

Songs of Protest

The Basics

Time Required

2 class periods

Subject Areas

Middle School Social Studies

Post World War II U.S., 1945-1970

Common Core Standards Addressed:

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

Authors

Judy Perez, Jacquelyn J. Chapel, and Daniel Hanczar (2008)

The Lesson

Introduction

I recall one young man from my district. . . . In November 1967 he was killed in Vietnam. His parents came for the funeral, and I met them in the stark basement of the chapel at Arlington. The mother walked up to me and just collapsed, crying in my arms. The father wrapped his arms around her and began to sob too. . . . I wanted to find the words to justify what had happened, but there weren't any.
(U.S. Senator Donald Riegle)

This lesson will focus on protest songs; our country had much to protest about. In the 1960's many people were political activist. There was the fight for civil rights, people against the Vietnam war, young people protesting their right to sexual freedom, music choice and drug use.

Guiding Questions

How does one make an objection to a political issue?

Learning Objectives

Students will consider how wars in American history have been met with either support or dissent; our country is rich in both patriotism and protest.

Songs used in this lesson:

“War” by Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong (1969). Recorded by Edwin Starr.

"God Bless the U.S.A."

Lesson Activities

Activities for Song One: "War"

Step 1: Play the song "War."

Step 2: Show the students the lyrics

Step 3: Ask them what they think about the song (Analysis)

Step 4: Ask the students to point out strong words in the song that dictates protest (Application)

Step 5: Have the students use the desk to tap out the beat.

Step 6: Challenge Activity: Write two additional lines to this song.

Questions:

- What it mean to protest something?
- What makes one song a protest song and another one a patriotic song?

Activities for Comparison Song: "God Bless the U.S.A." by Lee Greenwood, 1983

Step 1: Play the Song

Step 2: Show the lyrics

Step 3: Analyze the words to the song.

Step 4: Pick out the "Patriotic Words"

Questions:

- What feelings come up for you when you here this song?
- How different are these feelings as compared to the song "War"?

Activity for Both Songs

Have students create a binder for the two songs.

Inside the binder, students will have song lyrics, basic graphic organizer, essays, and notes related to this lesson.

Evaluate how well the students are retaining the unit by engaging them in the following activities.

Have students find one song that speaks to how they feel about the IRAQ war.

Have them also create a poster that reflects patriotism or protest.

Assessment

Students can draw upon their activities, lyrics, and background information to write their essay. Students will choose to write an essay about something they feel patriotic about or something they are in protest of. The essay must have an introduction, three paragraphs in the body, and a conclusion.

Resources

Lyrics

“War” available at

<http://www.edwinstarr.info/index.php>

“God Bless the U.S.A.” available at

<http://www.scoutsongs.com/lyrics/proudtobeamerican.html>