

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” and the Civil Rights Movement

Rationale

This 50-minute lesson is to be used in conjunction with “What Was the Civil Rights Movement?”. In this lesson, students will analyze the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” and make connections to the civil rights movement.

Guiding Question

Why is the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” important to the civil rights movement?

Mastery Objectives

Students will be able to summarize the reasons why “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is important to the civil rights movement.

Standards Addressed (from the National Council for the Social Studies)

Individuals, Groups, and Institutions (interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions)

Power, Authority, and Governance (how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance)

Vocabulary

- “colored people”
- Negro
- chronological order

Materials

Attached lyrics of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” by James Weldon Johnson

One set of pre-cut card sort cards for each group

Attached instructions for the card sort

Attached background reading on the events from the card sort

Audio and/or video file of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” by James Weldon Johnson

Attached summarizer

Procedures

1. Activator:

Distribute “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”

Ask students to read the song and answer the following question, “Is this song full of hope or sadness? Use words or lines from the song to support your answer.”

2. Guided instruction:

Card Sort

Divide students into groups of 2 or 3.

Post the attached “card sort instructions”.

Distribute a set of card sort cards to each pair or triad.

Give the students 5 minutes to engage in a card sort.

Solicit student responses.

Distribute the background reading describing the history of the events.

Ask students to read the information and correct the order of their cards.

Play an audio and/or video file of “Lift Every Voice and Sing”.

Ask students to think of reasons why the song was important to the civil rights movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s as they listen.

Review responses.

3. Individual Practice/Assessment

Complete 3-2-1 summarizer.

Students will list

3 reasons why the song is important to the civil rights movement

2 lines from the song that support your reasons why the song is important

1 line from the song that is meaningful to you

Assessment

3-2-1 summarizer

Additional Resources

Lift Every Voice, Music in American Life. University of Virginia Library

<http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/music/overview.html>

Lift Every Voice and Sing

By James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing,
till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith that the
dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
bitter the chastening rod,
felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
yet with a steady beat,
have not our weary feet
come to the place
for which our fathers died?

We have come over a way that with tears have been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the
slaughtered,
out from the gloomy past,
till now we stand at last
where the white gleam
of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
thou who hast by thy might led us into the light,
keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee;
lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee,
shadowed beneath thy hand,
may we forever stand,
true to our God,
true to our native land.

http://www.music-lyrics-gospel.com/gospel_music_lyrics/life_every_voice_and_sing_3704.asp

to see a live performance of the song

<http://www.ilike.com/artist/Stevie+Wonder+&+Melba+Moore/track/Lift+Every+Voice+And+Sing>

Cards for the “Lift Every Voice and Sing” Card Sort

14th Amendment to the Constitution

This amendment made citizens of all people born in the United States. This included African Americans.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work to end segregation and discrimination against African Americans using non-violent methods of protest.

Barack Obama is elected President of the United States.

Barack Obama defeated John McCain in the general election to become the 44th President of the United States.

National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

This group was formed to end segregation and discrimination against African Americans.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing”

James Weldon Johnson wrote this poem for a celebration of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln.

Plessy v. Ferguson

This United States Supreme Court case decided that there must be “separate but equal” public places for whites and African Americans.

Card Sort Directions

1. Read each card.
2. Determine which event happened first, second, third, and so on.
3. Sort the cards on your desk so that they are in chronological order.
4. Repeat the steps until you are confident the cards are in the correct order.

Card Sort Background Reading

14th Amendment to the Constitution

Ratified in 1868. This Amendment was written to provide citizenship to African Americans and ensure freedom to former slaves. Clause 1 states, *“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”*

Plessy v. Ferguson

Decided in 1896. After the Civil War was over, states in the South of the United States passed laws enforcing segregation. These laws made it illegal for Blacks and whites to use the same public places such as schools, restaurants, and movie theaters. In the case Plessy vs. Ferguson, the United States Supreme Court said that these laws are constitutional. In other words, “separate but equal” public facilities were allowed. Justice Henry Brown wrote, “If the civil and political rights of both races be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically.”

“Lift Every Voice and Sing”



James Weldon Johnson

Written in 1900. James Weldon Johnson was asked to speak at a celebration of Abraham Lincoln’s birthday. Instead he wrote a poem. He asked his brother to write music for the poem and the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was born. The song became popular throughout the South with church choirs in the 1920’s and was even pasted into some hymnals. The song became know as the “Negro National Anthem.” During the civil rights movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s, the song became popular again. By the 1970’s “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was often sung with “The Star Spangled Banner” at public events and performances at which there was a significant Black population in attendance.

National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

Created in 1909. The NAACP is an organization that was created to work for the end of segregation and discrimination in education, work, and voting. It also works to make sure civil rights are guaranteed for African Americans. In 1920, the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was adopted as the “official song” of the NAACP. The NAACP is still in existence and active today.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize

Awarded in 1964. Gunnar Jahn, Chairman of the Nobel Committee in 1964, said these words as he presented the prize to Martin Luther King, Jr., “. . . [Martin Luther King] is the first to make the message of brotherly love a reality in the course of his struggle, and he has brought this message to all men, to all nations and races. Today we pay tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr., the man who has never abandoned his faith in the unarmed struggle he is waging, who has suffered for his faith, who has been imprisoned on many occasions, whose home has been subject to bomb attacks . . . and who nevertheless has never faltered . . .”

Barack Obama is elected President of the United States of America

Elected in 2008. Barack Obama served as a United States Senator from Illinois. He defeated the former United States Senator from New York, Hillary Clinton, in the Democratic primary election. Obama then went on to defeat the United Senator from Arizona, John McCain, in the general election to become the

44th President of the United States. Barack Obama is the first African American President of the United States of America.



3-2-1 Summarizer

3

reasons why “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is important to the civil rights movement

2

lines from “Lift Every Voice and Sing” that support your reasons why the song is important

1

line from the song that is meaningful to you

Card Sort Background Reading Sources

14th amendment to the Constitution

http://www.usconstitution.net/xconst_Am14.html

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

“National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.” *Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica Online School Edition.* Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010. Web. 17, Jan. 2010 <<http://school.eb.com/eb/article-9054954>>.

Lift Every Voice and Sing, A Celebration of the Negro National Anthem; 100 Years, 100 Voices
Edited by Julian Bond and Dr. Dondra Kathryn Wilson

<http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780679463153&view=excerpt>

Plessy v. Ferguson

“segregation.” *Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica Online School Edition.* Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010. Web. 17 Jan. 2010 <<http://school.eb.com/eb/article9276975>>.

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=old&doc=52>

“Lift Every Voice and Sing”

photograph of James Weldon Johnson

Photo: Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
<http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/patc/liftvoice/>

<http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/72>

Lift Every Voice and Sing, Report by Dave Person

<http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/patc/liftvoice/>

“Black National Anthem” or “Lift Every Voice and Sing”

http://www.blackhistory.com/cgi-bin/blog.cgi?blog_id=62362&cid=56

Lift Every Voice and Sing, A Celebration of the Negro National Anthem; 100 Years, 100 Voices
Edited by Julian Bond and Dr. Dondra Kathryn Wilson

<http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780679463153&view=excerpt>

Martin Luther King, Jr.

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-faq.html