



American Colonists Protest Song

Intended Grade Level: Middle School

Lesson Purpose: Throughout history, music, art, and literature have served as expressions or reactions to cultural movements, political actions, and government policies. In this lesson, students will take on the role of either a member of the Sons or Daughters of Liberty and write a protest song, in the genre of their choice, to protest one or more of the British Acts or actions between 1763 to 1774 which eventually led to the American Revolution

Lesson Objectives:

- Provide a deeper understanding of the British actions leading to the American Revolution.
- Introduce music and songs as a common form of protest through the ages.

National Standards:

NSS-USH.5-12.3 ERA 3: REVOLUTION AND THE NEW NATION (1754-1820s)

- Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in forging the revolutionary movement, and the reasons for the American victory
- Understands the impact of the American Revolution on politics, economy, and society
- Understands the institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how they were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights

NA.5-8.8 UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MUSIC, THE OTHER ARTS, AND DISCIPLINES OUTSIDE THE ARTS

Students compare in two or more arts how the characteristic materials of each art (that is, sound in music, visual stimuli in visual arts, movement in dance, human interrelationships in theatre) can be used to transform similar events, scenes, emotions, or ideas into works of art

Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with those of music (e.g., language arts: issues to be considered in setting texts to music; mathematics: frequency ratios of intervals; sciences: the human hearing process and hazards to hearing; social studies: historical

Timeframe: Approximately three class sessions



Background: Completion of this lesson requires that students have knowledge of the American colonial period, including the British and European mercantile system and the establishment of colonies in North America. They should also understand the evolution of colonial assemblies and the rights expected by American colonists. These include the colonists' inherent rights as Englishmen and the rights they desired as colonists such as freedom of religion. Also assumed is an understanding of the French and Indian War. Establish that the Navigation Acts, included in the 29 British acts limiting trade of the American colonies from 1645 to 1761, were the first British laws to stir resentment in the American colonies against the mother country.

Procedure:

1. Divide the class into groups. Each group (of two or three students) will be assigned to research and present a three minute presentation reviewing one of the following British Acts:

- Proclamation of 1763
- Sugar Act/Writs of Assistance (1764)
- Currency Act (1764)
- First Quartering Act (1765)
- Stamp Act (1765)
- Townshend Acts (1767)
- Boston Massacre (1770)
- Tea Act/Boston Tea Party (1773)
- Coercive Acts, a.k.a. "Intolerable Acts" (1774)
 - New Quartering Act
 - Massachusetts Government Act
 - Quebec Act

2. As a class, discuss how music, art, and literature have historically been used as vehicles for protest. Discuss the importance of songs from the last 50 years that are connected to the Civil Rights and Anti-war movements of the 1960s, such as Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," Pete Seeger's "Where have all the Flowers Gone?," John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance," the Labor and Civil Rights movements' "We Shall Overcome," and Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On?" Playing a selection or two will engage students in this part of the discussion. Use the website, <http://folkmusic.about.com/od/toptens/tp/Top10Protest.htm>



Ask each student to identify at least one song that was written to protest issues such as a war or an act of government or even street violence. They may note songs of protest from their own favorite styles of music, including hip-hop, rap, country, or pop. They should be prepared to explain their choice.

3. Protest songs were important tools to rally or gain supporters among the American Patriots leading up to the American Revolution. Show students the primary document, "Tea Destroyed by Indians," which is a lyric sheet for a song about the Boston Tea Party. (Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov>, search for "Tea destroyed by Indians.") Its chorus reads:

"Bostonian's SONS keep up your Courage good,
Or Dye, like Martyrs, in fair Free-born blood."

And a verse goes:

"Our LIBERTY, and LIFE is now invaded,
And FREEDOM's brightest Charms are darkly shaded:
But, we will STAND----and think it noble mirth,
To DART the man that dare oppress the Earth."

NOTE: To make your students laugh, you or a student volunteer might sing the lyrics in different styles, such as rap, country, opera, etc.

Another example is this stanza from a protest song written by the Daughters of Liberty:

"First, then, throw aside
 your topknots of pride,
Wear none but your own
 country linen,
Of Economy boast, let
 your pride be the most,
To show clothes of your
 own make and spinning."

(United States and its People: Teacher's Guide, eds. King, David C., McRae, Norman, and Zola, Jaye. Addison Wesley Publishing: 1995)



4. Divide the class into groups of two to four students and distribute the American Colonists Protest Song Assignment (included below). You may choose to have groups do research and work on their songs using class time or do the project together outside of class as a homework assignment. Students may choose to perform their songs without background music, or if technologically feasible, you may allow groups to make a CD of their background music to play on low volume as they perform. Examples of lyrics written by students are included at the end of this lesson plan.
5. After groups have completed their songs, remind students to be respectful audience members as other groups perform. Most important, have a good time with this lesson! Students may wish to hum along with the groups, or groups may even have roles that they would like the audience to play.
6. Good reasons to videotape performances:
 - You may wish to review a group's performance for lesson assessment and grading purposes.
 - Students love to see themselves and each other perform. The video or DVD of these performances can be shown immediately after all groups have performed, allowing different sections of the same class to see all performances. This is a great class-bonding activity.
 - You can save the recordings until the end of the school year as a surprise "reward" for one thing or another.
 - Eighth graders in particular may wish to include some of these performances in their "graduation" activities before they move up to ninth grade.
 - Your recordings become part of the digital archive of the larger class. These are the types of activities that will be most fun for students to watch during their senior year reviews and at five-year reunions.
 - Parents enjoy seeing the performances, as well. They are great to have playing during a Parents' Night, Arts Night, or other event when parents visit.



*This has been adapted from a lesson by Andrew Ragan,
George Washington Teachers Institute 2008.*



American Colonists Protest Song Assignment

You are a young American colonist living in the years 1763 to 1774. To protest what you believe to be acts of British tyranny and injustices to the colonists, you join the Daughters or Sons of Liberty and write a song to protest the British Acts. Your song will rally colonists to the Patriot cause!

Guidelines

1. Set your song to the tune of an existing song of any genre or make a new song. You could write it to the latest hit, a golden oldie of your parents' era (ex. Beatles, Stones, Supremes), or to a tune such as "Yankee Doodle" or "On Top of Old Smoky."
2. Your song should be made up of a chorus and at least two verses.
3. Your song needs to demonstrate an understanding of the fundamental issues behind at least one British Action listed below and the reasons for the colonists' angry reactions.

- Proclamation of 1763
- Sugar Act/Writs of Assistance
- Currency Act
- Quartering Act(s)
- Stamp Act
- Townshend Acts
- Boston Massacre
- Tea Act/Boston Tea Party
- Coercive Acts, a.k.a. "Intolerable Acts"
 - -New Quartering Act
 - -Massachusetts Government Act
 - -Quebec Act

4. Cite all sources using the proper bibliographic format at the end of your lyrics. You must cite your textbook, at least one non-fiction source, and one Internet site.
5. Use appropriate lyrics. No profanity or rude body references or gestures.
6. Perform your song live for your classmates, and turn in a typed copy of the lyrics.



GW

Lyrics Sample #1: "Silver, Gold, Silver, Gold"
based on the Aquabots' "Pizza Day"

I just wanna use some paper cash
King George's head I would like to smash
Sometimes I think he's on the mental brink
He's setting up his colonies to sink
All this silver, all this gold
Is making me feel old
I'm reminded of a time
When paper was all mine

(Chorus)
Silver, gold, silver, gold
This is really getting old
Surely it is dying out
Everyone is freaking out
Average people, average jobs
We will form an angry mob
1764, we will surely close our doors
To you and boycott too
Just to make you mad
Just to make you mad

I remember 1765
They passed the Stamp Act
And it changed our lives
All the anger in the colonies
Needed to vent
So we came up with these:
No more paper by the yards,
No more dice or playing cards
Contracts will soon be gone
We are not Britain's pawns
This is not a chess game
We are British just the same
As you, and want people too,
In the Parliament (repeat softly)



GW

(chorus)

Because we touched the pocket nerve
Britain hit a learning curve
The wounds we caused will surely heal
Because the Stamp Act is repealed
For now the peace is safely secure
The voices of the colonies were heard
All the anger in the colonies
Made the British see
(chorus)



GW

Lyric Sample #2: “(I don’t wanna be a) British Idiot”

based on Green Day’s “American Idiot”

(slow, chorus)

I don’t wanna be a British idiot,
I don’t wanna be the one to crash the system.
I don’t wanna be shot up for protest
Like it was their mission.

Like on March 5th 1770
When things got really messy,
When we threw snowballs at the troops.
They got really ticked off
When they found out they were rocks
They started shooting at us.
(chorus)

In the end it was a massacre
Even though only five people were murdered.
They were still hated by the colonists.
They were tried by a jury
With lawyers John Adams and Quincy,
And most of them were released.
(chorus)