

“We Shall Overcome”

The Struggle of African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement

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Abstract: Students will understand the role of music in the Civil Rights Movement. They will understand the lyrics of “We Shall Overcome” and then be able to apply it to other events that were in the news at the time of the Civil Rights Movement, both in St. Louis, MO and Champaign, IL. They will also understand how the people experiencing these conditions used music as inspiration and to get their message across about the changes that they wanted to see.

Essential Questions/Enduring Understandings:

1. What was the role of music in the Civil Rights Movement?
2. What kind of changes were the singers and songwriters trying to address through their music?

Assessment:

Students will have to write two in-class responses for a grade. The first response will be about what they think the lyrics to “We Shall Overcome” mean while they listen to it and look at the lyrics. The second response will be how the lyrics apply to the picture that is put on the board. They will also discuss their responses in class and their participation points for the day will depend on how well they participate in the discussion.

Setting the Purpose:

The goal would be to line this up with the teaching of the Civil Rights Movement in one of the history classes at the high school. After discussing the background information that the students already know about the Civil Rights Movement, students will listen to “We Shall Overcome” and write a response to what they think the song means and what the lyrics are talking about. The class will then analyze the lyrics together and apply it to other pictures and articles from the movement. This will set up the discussions on the role of music during the Civil Rights Movement.

Duration:

One class period, or two, depending on the length of the class discussions on each response.

Procedure:

1. The class period will start with a discussion of what background knowledge the students have of the Civil Rights Movement. Students will be able to share what they have learned in history class and it will be written on the board so the students can keep the background information in mind while doing the other activities.
2. The class will then listen to “We Shall Overcome” played off of the *Let Freedom Sing! Music of the Civil Rights Movement* CD. Before they listen to the song, copies of the lyrics will be passed out in class so that they can follow along. Before listening, the teacher will explain the history of the song and its origins.
3. After listening to “We Shall Overcome”, the students will be given time to write a response about what they just heard. They will need to address the following questions:
 - a. During the Civil Rights Movement, where would you most likely have heard this song?
 - b. In your opinion, why was the song written?
 - c. What do the lyrics mean? What do they mean to you?
 - d. What types of issues would the lyrics apply to today?
4. After they are done writing their responses, the students will pass them in to be graded and there will be a class discussion on the response questions.
5. The teacher will then put the picture titled *stlouisprotest.jpg* and the article, *WhyPicketPenneys.jpg* from the Summer Institute resource CD up on the projector or overhead. Students will discuss what types of things they notice from looking at the picture and the article.
6. The students will then have time to write a second response in class. The second response will need to address the following questions:
 - a. How do the lyrics to “We Shall Overcome” apply to the picture shown?
 - b. How do you think this song could have been used in the situation in this picture?
 - c. How could the lyrics to “We Shall Overcome” apply to the article?
 - d. How might picketing help African Americans “overcome” the situation they had with J.C. Penney’s?
7. Students will then pass in this response also for a grade and then there will be a class discussion about how they think the lyrics to “We Shall Overcome” could apply to both the picture and article posted.

Ties to National Primary Sources or Sources

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to link the information about the song “We Shall Overcome” and its background to the events that happened in St. Louis and in Champaign. They will be able to connect the events of the Civil Rights Movement nationally to two events that happened in their hometown and close to it.

List of Sources

-*Let Freedom Sing! Music of the Civil Rights Movement* CD Set

-Pictures off the resource CD from the 2010 Summer Institute- stlouisprotest.jpg and WhyPicketPenneys.jpg

-“We Shall Overcome” lyrics found on the Kansas State University website,

<http://www.k-state.org/english/nelp/american.studies.s98/we.shall.overcome.html>