Title: We Are the Freedom Riders

Grade Level: Middle grades 5-8

Delivery Time: 55 minutes

National Council for the Social Studies
Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity
Personal identity is shaped by family, peers, culture, and institutional influences. Through this theme students examine the factors that influence an individual’s personal identity, development, and actions.

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices
An understanding of civic ideals and practices is critical to full participation in society and is an essential component of education for citizenship. This theme enables students to learn about the rights and responsibilities of citizens of a democracy, and to appreciate the importance of active citizenship.

National Standards for Music Education (The National Association for Music Education)
Standard 4: Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
Standard 6: Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
Standard 9: Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Learning Objectives
Students will recognize the impact individual and group actions can have on society.
Students will identify individual responsibility in a democratic society.
Students will appreciate the influence music has had historically as an agent of change.

Assessment
- Freedom Rider biography graphic organizer
- Role-play interview presentations
- New verse for We Shall Overcome song
- Written reflection

Materials
Computers with internet connectivity to access Freedom Riders biographies
Optional: Print Freedom Riders bios from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/freedomriders/people
Optional: Non-fiction literature for civil rights movement

Content Specific Vocabulary
CORE: Congress of Racial Equality
nonviolent protest
federal marshal
discrimination
segregationists
mob
activist
SCLC: Southern Christian Leadership Conference
Engagement

- Play Civil Rights Music Medley (photo/video)

This collection of songs accompanies photographs taken during the Civil Rights movement. These songs, sung during mass meetings and demonstrations, capture the sense of hope and unity among African-Americans and highlight the role of music in the struggle for equal rights.

Running time: 3 m.

- Play the accompanying *We Shall Overcome* CD for the class or choose one of the many YouTube *We Shall Overcome* videos.

- Have students complete the **Music Analysis** handout while listening to the song.

Statement of Purpose

Music has played an important part in social change throughout history. In this lesson we will learn about the song, *We Shall Overcome*, and how it became the anthem for the civil rights movement in America. We will learn about a group of people known as the Freedom Riders. It is important to recognize the responsibility all individuals have to take action to protect the rights of all people and to recognize the power that the arts, specifically music, have in our lives.

Instructional Plan

- Introduce vocabulary for the lesson. Use the **Vocabulary for We Shall Overcome** handout.
  - Ask each student to indicate their level of understanding about each term by placing a checkmark in the appropriate column.
  - Have students work in groups of 3-4 students to talk about the terms.
  - Lead a class discussion on the terms. Clarify misconceptions and definitions.
  - Ask students to listen for the terms as you read Chapter 1 of *We Shall Overcome*.
  - Ask students to make notes on their vocabulary handout as you read the chapter.

- Read Chapter 1 of *We Shall Overcome* (*Keep Your Eyes on the Prize*) to the class.

- After reading the chapter, have students reexamine their Vocabulary handouts and see what words they can now define and use. Have students reconvene with their original group to discuss their new understanding of the vocabulary.

- Discuss the Freedom Riders and what they hoped to accomplish.

- Working in pairs students will choose a figure who participated in the Freedom Ride protest. Using the internet and the resources provided (See Related Resources) partners will research their Freedom Rider using the **Freedom Rider Bio Graphic Organizer** to collect key facts and information to share. Students will prepare for a role-play interview. One of the students will be a news anchor and the other will be the civil rights activist. After collecting information, together the students will create an interview. They will prepare 4-5 key questions with responses.

- One of the questions for each individual will be about the song, *We Shall Overcome*. (How did you feel as you sang the song during threatening situations? How do you feel today when you hear the song? Do you still sing the song today and what memories does it evoke?) Encourage students to come up with their own unique question.

- Model an interview with a student and provide partners time to practice the role-play interview to present to the class. Each interview should be no longer than 5 minutes. Encourage students to look at the photos and dress as the Freedom Riders would have dressed.
• As partners present interviews, the class will individually record one interesting fact they hear in each interview. After each interview, ask students to do a Think, Pair, Share while the next pair prepares. They will get up and move to someone they have not talked to and discuss their interesting point from the interview. This allows movement and opportunity to process the information.
• After the interviews, as a class project students will compose an original verse for *We Shall Overcome* to sing together. Use Verses/Lyric Writing Organizer handout and sample.
• After the completion of the interview presentations, the class will reenact the Montgomery Bus Terminal incident by joining hands in a circle to sing *We Shall Overcome*, including their new verse.
• If possible, consider videoing the interviews and the singing of *We Shall Overcome* to create a “class documentary” on the Freedom Riders.

**Assessment**

Partners will research a Freedom Rider, prepare questions for a mock interview, and present the role-play interview to the class.

**Closing/Reflection**

• Have students write a short response to the following prompt:
  Freedom Riders put their personal lives on hold to devote their energy to a movement that would effect change for people living in oppression. What are examples of personal sacrifice that you’ve seen? What cause would you be willing to sacrifice for? Would you be able to do what the Freedom Riders did? What kinds of inequalities exist in our world? What can you do when you see inequality?

**Modifications**

• Plan for student partners who will support each other and work well together.
• Print out biographies for students who need to highlight specific details for graphic organizer.
• Work with librarian to provide a variety of reading levels both print and electronic, to meet the needs of students.

**Extensions**

• Invite a local community organizer or civil rights activist to talk to the class about nonviolent protest. Identify a local issue that students can learn about and become involved in: homeless needs in your community, migrant workers, undocumented workers, etc.
• For a shorter lesson activity, use website or print out bios of Freedom Riders from [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amERICANEXPERIENCE/FreedomRiders/people](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amERICANEXPERIENCE/FreedomRiders/people) Students will use graphic organizer to collect information. Instead of interview role-play students will use information to complete a mini poster on the Freedom Rider or a Bio Cube. See Bio Cube handout or complete the Bio Cube online activity [http://www.read writethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/games-tools/cube-a-30180.html](http://www.read writethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/games-tools/cube-a-30180.html)
• Consider working with the music teacher to write the new verse of *We Shall Overcome* and to prepare for the musical performance.
• Partners will print a picture of their Freedom Rider to post in the classroom with a mini-poster bio. Option: create a class book of the Freedom Riders.

• Create individual or a class timeline of events of the Freedom Rider movement.
  o Have students work in small groups to create a visual (Drawing, Poster, PowerPoint, Video) for each event.
  o Use the resource http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/freedomriders/timeline

• Create a human timeline. Assign an event to each student. Students will prepare a short description of their event then stand in timeline order and give their short description. Invite another class or administrator in to see the interactive timeline.

• Create a timeline of important events where the song *We Shall Overcome* has been sung.

• Create a sidewalk timeline using sidewalk chalk. Students place their events in order on the sidewalk and decorate with drawings.

• Create a class map to trace the Freedom Riders Movement.
  o On a wall map mark the places the Freedom Riders traveled to. Have students work in small groups to create a visual (Poster, PowerPoint, Video) for the events that took place at each location.
  o Use the resource http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/freedomriders/people/ralph-abernathy

• Living History: Interview a parent, grandparent, neighbor, or friend.
  o What do you think about when you hear the song, *We Shall Overcome*?
  o If the person is old enough ask them what they remember about the Freedom Rides? Did they know anyone who participated in the Freedom Rides or other Civil Rights Protest?
  o Consider recording for a video or create a class book.

**Related Resources**

*Civil Rights Activists’ Biographies for Interviews*

• Use the website American Experience – Freedom Riders http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/freedomriders/people
  o Assign or allow students to choose one of the freedom riders listed. There is a short biography for each rider and available media is listed on the right side of the page.
  o Bernard LaFayette Jr.
    http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/freedomriders/people/bernard-lafayette-jr
  
  Note videos on page

• Teachers’ Domain website http://www.teachersdomain.org/
  o James Farmer
    http://www.teachersdomain.org/resource/iml04.soc.ush.civil.farmer/
    This interview with civil rights leader James Farmer recalls the Freedom Rides of 1961, when an interracial group rode two buses through the South to test enforcement of recent Supreme Court rulings that banned segregated seating on interstate buses and trains. More than 300 Freedom Riders were arrested and jailed before the Interstate Commerce Commission enforced the rulings. Running time: 6m 45s.
In this interview, civil-rights leader Diane Nash recalls her role in the 1960 Nashville sit-ins, the 1961 Freedom Rides, and the 1965 voting rights campaign in Selma, Alabama. As one of the founders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Nash mobilized her fellow college students to confront segregation and discrimination with nonviolent direct action. Running time: 5m 59s.


Levine, E. (2000). Freedom's Children: Young civil rights activists tell their own stories. New York: Puffin Books. Grade 5 and up. Thirty first-person accounts of acts of courage and participation bring the civil rights movement to life in this book. It includes stories of young people like Claudette Colvin, who was arrested for sitting in the front of a bus just weeks before Rosa Parks was arrested for doing the same.

Thinking About Songs as Historical Artifacts graphic organizer. http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/tools/

We shall overcome (website) http://weshallovercomebook.com/

References

Freedom Riders http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amERICANexperience/freedomriders/people/ralph-Abernathy

Teachers’ Domain http://www.teachersdomain.org/ Teachers' Domain is a free digital media service for educational use from public broadcasting and its partners. You’ll find thousands of media resources, support materials, and tools for classroom lessons, individualized learning programs, and teacher professional learning communities. Create your free account.

Lesson written by Linda Carpenter, M.Ed. Cardinal Stritch University.

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## Music Analysis

As you listen to the song, *We Shall Overcome*, think about the effect music has on your emotions. Answer the following questions.

1. Have you ever heard this song?

2. Where did you hear it?

3. What emotion(s) do you feel when you hear the song?

4. Pretend you are a song writer. Jot down ideas for a new verse for the song.

5. Write one word you think of in connection to this song.

6. After you finish the lesson come back to this sheet and rethink your answers. Have any of your ideas changed after learning about the Freedom Riders and the song *We Shall Overcome*?
### Vocabulary for We Shall Overcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary Word/Term</th>
<th>I know the word and/or use it</th>
<th>I can describe the word but I don’t use it</th>
<th>I don’t know the word.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

### Term

<table>
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<th>Definition/Notes</th>
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</thead>
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## Verse/Lyric Writing Organizer

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the song about?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the emotion of the song?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Example of one verse:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many lines are in the verse?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a rhyme pattern? What is it? (AA, AABB, ABAB, AABCCB)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many syllables are in each line?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas for a new verse:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea for a new line:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea for next line, rhyming if necessary:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Verse/Lyric Writing Organizer (example)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title: <em>We Shall Overcome</em></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the song about? <em>Strength, hope, courage</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the emotion of the song? <em>Determined, strong</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of one verse:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We shall overcome. We shall overcome</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We shall overcome someday.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Deep in my heart I do believe</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We shall overcome someday.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many lines are in the verse? <strong>4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a rhyme pattern? What is it? <em>No (some internal rhyme)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many syllables are in each line? <em>In the line that changes, 7 (we shall overcome)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas for a new verse: <em>traveling somewhere, being victorious, getting along</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas for a new line: <em>We’ll get there at last, we’ll cooperate.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea for next line, rhyming if necessary: <em>no rhyming.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Freedom Rider Bio Graphic Organizer**

Name__________________________________________

Freedom Rider____________________________________

Date of Birth _____________________________________

Place of Birth _____________________________________

- Family
- Childhood
- Education
- Hardship
- Unique Experience
- Significant Event
- Quote
Name________________________________

Freedom Rider Bio Graphic Organizer

Freedom Rider

Family  Childhood  Education  Hardships  Significant Event  Unique or Interesting Event/Fact  Quote
Bio-Cube Template (optional)

- Put your name in small letters on one side of the cube.
- Fill in the information from your graphic organizer.
- Add drawings, colors, and designs.
- Cut along outside edges.
- Fold along the dotted lines.
- Tape the flaps to make a cube