

## **Social Justice Issues**

### **The Basics**

#### **Time Required**

2-3 class periods

#### **Subject Areas**

High School Civics

Contemporary America, 1968-present

#### **Skills**

Song analysis

Understanding of social issues

Reflective writing

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### **The Lesson**

#### **Introduction**

Using a variety of primary sources, political cartoons, photographs, music, etc., students will be encouraged to look at issues of social injustices in today's world and to develop ways to help resolve them. The information will be continually referred to as we progress through the year's study of American History and as students are challenged to find similarities of events in the past and compare them to our current world.

#### **Guiding Questions**

What are the social issues in the U.S. today?

What are the social issues in our local community?

How do these issues affect us? And how can we impact the issues?

#### **Learning Objectives**

Students will identify, research, analyze, discuss, and defend position on current social justice issues including poverty, race, gender, religion, etc.

## Preparation Instructions

Songs used in this lesson:

“Black and White”

“Everyday People”

“We Shall Be Free”

## Lesson Activities

Day 1

Do Now: Do you have the power to change the world? How? Why/Why Not?

Instructional Activity: Students will watch “Mighty Times: The Children’s March” (40 minutes in length and free to teachers through Teaching Tolerance) and complete the guided viewing questions as they watch (available from Teaching Tolerance.org, <http://www.tolerance.org/kit/mighty-times-childrens-march>)

Homework Assignment:

Do you have the power to change the world? How? Why/Why Not? Responses will be posted on the Moodle Chat Room created for this unit.

Day 2

As Students Arrive: “Everything is Beautiful” will be playing. Students will be asked “IS everything beautiful in our world?” Short discussion of student responses.

Song Activity: Today students will listen to three different songs discussing some of the social injustice we see in our world today: “Black and White,” “Everyday People,” and “We Shall be Free.”

First, students will be given the lyrics to “Black and White”) and asked to find the many different opposites they see in the lyrics (black and white, read and write, day and night, etc.) Ask students when they think it may have been written. Do they think it was a hit or a flop? The video will then be shown.

Students will learn that it was written in 1954 and first recorded by Sammy Davis, Jr. in 1957. The song was inspired by the U. S. Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education decision that ended racial segregation in public schools.

The original lyrics of the first verse were:

*Their robes were black, Their heads were white,  
The schoolhouse doors were closed so tight.  
Nine judges all set down their names,  
To end the years and years of shame.*

Students will be asked why that verse may have been changed for the 1972 recording by Three Dog Night.

Second, students will be asked how students are accepted at our school who choose to look or act apart from the “norm.” Is it acceptable to be different at our school? Why/Why not? How do they (personally) treat the non-traditional student?

Lyrics to “Everyday People” will be handed out and we’ll listen to the song performed by Sly & The Family Stone. Students will be asked if they were surprised that Sly was a black man? Why? From the lyrics, what were your expectations?

The third song “We Shall Be Free” – students will be asked to make predictions: when do you think it was written?; who might be singing it – man, woman, white, Hispanic, etc., why? What issues might be addressed?

Students will then listen to Garth Brooks’ voice with images that reflect the lyrics of the song. As a class, students will discuss the surprises and the accuracies of their predictions.

### **Assessment**

After listening to the three songs, students will be asked to write a reflection on the messages of the three songs – were they similar or different and how?

### **Extending the Lesson**

Students will choose one of the three songs and create a political cartoon, find an appropriate photograph, or create a power point to reflect the message of their chosen song.

### **Resources**

#### **Lyrics**

“Black and White” available at

<http://lyricsplayground.com/alpha/songs/b/blackandwhite.shtml>

Song Background:

Lyrics written by David I. Arkin. Music by Earl Robinson. 1954

David Arkin (1906 – 1980) was a teacher in California in the 1940’s. During the McCarthy era, Arkin was accused of being a communist and was fired from his teaching job. Blacklisted, he was unable to find work in Hollywood. Music was a big part of Arkin’s life and entertained Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly, Paul Robeson at his home often. Although Arkin was Jewish, there was no emphasis on religion. Arkin was comfortable with people of all ethnic groups and religions. This song was inspired by the Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education decision to end racial segregation of public schools.

Earl Robinson (1910-1991) was a songwriter from Seattle and was a member of the Communist Party who wrote many songs and composed for Hollywood films. He was formally trained in music and studied with Aaron Copland in New York. He was involved with the WPA Federal Theater

Project and taught at a high school in New York when he was blacklisted in California. His musical influences were Paul Robeson, Leadbelly, and American folk music.

Recording by Pete Seeger: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgPzlp-T9Ig>

“Everyday People” available at

[http://www.aldielyrics.com/lyrics/sly\\_and\\_the\\_family\\_stone/everyday\\_people.html](http://www.aldielyrics.com/lyrics/sly_and_the_family_stone/everyday_people.html)

Song Background:

Born Sylvester Steward (b.1941) in Texas, Sly Stone grew up in California. He sang with his family, studied music in college, and played in several bands and deejayed in the Bay Area. His first #1 song was “Dance to the Music” followed by “Everyday People.” Sly & the Family Stone were one of the favorite groups featured at Woodstock. The band was one of the first major integrated bands in rock history with Caucasians, blacks, and females. Although many of the group’s songs were more funky and psychedelic, “Everyday People” had a more moderate tempo and appealed to a wider audience. The lyrics reflected Sly’s personal hope for peace and equality between races and groups.

“We Shall be Free”

Live performance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RaMBFA2qTco>

This ain't comin' from no prophet  
Just an ordinary man  
When I close my eyes I see  
The way this world shall be  
When we all walk hand in hand

When the last child cries for a crust of bread  
When the last man dies for just words that he said  
When there's shelter over the poorest head  
We shall be free

When the last thing we notice is the color of skin  
And the first thing we look for is the beauty within  
When the skies and the oceans are clean again  
Then we shall be free

We shall be free  
We shall be free  
Stand straight, walk proud  
'Cause we shall be free

When we're free to love anyone we choose  
When this world's big enough for all different views  
When we all can worship from our own kind of pew  
Then we shall be free  
We shall be free

We shall be free  
Have a little faith  
Hold out  
'Cause we shall be free

And when money talks for the very last time  
And nobody walks a step behind  
When there's only one race and that's mankind  
Then we shall be free

We shall be free  
We shall be free  
Stand straight, walk proud, have a little faith, hold out  
We shall be free

We shall be free  
We shall be free  
Stand straight, have a little faith  
We shall be free

#### Song Background:

Troyal Garth Brooks (b.1962) was born in Oklahoma and grew up in a blended family of six children. The large families had weekly talent nights and the children were expected to participate. Garth learned to play the banjo and the guitar. Although he did sing, his love was athletics and he received a track scholarship to Oklahoma State University graduating in 1984 with a degree in advertising. After graduating, he began his profession career playing in bars. He enjoyed rock music but soon came to prefer country music. Brooks was an immediate hit with the public and received multiple music awards repeatedly. Brooks was an immediate hit with the public and received multiple music awards repeatedly. According to Brooks, he was inspired to write this song after the 1992 riots in Los Angeles. The video included a wide range of celebrities and won Video of the Year at the 1993 Academy of Country Music Awards.