually in the opening line I always sang 'trouble in the air' [the traditional words]; however, . . . I did not see any 'trouble.' I saw 'freedom,' so I switched the words as I sang and everyone followed, raising up the song.

Over my head I see Freedom in the air
Over my head I see Freedom in the air
Over my head I see Freedom in the air
There must be a God somewhere. . . .

It was the first time my living had changed a song even as it came out of my body. Freedom!" (4).

These songs served many different functions. The participants themselves provide the best explanations. Sam Block: "After our first meetings, I realized how much those songs I had learned, those freedom songs, could help pull us together. It was an organizational glue." Hollis Watkins: "You sing to throw off weight, your burden. When you are weighted down and your spirit is low, your mental capacity is also low. But when you sing, and you let go of that weight, you rise up, you feel good about the decisions you've made or the ones you are about to make. You feel good about the jobs you are going to do, and you feel good to be part of the group that's going to do them." Willie Peacock: "When you sing, you can reach deep into yourself and communicate some of what you've got to other people, and you get them to reach inside of themselves. You release your soul force, and they release theirs, until you can all feel like you are part of one great soul . . . When you have that kind of unity and that kind of communication, there is nothing the police can do to stop you" (5).

Freedom songs often were sung in a congregational style. A song leader would try to select the right song for the particular moment and would try, with passion and enthusiasm, to infuse the group with the spirit to sing. In order to “grow” the song, the leader would change the first line of a new stanza or the chorus, thus giving new lyrics for the “congregation” to sing. For example, in the subsequent verses of “Over My Head I See Freedom in the Air” mentioned above, Bernice Johnson Reagon sang:

Over my head I see glory in the air
Over my head I see music in the air

Often other singers would take over as the song leader and add new lyrics and energy to the singing. A song sometimes lasted twenty minutes or more, and the group singing could continue for several hours before the members were ready to address other business.

In the end, the songs themselves were less important than the singing, and singing in tune with the correct rhythm was less important than simply joining in the singing itself. As Reagon has noted,

Singing is an organizing experience You cannot create a song if you're not willing to be organized. You have to hear, you have to be willing to lead, you have to be willing to follow, you have to be willing to experiment and move around the basic themes [W]hen

I sing the first line of a song I have not done anything but made an announcement about a possibility. I raise the possibility and it's up to somebody else whether or not it will fall flat and empty A song leader only does what? Start and announce the potential. And then the piece continues based on the needs and the power not of the song leader, but of the people in the room It takes a lot of courage. That's why I talk about creating a song as an organizing experience, because you have to stick out. I promise you that if you cannot sing a congregational song at full power, you cannot fight in any struggle Now, all of those people were not what you'd call great singers. All of those people were people who were risking their lives, and that's what it takes to raise a congregational song; you put yourself at total risk, you go all the way out (6).

If our students can find the courage to sing in the classroom, they will start to understand the courage that was necessary to sustain the civil rights movement.

Procedure

1. Begin by providing background on the civil rights movement and emphasize, for the purposes of using freedom songs, the period from about 1960-1965. Students must understand that different campaigns (i.e., the sit-ins, freedom rides, and voter registration drives) occurred in different places (for instance, Greensboro, North

Carolina; Birmingham, Alabama; Greenwood, Mississippi) and at different times. Students might be familiar with certain events (Birmingham, Alabama, and the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in 1963, or Bloody Sunday in 1965 on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama), but lesser-known campaigns (Albany, Georgia, in 1961-1962) can yield important insights.

2. Form the students into small groups and have each group focus on a specific campaign. What were the circumstances in which music was used, and to what effect? For example, Len Holt recalled one moment in the Birmingham movement:

Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth would be lecturing everyone in the church, explaining all about nonresistance. “It’s to be a silent demonstration,” he would say. “No songs, no slogans, no replies to obscenities.” Everyone would nod. “However,” the reverend would add, “when you’re arrested, sing your hearts out.” So, all the young people would file out of church, solemn as deacons, quiet as mice. Then a cop would come along and shout, “You’re all under arrest!” That was the cue. Suddenly there were five hundred bodies moving at once, their voice shouting out:

Ain't a-scared of your jail 'cause I want my freedom
I want my freedom

I want my freedom (7)



Civil rights demonstrators in Jackson, Mississippi, sang freedom songs while being held in temporary jail facilities at the state fairgrounds during two days of attempted marches on the state capitol in June 1965. (Image donated by Corbis-Bettmann, U1476097.)

3. Have students find the words and music of traditional spirituals and songs. They must hear these songs, so you may want to play recordings, but it would be even better if you and the students sing and play the songs yourselves.

4. Discuss the ways in which the songs were adapted to the particular situations. On the CD included with this issue, Betty Mae Fikes and the Selma Youth Freedom Choir provide a rousing rendition of “This Little Light of Mine.” In this October 1963 field recording, Fikes’s call to begin each new verse starts halfway through the last line of the old verse. She incorporated the names of many local opponents—

singing “Tell Governor Wallace” (George Wallace of Alabama), “Tell Jim Clark” (sheriff of Selma, Alabama), and “Tell Al Lingo” (head of the Alabama State Troopers)—as well as Movement leaders as a way of personalizing the moment.

5. Have the students research other situations during this time period. They may comb through published oral histories, memoirs, and secondary sources, or they may dive into primary sources like newspaper accounts. For example, the *New York Times* reported the situation in Madison County, Mississippi, on March 2, 1964:

Police auxiliaries in blue helmets and makeshift uniforms mounted a shotgun guard along the [demonstration] route. Sheriffs and deputies from Madison and surrounding counties wearing 10-gallon hats and driving white cars . . . patrolled the streets. City policemen armed with nightsticks, revolvers and a variety of shotguns and rifles snapped orders at the Negroes as they shepherded

them through a crosswalk to the courthouse grounds (8).
 What songs would your students have sung at this moment? What new words or verses would they have created? Then have them sing their songs!

Endnotes

1. Martin Luther King Jr. *Why We Can't Wait*, reprinted with after word by Jesse Jackson Sr. (New York: New American Library, 2000, 1964).
2. Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965: A Study in Culture History" (Ph.D., Howard University, 1975), 41, 49.
3. Pete Seeger and Bob Reiser, *Everybody Says Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1989), 179.
4. Seeger and Reiser, *Everybody Says Freedom*, 179; Bernice Johnson Reagon and Sweet Honey in the Rock, *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey in the Rock . . . Still on the Journey* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), 154.
5. Seeger and Reiser, *Everybody Says Freedom*, 179-80.
6. Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, ed., *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 112-14.
7. Seeger and Reiser, *Everybody Says Freedom*, 112.
8. Quoted in John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 222.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Carawan, Guy and Candie Carawan, comps. and eds. *Sing For Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Its Songs*. Bethlehem, PA: Sing Out Corp., 1990.
- Greenberg, Cheryl Lynn, ed. *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997.
- Johnson, James Weldon, J. Rosamund Johnson and Lawrence Brown. *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*. 2nd and expanded ed. New York: Viking Press, 1940, 1925.
- Raines, Howell. *My Soul is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977.
- Reagon, Bernice Johnson. "Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965: A Study in Culture History." Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 1975.
- and Sweet Honey in the Rock. *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey in the Rock . . . Still on the Journey*. New York: Anchor Books, 1993.
- Seeger, Pete and Bob Reiser. *Everybody Says Freedom*. New York: Norton, 1989.

Recommended Recordings

- Freedom Is A Constant Struggle: Songs of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement*. Folk Era Records, 1994. FEL419CD.
- Sing For Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Its Songs*. Smithsonian/Folkways, 1990. CD SF 40032.
- Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black American Freedom Songs, 1960-1966*. Smithsonian/Folkways, 1997, 1980. SF 40084.

Web Sites

- Spiritual Workshop, Paris. <<http://www.negrospirituals.com>>. This site includes a cursory overview of spirituals, as well as a database of lyrics to many spirituals in an alphabetical listing.
- Friends of Negro Spirituals. "The Negro Spiritual: Keeping the Bond with Our Enslaved Ancestors and Their Song." <<http://www.dogonvillage.com/negrospirituals>>. This site contains general information on spirituals as well as recordings for sale.
- Scanned images of the actual sheet music are available at the Digital Scriptorium at the Special Collections Library of Duke University. <<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/sheetmusic>> The following URL will link directly to the spirituals: <[http://Scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/dynaweb/sheetmusic/1910-1920/@GenericBookView?DwebQuery=%27Spirituals+\(Songs\)%27+in+%3Csubject%3E+with+source=%22LCSH%22](http://Scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/dynaweb/sheetmusic/1910-1920/@GenericBookView?DwebQuery=%27Spirituals+(Songs)%27+in+%3Csubject%3E+with+source=%22LCSH%22)>
- A scanned image of the sheet music for "We Shall Overcome" may be found at the Library of Congress's American Memory site: <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/0919001.html>>

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Handout

Additional Primary Source

James Farmer, national director of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) and organizer of the Freedom Rides in 1961, on going to jail in Jackson, Mississippi, that year.

And we were singing the songs, the freedom songs, which they hated. "You gotta stop that singing." You know, "O-o-h freedom, o-o-o-o-h free-dom, before I'd be a slave, I'd be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free." . . . "Stop that singing!" The other prisoners upstairs began joining in on the singing. . . . They were in for murder, rape, theft, what have you. We developed a communications system by sending a message up a wire. They'd pull it up . . . an old electric wire that wasn't in use. "Stop that singing!" We refused to stop and kept on singing, and they then stopped bringing in the knickknacks. They'd bring in candy bars and chewing gum to sell, and they wouldn't bring that to us. The kids were looking forward to that coming in each day, so we found a way to get it. We would send the money upstairs and have them buy more than they wanted with our money.

They knew many of us were chain-smokers. They wouldn't allow any cigarettes in, and the guards would walk down the corridors blowing cigarette smoke into our cells. We were already climbing the walls for want of a cigarette. And they knew that most of these were college students. They wouldn't allow any books in, no books whatever. No newspapers.

And then psychological brutality—they passed out the clothing for us. We had to strip, and they then gave us shorts, just a pair of undershorts, that's all. The big guys got tiny little undershorts, and the little guys had huge undershorts. The big guys were trying to hold theirs shut, and the little guys were trying to stay in theirs and keep 'em from falling down. [Laughs] And they arranged to put two big guys in one cell and two little guys in one cell, so they couldn't swap.

The food was terrible. It was very, very bad. I went on a diet there and lost about thirty pounds. . . . We wanted to get out, because we were really suffering in there. It was damp, and it was cold at night too. And when they tried to get us to stop singing, we wouldn't stop singing, so they said, "If you don't stop singing, we'll take away your mattress." So they yanked those mattresses off those hard metal beds when we wouldn't stop singing. And we were sleeping on that cold, hard surface, and then they opened the window and turned on the exhaust fan, which brought cold air. I didn't know Mississippi could get that cold, but it felt cold at night. Almost everybody came down with a cold. . . .

I demanded to see the director of prisons. . . . Two guards came to escort me. Here I was with my tiny little shorts, trying to keep 'em up, couldn't fasten 'em, other than that, naked, walking along and going to meet the director of prisons. And he was seated there, smoking a big cigar, and there was only one chair. That was his. So I could not sit down. I had to stand. It was really quite a humiliating situation. Here he was, well-dressed, Palm Beach suit, smoking his big cigar, me standing, barefoot, too, no shoes or anything else. And I told him that we respectfully requested—the other Freedom Riders had authorized me to request that we be allowed to go outside and work, work on the farm, work in the field. "Naw, we can't do that, 'cause the other prisoners 'll kill you, and we're responsible for keeping you alive." I said, "We'll take our chances on that." He said, "No, ain't gonna do it. And furthermore," he says, "we want you to stay in there and rot. That's what we want you to do. We got to feed you, because the law says we gotta feed you, and the government will see to it we feed you. But we can make that food so damn unpalatable that you can't eat it. We can put so much salt in it that it'll turn your stomach if you swallow it, and that's just what we may do." Then he signaled that the interview was over.

Source: Howell Raines, *My Soul is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 126-28.

GLOSSARY

accent: To emphasize a beat or series of beats.

Afro-Cuban jazz: A clave-based, mostly non-vocal music that integrates modern jazz practice and style with the rhythmic elements of Cuban folkloric music.

arrangement: The organization of a musical work for a given ensemble; determines which instruments play when, what harmonies and what rhythmic groove will be used, and where improvisation occurs.

arranger: Someone who creates arrangements for musical ensembles.

bar: A musical unit consisting of a fixed number of beats—also known as a measure.

beat: The basic pulse of a piece of music; the unit by which musical time is measured.

bebop: A style of music developed by Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and others in the early 1940s and characterized by challenging harmonies and heavily syncopated rhythms that demanded a new standard for instrumental virtuosity and impacted every subsequent style of jazz.

bent note: A note that is seamlessly raised or lowered generally a half step away from the diatonic note; also known as a blue note.

big band: A style of orchestral jazz that surfaced in the 1920s and blossomed as popular music during the Swing Era (1935–50). Also: any ensemble that played this type music (i.e., a band consisting of a brass, woodwind, and rhythm section that played carefully orchestrated arrangements).

blues: An African-American music, developed in the South during the mid-1800s, that became the foundation of most American popular music.

blues form: A harmonic progression that typically consists of 12 measures, divided into three sections of four measures each. Often, the first section is a call or question, the second section repeats the question, and the third section resolves the question. The most basic blues form uses just three chords, though there are numerous variations.

bossa nova: A musical style developed in the 1960s that combines elements of cool jazz with Brazilian music and features complex harmonies, a steady straight-eighth-note groove, and sensual melodies.

brass: A family of musical instruments that includes trumpets, trombones, tubas, and French horns.

break: An established pause in the form of a tune during which an improvised phrase is usually played.

call and response: A musical conversation in which instrumentalists and/or vocalists answer one another.

chord: Three or more notes played at the same time, creating one sound. The harmonic structure of most songs is composed of a progression of different chords, on which soloists improvise.

chorus: A song form played to completion. When a musician solos, he or she may improvise several choruses in succession.

collective improvisation: Improvisation by two or more musicians at the same time; also known as polyphonic improvisation. See **improvisation**.

composer: The creator of a musical composition. See **composition**.

composition: A musical idea, generally including melody, rhythm, and harmonic structure, created by a composer.

cool: A style of playing characterized by spare lyricism and a relaxed demeanor. First inspired by the understated style of saxophonist Frankie Trumbauer in the 1920s, cool jazz became widespread in the early 1950s.

cornet: A brass instrument very similar to the trumpet but possessing a darker sound.

crescendo: A gradual increase in volume.

dissonance: A harsh, disagreeable combination of sounds that can suggest unresolved tension.

dynamics: The variation and contrast of loudness and softness in a piece of music.

ensemble: A group of more than two musicians.

free jazz: A style of music pioneered by Ornette Coleman in the late 1950s that eschewed Western harmony and rhythm in favor of greater freedom of self-expression.

front line: Collectively, the primary melody instruments in a New Orleans band, namely the trumpet, the trombone, and the clarinet.

groove: A musical pattern derived from the interaction of repeated rhythms.

hard bop: A style of jazz characterized by intense, driving rhythms and blues-based melodies with a bebop sensibility.

harmonic structure: The pattern of chords for a song.

harmony: The chords supporting a melody.

head: The melody statement of a jazz piece.

horn section: A grouping of musical instruments in a band or orchestra that generally includes saxophones, trumpets, and trombones.

improvisation: The impromptu creation of new melodies to fit the structure of a song.

key: The central group of notes around which a piece of music revolves.

lyrical: Possessing a poetic and super-melodic quality.

melody: A succession of notes that form the primary musical statement of a song or composition.

minstrel show: A variety act of song, dance, comedy, and theater popular in the 19th century and performed largely by white actors in blackface.

modal jazz: A style of jazz based on Greek scales known as modes rather than on the chord changes standard to most jazz.

orchestrate: To arrange music in a form that facilitates various instruments playing together.

ostinato: A musical phrase that is repeated over and over, generally by the bass.

percussion: A family of instruments generally played by striking with hands, sticks, or mallets.

phrasing: The grouping of notes into musical statements.

polyphony: The sound or act of playing two or more melodies at the same time.

polyrhythm: Contrasting rhythms played simultaneously.

ragtime: A musical precursor of jazz, generally played on the piano, that appeared in the first years of the 20th century and that combined European classical technique with syncopated rhythms, which were said to "rag" the time.

register: The range of a voice or musical instrument (generally: high, medium, or low).

rhythm: The organized motion of sounds and rests; the patterned repetition of a beat or accent that drives a musical piece forward.

rhythm section: A grouping of instruments that provide the rhythmic and harmonic structure in band or orchestra; usually the drums, bass, and piano.

riff: A short, repeated musical phrase used as a background for a soloist or to add drama to a musical climax.

scale: An ascending or descending progression of related notes.

scat: A vocal technique that uses nonsense syllables to improvise on a melody.

score: A written map of a piece of music that is created by the composer and that dictates the notes to be played by each instrument.

section: A subdivision of a musical composition. Also: a group of instruments in the same family (e.g., brass or woodwind) that form a discrete part of a band or orchestra.

shuffle: A rhythmic style that formed the basis of the blues and early jazz and informed the feeling of swing.

solo: The act or result of a single musician improvising, usually within the structure of an existing song.

staccato: A playing or singing style characterized by crisp, short notes.

stride: A style of playing piano in which the left hand covers wide distances, playing the bass line, harmony, and rhythm at the same time, while the right hand plays melodies and intricate improvisations.

swing: The basic rhythmic attitude of jazz; based on the shuffle rhythm. Also: a style of jazz that appeared during the 1930s and featured big bands playing complex arrangements.

syncopation: The act of placing a rhythmic accent on an unexpected beat.

tempo: The speed at which a piece of music is played.

texture: The overall sensory effect created by the combined sounds of musical instruments and harmonies.

theme: The central message or melody of a composition, usually a musical phrase or idea.

timbre: The tonal quality of a voice or instrument (e.g., raspy, rough, smooth, clear, etc.).

time signature: A numeric symbol, expressed as a fraction, at the beginning of a written composition; describes the number of beats per measure and the rhythmic value of each note.

vibrato: A slight, often rapid fluctuation of pitch that enriches or dramatizes a note.

woodwind: A family of musical instruments that includes saxophones, clarinets, flutes, oboes, and bassoons.