

“Testimony”

The Basics

Time Required

3-4 class periods

Subject Areas

11th Grade US History

Contemporary America, 1968-present

Common Core Standards Addressed:

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

Author

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The Lesson

Introduction

Ferron is a women’s music singer of Canadian origin and of a working class background. After trying many diverse occupations, Ferron recorded her first two albums out of her basement and began a music career that continues to this day. She writes about issues in her own life and the challenges women face in spare, poetic language and metaphorical imagery. The song “Testimony” comes from her third eponymous album and is a lush and passionate song about the challenges women faced and will continue to face in achieving their rights. Hinting at different angles and experiences of personal and professional struggle, Ferron optimistically encourages women to continue the fight in their ongoing quest to realize full equality and self-actualization.

Guiding Questions

What is the Women’s Liberation Movement?

How has the Women’s Liberation Movement affected your life?

Learning Objectives

- Review key aspects of the Women’s Liberation Movement
- Explore how the movement helped women rediscover and redefine themselves
- Examine how women fought for social change through movement activism
- Understand the strategies and tactics activists employed to achieve their objectives
- Discover how some women opened themselves to lesbianism and how that affected their lives
- Synthesize how women’s lives were prior to the 1970’s with how the movement changed women’s lives thereafter

- Experience through feminist songs, readings, and film how art can highlight fundamental concepts of women's liberation
- Develop a fuller understanding of how the Women's Liberation Movement was a logical development in the modern history of liberation causes, originating in the civil rights and anti-war movements
- Appreciate the myriad of ways the women's movement changed American society and the ways people in all spheres of daily life changed how they thought about and acted toward women
- Explore how issues of the movement play a role in today's world
- Appreciate how movement issues affect the lives of the students

Preparation Instructions

Song for this lesson: "Testimony" by Ferron.

Lesson Activities

Introductory Activity

After introducing the song "Testimony," students should listen to a recording of the song and engage in a class discussion of its lyrics. Students should share their thoughts and feelings about the song and the writing style Ferron utilizes to address challenges women have faced and will continue to face. Students should engage in analysis of the song's meaning and interpretation of its lyrics.

Central Activity

Following the analysis of the song, students should experience a discussion on what the actual activist work of the Women's Liberation Movement was like. Utilizing topics from "Further Classroom Discussion" and prompted by questions from "The Questions" below, students should learn about how movements evolve and how they built. Students should learn about the various tactics employed during the women's movement and how they compare to tactics used by the civil rights and anti-war movements. Students should offer their opinions on the efficacy of the various tactics and strategies employed.

Students should also learn by discussion about the issues that women were fighting for and the challenges of getting the issues to be taken seriously by both other women and the establishment. Students should learn about the challenges both within and outside the movement in creating momentum behind a cause. Students should then appreciate how issues percolate onto the national agenda and how they get addressed and/or resolved. Finally, students should assess in open discussion how successful the women's movement was in remedying problems women face in the modern times.

Further Classroom Discussion

- Compare and contrast the 1st wave women's movement of the 19th century with the 2nd wave women of the 20th century
- Review tactics of the women's movement used to strategize and actualize social change: writing, consciousness-raising sessions, guerilla theater, artwork, music, phone networks, public speak-outs on taboo subjects, marches, rallies, protests, filing complaints, utilizing the media, networking with lawyers, suing in court, promoting new legislation, lobbying

- What are the challenges of protesting the establishment
- How the Women's Liberation Movement evolved
- How the Women's Liberation Movement was different from the civil rights and anti-war movements
- What is life like for a radical activist
- What is necessary to successfully challenge the establishment for social change
- How did the women's movement achieve successful reform in the following areas: the workplace, the military, education, sports, healthcare, organized religion, the home, politics, the law, childcare
- What challenges and foes did women face in their activist work

Assessment

Select from among the following questions to assign.

- Who would sing this song? Who is the song's audience? What is the song's purpose? What is the style and tone of the song? What kinds of ideas are presented in the lyrics? What is a protest song? Why are songs written as forms of protest? Is this lesson's song an example of a protest song? Explain.
- What is "Testimony" about? How does Ferron present ideas in her lyrics? What different kinds of experiences do the lyrics convey? How do the music and Ferron's singing style contribute to how the listener absorbs the song's vision?
- What is Ferron saying about women's experiences? Who are the "young ones" Ferron refers to? What is her song saying to them? What is she warning about when she sings about possibly falling prey to the "jaded jewel"? What are the lyrics suggesting about the future for women? What are the differences between the two choruses? Why does Ferron employ two choruses and how does this contribute to the song's meaning? How does this song capture the spirit of the Women's Liberation Movement?
- How did the Women's Liberation Movement improve the lives of women in the 1970's? Did the movement improve the lives of all women? If not, whose lives were not improved and why? How did class and race play a role in the activities of the Women's Liberation Movement? How has the Women's Liberation Movement shaped the lives of women living today?
- What is feminism? What does it mean to be a feminist? What are some stereotypical notions of what feminism is and what being a feminist means? Do these stereotypes persist today? Explain.
- Why was the 1968 Miss America Pageant chosen as the first major action of the modern women's movement? What does the pageant signify in American society?
- What are issues that affect women's lives today? Do students see these issues affecting their lives? How?
- What was the Equal Rights Amendment? What do students think of the ideas it espouses? Why didn't it become a part of the US Constitution?
- What is birth control and what are different forms of it? What are reproductive rights? What are Emergency Contraception pills ("Plan B")? What issues are associated with birth control and reproductive rights? Why do these topics continue to be controversial in American life? In what ways can an unwanted pregnancy affect a woman's life?
- What is an abortion? What is Roe v. Wade? What is RU-486? How has legalized abortion in the United States affected people's lives? Why does this issue remain controversial in American society? What are the arguments of pro-lifers? What are the arguments of the

pro-choice contingency? How might recent changes in the personnel of the US Supreme Court affect *Roe v. Wade*? What could happen in the United States if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned?

- What role does pornography play in American life? How might pornography shape the thinking and behavior of men and women? How might pornography affect women and men differently? Why is pornography a multi-billion dollar industry today? What does this suggest about American culture?
- What tactics and strategies did activists use to fight for women's rights and social change? How did these tactics and strategies develop? What relationship does the Women's Liberation Movement have with other causes, such as those for civil rights, gay rights, and the anti-war movement? How did the tactics and strategies of the women's movement differ from other movements? What were the causes that brought the Women's Liberation Movement into being? What is the women's movement's relationship to the New Left of the 1960's?
- In what ways did the Women's Liberation Movement change popular culture? How did the movement affect men in their thinking and behavior? What challenges did men face in response to the demands of the women's movement? In what ways do men treat women differently now than they did prior to the 1970's?
- In what ways has the Women's Liberation Movement changed the following aspects of American life: romantic relationships, working environments, career aspirations, the military, the media, the academic world, home life, marriages, child rearing, sports, the arts, government entitlements and protections? In what ways has American culture not changed as a result of the women's movement?
- What are tactics activists have used to challenge norms and struggle for social change? Would the students be willing to participate in a march, rally, or other form of protest to fight for a cause s/he believes in? What causes are the students concerned about in their world today?

Extending the Lesson

As a follow-up to the discussion about how the women's movement actually functioned, students will engage in a theater exercise that highlights the challenges women faced before the Women's Liberation Movement. In the drama exercise, students will group up in pairs and will act out an impromptu scene before the class. In each scene one student plays a character who wants something that s/he cannot easily obtain before the 1970's. Examples of such hard-to-obtain items include a job, an education, a loan, a raise, equal pay, an abortion, respect, recognition of oppression, and more. The other student plays an authority figure that controls whatever the needing student seeks. Together they play out an "I want" scene where the needing character tries to find ways to achieve the desired goal, while the authority figure presents the sexism of the time that thwarts the needing character from getting what s/he wants. Following each scene, students in the audience should comment on what they saw and the participating students should comment on what they experienced.

Resources

Lyrics

"Testimony" available at

<http://www.maxilyrics.com/ferron-testimony-lyrics-e817.html>