

Life After the Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The Basics

Time Required

3 days

Subject Areas

US History

Contemporary America, 1968-present

Common Core Standards Addressed:

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

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The Lesson

Introduction

Martin Luther King was one of many who devoted his life to the cause of others. Throughout his career he worked to inspire change through non-violent protest. However, King's assassination in 1968 had a major impact on the United States and the world just as much as his contributions towards change. April 4, 1968 will be remembered for the loss of a devoted citizen for change and equal rights for all, but will also be remembered for the rioting and the anger felt by many.

Towards the end of King's career and definitely during, the music of the late 60s and the early 70s began to reflect the issues and concerns of the cities in the United States. Marvin Gaye and Gil Scott-Heron among many began to write music that painted pictures of the struggle that Martin Luther King stood up for. Unlike Gil Scott-Heron Marvin Gaye changed his approach to music in order to represent the frustration felt by so many. (See Artist bio)

Along with the socially conscious lyrics, came socially relevant images that made the album cover. Many artists along with Gaye and Heron devoted their album covers used art to display the problems that plagued the United States. During the 60s and 70s the United States experienced a great loss of leaders, a war, and an unstable economy and government. Musicians and their creative circles took it upon themselves to continue to speak out and acknowledge the issues that hindered progress.

Guiding Questions

Who was Martin Luther King, Jr.?

What role and impact did he have on American history and culture?

Learning Objectives

The lessons within this project are designed to highlight the response of the media, the government, and the nation's major cities of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. They will provide students the opportunity to examine the various reactions of the United States to this tragic loss. The lessons will show how the loss of King influenced the direction music that was created shortly after 1968 by Marvin Gaye and Gil Scott-Heron.

Preparation Instructions

Song used for this lesson

"Inner City Blues"

Lesson Activities

Day One Lesson Plan

Understanding the Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King and its impact on the Nation

Objective: The lesson will give the factual information relevant to understand the loss of Martin Luther King Jr.

Students will understand;

- Who was involved
- Where it took place
- How the media handled the information
- The reaction from within the U.S. and its leaders
- And its impact on the nation.

Step One:

Have students define the word "assassination" in their own words. After students volunteer their answers, give them the definition give them the example from a dictionary.

Note: Help them to understand the idea of killing a famous or influential person for political reasons.

Step Two: Use the notes to begin conversation about what happened. Pass out a student copy so they will follow along and fill in the necessary information.

Wrap up questions can be completed for homework or at the end of the lecture/discussion.

Question number 5 should be completed at home. Encourage the students to ask grandparents or elder relatives, in hopes of getting a descriptive response.

Step Three: After the notes are have been taken show students the images of the balcony and the riots.

Help them to see the frustration about the assassination as well as the military response.

Conclusion: By the end of the period, or the time allotted, students should have an understanding of what was going on the day Dr. King was assassinated.

Note: Teacher may want to read the following web-pages about the assassination in order to elaborate on the notes the students will be taking.

<http://www.jofreeman.com/photos/Kingfuneral.html>. This web-page has images of the Chicago riots. It also contains an article on the assassination.

<http://www.museum.tv/exhibitionssection.php?page=92>. This article is from the broadcasters prospective.

Teachers could also use articles to read in class to help students understand the assassination as well.

Images of the Balcony where King was assassinated can be found at googleimages.com

Day Two Lesson plans

The Song and Poem “Inner-City Blues” Marvin Gaye and Gil Scott-Heron

Objective: The objective is to take two song/poems with the same title and identify their differences and commonalities.

Students will be able to identify:

- Identify the issues of economics, politics and racism within each song.
- Identify the language used in both songs
- Students will be able to distinguish the difference in approach between the artist
- Students will be able to identify the issues and concerns of artists related to Martin Luther King Jr. work.

Step One: (Bell-ringer) on the board write the following questions on the board or the overhead.

1. What is the Inner-city?
2. What is the Blues?
3. What about the riots after Dr. King’s death helps to define the inner-city? (Optional)

Students should be asked to answer the above questions on a separate sheet of paper. Encourage students to volunteer their answers. After several contributions from the class, introduce the two

artists for the lesson's song. Use the artist biographies to help students get familiar with the background about the artist.

Step Two: (Modeling) Use either the poem or the song to do as a class. Read the lyrics and or poem as a group and answer the questions related to either Gaye's or Heron's song.

Step Three: Group Work:

After the first of two selections are completed have them pair off in groups of two or three and read the last selection together. Questions should be provided to each group along with the lyrics.

Once the groups have finished, return as a class to discuss their findings. Have a Venn diagram prepared to compare and contrast the selections from one another.

Create the Venn Diagram on your own.

The Homework Assignment: Using their Venn Diagrams students should write a compare and contrast response about the songs and determine in their opinion which selection speaks to them personally and why.

Vocabulary and Names:

Charles Manson-Serial Killer who created cult to kill celebrities

Mark Essex- a member of the New York Black Panthers. In 1973 he was in New Orleans where he gunned down 19 people of which 10 were police officers.

Glassine bag: Transparent paper sometimes used as a dust jacket to protect a book

Scag: Street name for Heroin.

The following are questions that are tailored for each song. Students and teacher should read the lyrics and listen to the individual songs.

The teacher may choose to allow the students to work in pairs to analyze the songs in relation to the questions.

The above names and vocabulary are a part of the Gil Scott-Heron

Other songs that may help to solidify the objectives of this lesson from Marvin Gaye can be found on Marvin Gaye's album, *What's Going On* (1972).

Note: Resources, Gil Scott Heron's poem was later turned into a song on the recording "Reflections" in 1981.

Please review the poem which can be located in the book *Now and Then: The Poems of Gil Scott-Heron* (Canongate, 2000)

When reviewing the poem please be sure to familiarize yourself with the following people and terminology above.

Day Three Lesson

Connecting Album Cover Art to History

Objective: Students will get a chance to highlight the social conditions of the United States during the early seventies within the album cover art.

Note: Before the final bell, wait by the door and hand students a random playing card. Have four suits within your deck to make random groups.

Step One: Bell Ringer: 1. What is the purpose of the album cover?

Ask the students to take out their notes and assignment from yesterday. Ask them to use the notes to locate social and political issues that were discussed in the songs from yesterday's lesson.

Before the students work in groups, model of couple of albums (**See the links below**) to get students ready to analyze their own albums. Encourage students to volunteer responses.

I.E. What do they see and how can the visual be interpreted?

Step Two: Group Analysis

Walk through the instructions of the activity. (**See Worksheet**)

Remind students they can use their notes from yesterday. Working together is important. Each album will rotate around the room once so they must use their time wisely. **Five minutes per album.**

Step Three: Bring the groups back together and write a final statement based on what they observed in the albums.

Discuss the group's findings album by album.

Wrap up Questions:

- Which album had the best art and why?
- Which album conveyed the message the best?
- Which album was the least informative?
- Were there any songs on the albums that reflect the images on the cover?

NOTE: If possible play some of the songs you think reinforce the lesson.

Assessment

See homework assignments provided for each day's lesson.

Extending the Lesson

Lesson One: The Lost

The Conspiracy behind the assassination. Who did it? Students can take a closer look at the life of James Earl Ray. They can research and examine his response to the assassination.

Did James Earl Ray kill King? Students can research the assassination and write a persuasive argument that addresses this controversy.

Lesson Two: The Music.

Marvin Gaye's album, *What's Going On?* offers other songs that address the issues concerning the United States during the early 70's.

Gil Scott Heron's album *Pieces of a Man* contains songs that help to demonstrate the struggle felt by African American during the 1970s.

Lesson Three: The Album Cover Art:

Students can think of issues concerning their community and make a collage or painting etc that represent those issues.

Students can look at their own CD or record collection and research and explore an artist whose album cover displays issues concerning the time in which it was written.

Students can compare record albums to compact disc in terms of their informative nature.

Resources

Lyrics

"Inner City Blues" available at

[http://www.elyrics.net/read/m/marvin-gaye-lyrics/inner-city-blues-\(make-me-wanna-holler\)-lyrics.html](http://www.elyrics.net/read/m/marvin-gaye-lyrics/inner-city-blues-(make-me-wanna-holler)-lyrics.html).

Links to Album Covers:

Album I: War, *The World is a Ghetto*

Album II: James Brown, *Hell*

<http://images.amazon.com/images/P/B000001E77.01.SCLZZZZZZZ.jpg>

Album III: Curtis Mayfield, *Back to the World*

Album IV: Maceo, *Us*

http://www.dustygroove.com/images/products/m/maceo~~~~~_us~~~~~_101b.jpg

Links to Examples: (Before Group Analysis)

Parliament, *Chocolate City*

http://www.dustygroove.com/images/products/p/parliament~_chocolate_101b.jpg

Parliament, *Uncle Jam Wants You*

<http://www.gatefoldrecords.com/images/013252980121.jpg>

NOTE: All images can be found on googleimages.com by searching the band name with the title of the album, if the links are not working.