

Title: Protest Music

Courses: AMU4M

Connection to a Culminating Activity:

This lesson will help students see music as being more than a form of entertainment. That music is political and holds social power. This will help students conceptualize music better moving forward.

Overall Expectation:

B1 → The Critical Analysis Process: use the critical analysis process when responding to, analysing, reflecting on, and interpreting music.

B2 → Music and Society: demonstrate an understanding of social and cultural influences on and effects and functions of traditional, commercial, and art music.

Specific Expectation:

B1.3 → Analyse with increasing insight and assess the effectiveness of music from a wide range of styles and genres and in various performance modes, and reflect on how such analyses can enhance their own creation or performance of music.

B2.3 → Analyse the various functions of music in society

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to identify the elements of protest music

Students will be able to examine the significance and effects of protest music

Success Criteria:

I know I've got it when I can extract the elements of protest music from a musical example

I know I've got it when I can define protest music's role in social change

Prior Student Knowledge Required

- Understanding of what is social change/movements are

Required Materials:

- Student headphones (one per student)
- Lyrics handout

Instruction #1 → Think-Pair-Share (~10 min.)

Assessment FOR Learning

Questions presented:

1. What are protests and what purpose do they serve?
2. How can music be used in protests?
3. What is the purpose of this protest music?

Think → Students individually think about the question for 30 seconds to a minute.

Pair → Students pair up into groupings of 2-3. The groups discuss their initial thoughts and share their various views on the subject matter.

Share → As a class we regroup and volunteers share what their group discussed

Instruction #2 → Purpose of and Elements of Protest Music (~8 min.)

Explain the purpose of protest music. This should bring together the thoughts students might have explored in the think/pair/share.

The slide displays six common elements found in protest music as described by Cree singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie.

- Alternatively, show students the following video provided by CBC:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mDvukMvtU>

As you or the video go through the elements of protest music, inquire with the students asking why they think these elements are significant in protest music.

Instruction #3 → Protest Music: A Global Experience (~40 min.)

Divide your class into groups of ~4 students per group.

Student #1 → Researcher #1

Student #2 → Researcher #2

Student #3 → Recorder #1

Student #4 → Recorder #2

Groups will be responsible for analyzing one protest song from different countries by listening to the song, and examining the lyrics and researching the message of the song. The teacher reference guide below provides you with some details about the music from the list below

List of protest songs and countries:

- Strange Fruit (USA) → Addressing lynching and racism
- Universal Soldier (Canada) → Anti-War
- Black President (South Africa) → Anti-Apartheid
- Lift Your Umbrella (Hong Kong, China) → Pro-Democracy
- Bella Ciao (Italy & Middle East) → Anti-Fascism
- Stand up / Stand N Rock (First Nations/Indigenous) → Anti - Pipeline in Standing Rock
- Backlash Blues (USA) → Anti-Racism
- Cancion Sin Miedo (Mexico) → Addressing the missing and Murdered women of Mexico
- Magizhchi (India) → Anti-Caste System

On a collaborative document (like Google Slides) or on chart paper, have students follow the guideline below:

Country (Year Composed) - Title of Protest Song

1. Composer(s), lyricist(s), etc.
2. Why was it written? What was it supporting or protesting?
3. How are the elements of protest music used here?
4. Interesting fact ...
5. Sample lyrics that stood out to the group ...

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After each group has had time to complete this activity. Invite each group to share their findings with the class. Optional: have students share a small section of the music with an audio or YouTube clip.

Note: As the presentations go on, ask the class critical questions like:

- How do you think technology played a role here?
 - Oral transmission, radio, illegal cassette tapes, the internet, social media?
- Why do you think the artist chose these lyrics?
- Why or why not was this song successful?

Instruction #5 → Assessment OF Learning (~8 min.)

Have students fill out the Frayer Model handout (last page of PDF)

Teacher Reference Guide

Strange Fruit

Lyrics by: Abel Meeropol

Music by: Billie Holiday

Country: USA

Year: 1939

- Abel Meeropol (White-Jewish American poet) wrote the words as a poem. Meeropol approached Holiday and asked her to sing it
- Explicitly addresses the issue of lynching and racism in America
- When the song was done being performed in New York, Holiday was instructed to leave the stage immediately with no bowing and no returning. This was instructed for her safety
- “Southern trees bear strange fruit” ... “Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze, strange fruit hanging”

Universal Soldier

Music by: Buffy Sainte-Marie (Cree singer-songwriter)

Country: Canada

Year: 1964

- Written as an Anti-War song during the Vietnam War
- Explores how humans from all walks of life have engaged in war and how it needs to end
- “He’s the one who gives his body as a weapon to a war and without him all this killing can’t go on”

Black President

Music by: Brenda Fassie

Country: South Africa

Year: 1990

- Written to support Nelson Mandela and the protesters against the South African Apartheid
- The song depicts Mandela’s imprisonment and was written less than a month after his release
- “The people’s president was taken away by security men” ... “I will die for my president, I will sing for my president”

Lift Your Umbrella

Lyrics by: Lo Hiu Pan

Music by: Denise Ho (and others)

Country: Hong Kong, China

Year: 2014

- Protest originated in a demand for a democratic government and universal suffrage
- Supports the Umbrella Movement, where protestors used umbrellas to protect themselves from tear gas
- “Keeping silent is more terrifying”“Let’s fight for what we deserve with courage” ... “We faced atrocity with calmness”

Bella Ciao

Music by: Female rice workers

Country: Italy and several Middle Eastern Countries

Year: 20th Century, 1940s, 2019

- Bella Ciao originated as a work song that female rice workers would sing to help cope with the tough labour (20th Century)
- Lyrics were altered to address the Civil war against Mussolini’s fascist government as well as the occupation of German forces in WWII (1940s)
- Lyrics altered again in various Middle Eastern countries to address corruption, inequality, patriarchy, and failing government systems (2019)
- “One morning I awakened and I found the invader” ... “this is the flower of the partisan who died for freedom

Cancion Sin Miedo

Music by: Vivir Quintana

Country: Mexico

Year: 2020

- Pro-Feminism and addresses the missing and Murdered women of Mexico
- Human Rights Watch says that over 27,000 Mexican women have gone missing since 2006
- “We sing without fear, we ask for justice. We scream for every missing person. Let it ring out loud: We want each other alive! Let the femicide fall hard”

Stand up / Stand N Rock

Music by: Jaime Luis Gomez (Taboo)

Country: Canada/USA, First Nations/Indigenous

Year: 2016

- Song was written in protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline route near the Standing Rock Sioux's reservation
- Taboo is also the founder of Black Eyed Peas
- Unfortunately, the protest was unsuccessful and the pipeline was built in 2017
- “Now they poisonin' the waters for our sons and our daughters, so We on the frontier (we one) one nation, one cause, one people, one tribe”

Backlash Blues

Lyrics by: Langston Hughes

Music by: Nina Simone

Country: USA

Year: 1967

- Langston Hughes wrote Backlash Blues as a protest poem. Nina Simone added a melody and created a protest song of it
- Released during the Civil Rights Movement protesting racism in America
- Her lyrics, “But the world is big big and bright and round and it's full of folks like me who are black, yellow, beige and brown” demonstrate that Simone is addressing inequities on a global scale
- “You give me second class houses and second class schools. Do you think that all the colored folks are just second class fools”

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Magizhchi

Music by: The Castless Collective

Country: India

Year: 2019

- Written to protest the caste system within India
- The Casteless Collective mixes rap, gaana (traditional folk music) and Hip-Hop
- The music video took over 82 people to create
- “In the name of Caste, our village stands divided” ... “We don’t fear death, let’s make a revolution”