

Music of the Civil Rights Movement
**Freedom Songs: “Oh! Freedom,” “This Little Light of Mine,” “Ain’t Gonna Let
Nobody Turn Me ‘Round” and “We Shall Overcome”**

Cecilia Hann

Introduction

As a music teacher for 25 years, I see the importance of music everywhere whether it’s to facilitate happiness, consolation, entertainment, community or worship. When the seminar unit of Civil Rights was presented, I immediately wondered how music influenced the Civil Rights Movement. How could I teach my students some of the important songs of the Movement as well as why this music was important? Was there a historical significance to these Freedom Songs? What songs were most meaningful during the Civil Rights Movement? Early in my research, I discovered a quote from James Farmer, founder of the northern civil rights group, The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) that validated the importance of music and the Movement. In May 1961, CORE organized freedom rides to question the Supreme Court ruling that segregation was illegal on buses, airplanes and businesses. James Farmer was arrested and wrote:

As a way of keeping our spirits up, we sang freedom songs. The prison officials said “If you don’t stop singing, we’ll take away your mattresses.”.... They came in and took the mattresses away and people sang as they had never sang before.ⁱ

Now that I know music made an impact, I had to decide which songs had a significant role? Not only should these songs be meaningful to the Movement but they should be easy for my Fifth Graders to sing and understand. What songs should I choose? I have some knowledge of African American and Gospel music as I am currently the accompanist for the Wilmington Diocese Gospel Choir (WDGC) at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church in Wilmington Delaware. I spoke to Brenda Burns, the Director of the WDGC and a scholar of Theology and Black Studies. I asked Ms. Burns what freedom songs she thought had the most influence on the movement. She told me that freedom songs started in the churches as spirituals.ⁱⁱ From her years as a Gospel Musician, she suggested the spirituals “Oh Freedom,” “This Little Light of Mine” and “We Shall Overcome”. I also wanted to teach “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” after hearing the song in the film, *Selma*.ⁱⁱⁱ

I am currently the music instructor at Eisenberg Elementary in New Castle, Delaware. Eisenberg Elementary provides academic studies for kindergarten through fifth grade. The school reflects a culturally diverse student body of approximately 570 students. Strong academic emphasis focuses on physical, social and emotional development to create a community of learners. Programs offered are STAR and Accelerated Reader which enable students to succeed by addressing their reading needs. 24 Club strengthens Math skills as well as learning to work together. The Positive Behavior Support Program allows students to

focus on appropriate encouraging actions in an educational environment. Teachers use research-based methods of Learning Focus and Responsive Classroom instruction which are aligned with the Delaware State Standards. In the Arts, students may participate in band in grades 4 and 5. Chorus is offered for grades 3, 4 and 5. In second, third, fourth and fifth general music class, recorders, world drumming and guitars are presented as units of study. My role as a music educator is not only to develop musical skills but also relate music to other academic areas such as English Language Arts, Math, Social Studies and Science. This unit, Music of the Civil Rights Movement, will relate Music and Social Studies for all fifth grade students. Students will learn the songs "Oh! Freedom," "This Little Light of Mine," "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" and "We Shall Overcome". The students will then draw conclusions about how this music played a role in the Civil Rights Movement.

Rationale/Objective

The fifth grade Delaware State Social Studies recommended curriculum states that students should know historical chronology in such a way as to be able to place people, laws and events. The Civil Rights Movement is studied in social studies with an emphasis on Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. Students will complete a timeline of African American musicians from 1954-1968. In music, the Delaware State Standard 9 says that students will understand music in relation to diverse cultures, times and places. Students will be introduced to the freedom songs, "Oh! Freedom," "This Little Light of Mine," "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" and "We Shall Overcome" and the conditions under which these songs were performed. Classes will learn how spirituals were collected, adapted, sung and taught to young civil rights activists. They will then sing and accompany these songs with percussion instruments.

The purpose of Music of the Civil Rights Movement unit is to introduce fifth graders to the freedom songs that became an important motivating force during the Civil Rights Movements from 1954-1968. Students will experience the aesthetics of music and tie that experience into how these four songs may have motivated Civil Rights activists. Students will then form conclusions as to the motivational effects "Oh! Freedom," "This Little Light of Mine," "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" and "We Shall Overcome" may have had on the Civil Rights community.

The objectives for Music of the Civil Rights Movement unit are for the students to summarize important ideas and events for the Civil Rights Movement and to describe how men and women such as Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. sacrificed for the movement. They will recognize and sing famous freedom songs representative of the Civil Rights Movement from 1954-1968. Description of the functions of freedom songs and the conditions under which these songs were sung and performed will be discussed. Learners will explain how music can motivate and move its listeners to take action.

Background Information

As early as 1619, Africans, who were removed from their homes and shipped to America,

used singing as a way to communicate their emotions. In the 1700's, Africans used work songs to show the living and working conditions that slaves were forced to bear. People who worked physically demanding jobs like harvesting crops, laying railroad ties or cleaning ships sang to control the speed of their work or lessen the monotony of the tasks. Slave also sang hymns when they were allowed to gather outside of work at church. Often at church services, a soloist would shout a phrase and the congregation would echo while joining hands. Musically, this was the beginning of call and response. Sometimes soloists would shout encouragements for the group to sing and praise. Song leaders were improvising.

These people generally did not have the training or resources to write down their pieces in ways that would put some confinements on their performances. They would sing to communicate and give hope to each other as they worked in the fields or in other jobs, so it was very common for them not only to perform spontaneously, but also to change the words and melodies to suit their own needs and feelings.^{iv}

Slaves often sang songs as a code. The words in "Follow the Drinking Gourd" gave slaves directions to an escape route to freedom. The masters did not understand that the drinking gourd was not a cup for water but the constellation of stars in the sky for the slaves to follow to reach the Underground Railroad. "Left foot, peg foot, traveling on" meant that a slave named Peg Leg Joe would help the slaves cross the river to reach freedom.^v

By 1830, slave songs which had been improvised were now written. These songs were now known as Spirituals. Spirituals grew out of a combination of work songs, shout songs and the religious events of Africans in America who were slaves and switched to Christianity. "Spirituals are religious folk songs created and first sung by African-Americans in slavery."^{vi} Songs like "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Deep River" and "This Little Light of Mine" were popular recorded Spirituals. Musically, Spirituals were either call/response, improvised, slow, long-phrased melody or syncopated melody.

Music helped pick up the spirits and keep the Civil Rights Movement strong. Singing helped grow a spirit that moved the feelings of protestors and all those who heard the songs. These Spirituals were also called Freedom songs and were sung in numerous situations: meetings, Prayer vigils, demonstrations, freedom rides, sit-ins, jails, gatherings. They were sung to raise spirits, strengthen courage and give a sense of unity. Singing acted as a way to confuse and irritate police and on-lookers. Songs tell a special kind of history of many important developments and events in the Civil Rights Movement. They protested segregated lunch counters, restaurants, churches, buses, schools, swimming pools, employment and voter registration. Students and protestors changed the words of the songs to fit their specific demonstrations or gathering.^{vii} The chart below shows the opening line verse for the Spiritual and Freedom song. Often songs were not changed and sung as the original Spiritual.

Original Slave Spiritual	Civil Rights Movement Freedom Song
Don't you let nobody turn you roun' . . .	Ain't gonna let nobody turn me roun' . . .
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine . . .	This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine . . .
Oh freedom . . .	Oh freedom . . .

viii

Making music and singing was an emotional outlet for African Americans. Sweet Honey in the Rock, an African American women singing group, believes that we would not be here if it wasn't for music. A song entitled "Balm" tells of a place where there is hope and healing. Its main message is to continue on with whatever the struggles.

If we're sad, sometimes we sing a sad song. It may or may not make us feel better. It certainly will not make us feel worse. Singing gives us strength.^{ix}

In my research, I also discovered that music and poetry expressed the dreams and hopes of the Civil Rights Movement. Langston Hughes, "the poet laureate of Harlem", wrote poems, stories and plays about the trials of ordinary African American. In 1955, his poem, "Youth" rhythmically spoke about his belief in unity for all nations. His poem, "Dreams", melodically tells of his dreams that are rooted in the past trials. "Hold fast to your dreams" reflects the desire for a better future.^x

This research unit will focus on four spirituals, "Oh! Freedom," "This Little Light of Mine," "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" and "We Shall Overcome". The music, historical importance and music theory will be discussed for each song.

"Oh Freedom" ^{xi}

The image shows a musical score for the song "Oh Freedom". It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line and a bass line. The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Oh Free-dom Oh Free-dom Oh oh free-dom o-ver me o-ver me, and be-fore I'll be a slave I'll be bur-ied in my grave and go home to my Lord and be". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines. Chord symbols are placed above the vocal line: F, C7, F, C7, G7, C7, F7, Bb, B dim, F, Dm, Gm, C7.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Oh Freedom". The score is written in G major (one flat, Bb) and 4/4 time. The melody is on a treble clef staff, and the bass line is on a bass clef staff. The lyrics are: "free and there'll be... free." Below the score, there is a list of updated lyrics: "No segregation, no segregation, no segregation over me, And before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave And go home to my Lord and be free", "No more weeping . . .", "No more shooting . . .", "No burning churches . . .", "No more jail house . . .", "Oh, freedom . . .", "No more Jim Crow . . .", "No more Barnett . . .", and "No more Pritchett . . .". To the right of the updated lyrics is a black and white photograph of a man, likely Martin Luther King Jr., speaking into a microphone.

Historically, “Oh Freedom” is a traditional song from the 1840’s. The lyrics imply an acknowledgment of death and faith on the Lord. In 1960, the Freedom fighters changed the words from ” Oh Freedom” to “No Segregation,” “No More Weeping,” “No More Shooting,” “No Burning Churches,” “No More Jailhouse,” ”No More Jim Crow,” “No More Barnett” and “No More Pritchett”.^{xii} The Freedom fighters changed the words to react to the situation. The Jim Crow state and local laws, enacted between 1876 and 1965, demanded that separate but equal making the African Americans inferior to the white Americans. Their offenses were minor, yet they were brutalized and beds were taken away.

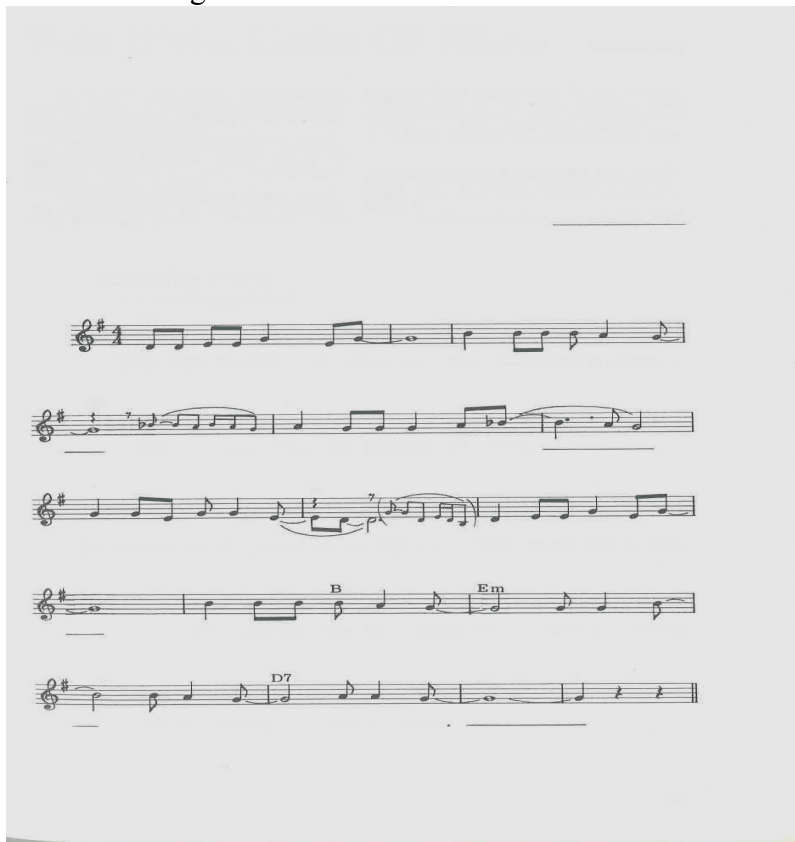
In 1961, nonviolent protests called “Freedom rides” began. Despite a Supreme Court ruling to desegregate long-distance bus rides, Southern states ignored the ruling. On the first Freedom ride, thirteen students, seven black and six white, rode a bus together from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans, Louisiana. The bus was attacked and the students were beaten. On the second Freedom Ride, Dr. Martin Luther King came to New Orleans to support the riders. He held a meeting at Ralph Abernathy’s church. A group of whites threw rocks and tear gas at the church. Cars were set on fire. Despite the violence, Freedom rides continued. Ross Barnett, a Segregationist and Governor of Mississippi from 1960-1964, arranged for the arrest of Freedom riders in 1961 and then imprisoned them in the Mississippi State Penitentiary. Their offenses of the Freedom riders were minor, yet they were brutalized and demeaned.^{xiii}

Laurie Pritchett, police chief of Albany, Georgia, gained national attention when he tried to stop the efforts of the Albany Movement in 1961–1962. The Albany Movement was formed on November 17, 1961 in Albany, Georgia by representatives from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other groups. This Movement conducted a wide campaign that challenged all forms of segregation and discrimination. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) temporarily joined the alliance, attracting

national publicity to Albany. Although the Albany Movement was successful in assembling massive protests during December 1961 and the following summer, it obtained few gains. Pritchett's response to these demonstrations was mass arrests of protesters and the jailing of Martin Luther King, Jr.^{xiv}

Musically, "Oh Freedom" should be sung in cut time of a fast 4/4 time. Keys vary from F to G Major. Chord progressions are I, IV and V. Some ii and vi chords are found in the more complicated accompaniments. The song is usually sung in unison by a group. However, it can be performed in 2 parts. Melodic range is 6 notes. A higher second part if sung is an octave. Form is not repetitive (AB). No dynamics are given. The tempo is not given. Rhythm is half, quarter, dotted quarter and eighth notes. Several measures have tied eighth notes into the next measure producing syncopation. The frequent off strong beat makes "Oh Freedom" the most difficult of the four songs to sing rhythmically. Lyrics are repetitive. Call/response is the teaching strategy to sing this song.

"This Little Light Of Mine"^{xv}



The image shows a musical score for the song "This Little Light Of Mine". It is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The score consists of five staves of music. The first staff is the melody, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The second staff is a vocal line with a 7-measure rest at the beginning. The third staff is a vocal line with a 7-measure rest at the beginning. The fourth staff is a vocal line with a 7-measure rest at the beginning. The fifth staff is a vocal line with a 7-measure rest at the beginning. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines. Chord symbols B and Em are visible above the fourth staff, and D7 is visible above the fifth staff.

Historically, "This Little Light of Mine", written in 1920, was sung again in August 1964 by Fannie Lou Hamer, a sharecropper on a Mississippi plantation. She attended a SNCC meeting at church. The church was filled with the song, "This Little Light of Mine" which

uplifted her spirits after a long ten hour day.^{xvi}

“This Little Light of Mine” was sung communally. Bernice Johnson Reagon explains that singing announces that you are here even before you get there. It extends the area. It is true and people cannot change the air as long as there is singing. Your song fills your territory. If there is a meeting, protest or sit-in and a sheriff walks in, he establishes the air of fear. The only way to take the space back was to start a song. As everyone joins in singing “This Little Light of Mine” an air of confidence takes over the feelings of dread and anxiety. Ms. Reagon explains that “I” or “me” songs are black songs such as “This Little Light of Mine” and “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round.” “We” songs are group songs. White people collaborate with blacks singing “We Shall Overcome.”^{xvii}

Musically, I have taught “This Little Light of Mine” to Kindergarten, First and Second Graders. Students learn the words quickly. They add claps and pats. They tap a steady beat with claves and sticks. Second Graders play quarter and eight note rhythms on drums, djembes, congas and bongos. “This Little Light of Mine” can be sung in cut time or 4/4. The key is G Major. Chord progressions are I, ii, IV, V and vi. The song is sung first by a leader and then others join in often adding harmony. Some versions add accompaniment. Melodic range is 6 notes. Form is repetitive (AAAB). Harmonic range is 3 notes. No dynamics are given. Tempo is medium with energy. Rhythm is whole, dotted half, half, quarter and eighth notes. Every measure is syncopated on beat four. Lyrics and melody change at the discretion of the leader. Verses often started with the name of the city or state of the leader. It then expanded to other places in the country:

All over the state of Georgia...

All over the southland...

All over America...

All over the world now...

Or shrank to be more specific:

All over the state of Georgia...

All over the city of Atlanta...

On this street called Peachtree...

Here in this building...

Deep in my heart...^{xviii}

The repetition of “I’m gonna let it shine” makes “This Little Light of Mine” easy to sing.

Improvisation is the teaching strategy to sing this song.

“Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round” xix

Lead (tenor or alto)
 Ain't gon-na let no-bod-y, Lord-y, turn me 'round,
 turn me 'round, turn me 'round, Ain't gonna let no-bod-y, Lord-y,
 turn me 'round, I'm gon-na keep on a-walk-in', Lord,
 ye-ah,

keep on a-talk-in', Lord, march-ing up to free-dom land.
 Oh, ye-ah,

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round,
 turn me 'round, turn me 'round,
 Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round,
 I'm gonna keep on a walkin', keep on a
 talkin'
 Marching up to freedom land.

Ain't gonna let Nervous Nelly turn me 'round . . . (term applied to typical segregationist) Ain't gonna let Z. T. . . . (Z. T. Mathews, sheriff of Terrell County, Georgia)

Ain't gonna let Chief Pritchett . . . Ain't gonna let no jail house . . .

Ain't gonna let Mayor Kelly . . . Ain't gonna let no injunction . . . (after a federal injunction prohibiting further demonstrations)

Ain't gonna let segregation . . .

Historically, this spiritual was sung in the summer of 1962 in Albany by the Reverend Ralph Abernathy. He held a meeting at the Mount Zion Baptist Church and taught this song to the congregation. The media caught it on TV showing the Negroes rhythmically singing inside the church while students were being arrested outside for protesting for equal rights.^{xx}

In January, 1965, eight-year old Sheyann Webb saw a gathering of white and black people at Brown Chapel in Selma Alabama. She decided to sit in and listen to the discussion of voting rights. She knew that her mother and father could not vote as well as most of the black people in Selma. Often literacy tests or silly games such as guess how many jelly beans are in the jar were given to blacks to allow them to vote. It was at this meeting that Sheyann and her best friend, Rachel, met Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. She asked him to sign a paper that she wrote in school about him being a kind and noble man. He asked her to come back that evening to attend a rally to register voters and sing a freedom song. Sheyann came with her best friend, Rachel. Dr. King called Sheyann up in front of more than 500 people.^{xxi} Sheyann started to sing “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round” timidly. Soon the congregation joined in and Sheyann loudly sang “Ain’t Gonna Let Alabama Turn Me ‘Round,” “Ain’t Gonna Let No Governor Turn Me ‘Round” and “Ain’t Gonna Let No Sheriff Turn Me ‘Round.” The audience was inspired by her performance. Sheyann then talked about freedom rights in school. Ms. Bright, her teacher, was skeptical about teaching freedom but since it meant so much to Sheyann, she did. On January 18, 1965 Sheyann joined Dr. Martin Luther King and other marchers on their way to vote. They sang “Oh Freedom” as they solemnly walked to the court house. Dr. King and others were arrested. On March 7, 1965, a march from Selma to Montgomery was attended by Sheyann and Ms. Bright. They sang “This Little Light of Mine.” As the marchers walked across the bridge to Montgomery, they were forced back by police on horses with tear gas. This march is known as the “Bloody Sunday” march. Several people were hurt and trampled. When the march was re-organized on March 25, 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Sheyann, her parents, Ms. Bright, Rachel, her parents and others successfully marched from Selma to Montgomery Alabama. They sang “We Shall Overcome”. The sheriff said to let them march as he knows all the words to their songs.^{xxii} Dr. King gave a speech that day in Montgomery entitled “Our God Is Marching On”. He referenced this song with great importance and passion.

They told us we wouldn’t get here. And there were those who said that we would get here only over their dead bodies, (*Well. Yes, sir. Talk*) but all the world today knows that we are here and we are standing before the forces of power in the state of Alabama saying, "We ain’t goin’ let nobody turn us around."^{xxiii}

Musically, “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round” was sung in cut time. The key is a minor. Only a minor and E Major chords were used. Accompaniments can be simple or complex but were probably played by ear. Song is sung in unison by a soloist or group. Melodic range is 5 notes. This melody makes “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round” the easiest of the four songs to sing. Form is repetitive (ABBB). Accent marks are only above the word “Lord”. No dynamics were given. Tempo is fast. Rhythm is quarter, quarter note triplet and eighth notes. Syncopation is felt in the eight, quarter eighth pattern throughout the song. Metronome marking for a quarter note is 152. Lyrics were changed according to the soloist or group to fit a specific meeting or gathering. Syncopation is the teaching strategy to sing this song.

“We Shall Overcome”^{xxiv}



Historically, the anthem, “We Shall Overcome”, was originally called “I’ll Be All Right” or “I Will Overcome” in 1945. The freedom song was sung by the food and tobacco workers as they picketed in Charleston, South Carolina.

To keep up morale, the remaining people would ‘sing themselves away some days. We sang ‘I’ll be all right...we will win our rights....we will win this fight... the Lord will see us through...we will overcome.’ We sang it with a clap and shout until the cops would quiet us down.^{xxv}

In 1960, students formed the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Raleigh, North Carolina. It was a group of black and white high school and college students supported by Ella Baker, the director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Some members participated in planning civil rights demonstrations. Some young people chose to participate in sit-ins. These non-violent protests happened when a person or group entered a segregated restaurant, lunch counter or library and were refused service. Sit-ins began in 1948 but were not really successful until 1960. Before students could participate, they were trained in how to deal with harassment, beatings and being put in jail. Some whites participated. These protestors did not fight back. They sat quietly and sang. Others created a group called the Freedom Singers and sang to raise money for the movement. “We Shall

Overcome” became with signature song and soon became the theme song for the civil rights movement. ^{xxvi}

On March 31, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke at the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. His emotional speech “Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution” included the message and words from “We Shall Overcome.”

And so, however dark it is, however deep the angry feelings are, and
however violent explosions are, I can still sing "We Shall Overcome."
We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it
bends toward justice.
We shall overcome because Carlyle is right—"No lie can live forever."
We shall overcome because William Cullen Bryant is right—"Truth,
crushed to earth, will rise again."
We shall overcome because James Russell Lowell is right—as we were
singing earlier today ^{xxvii}

Dr. Carlyle Fielding Stewart III was a writer, scholar, minister, peace activist, spokesman for peace and lecturer from Detroit Michigan. This speech by Dr. King was one of his last before he was shot and killed on April 4, 1968.

Musically, “We Shall Overcome” was sung in 4/4. The key is C Major. Other chords used were ii, IV, V, V7 and vi. Accompaniment is complex for the Europeans. However, Africans encouraged improvisation. The song is sung in unison. The melodic range is 9 notes. Melodically, “We Shall Overcome” is the most difficult of the four songs because of its wide range. Form is not repetitive (AB). No dynamics were given. Tempo is slow with quiet determination. Rhythm is whole, half, dotted quarter, quarter and eighth notes. Only one quarter note triplet is sung. Metronome marking for a quarter note is 68. Groups sang the song and changed the words as they marched or assembled. Long Phrase melody is the teaching strategies to sing this song.

In conclusion, spirituals played a role in the Civil Rights Movement. Songs like, “Oh! Freedom,” “This Little Light of Mine,” “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Be ‘Round” and “We Shall Overcome” were sung during marches for voting rights, sit-ins, church gatherings and meetings. These songs provided a personal expression of freedom that no one could take away. No sheriff, policemen, police dogs or tear gas could take away these marchers voices. The spiritual “Oh Freedom” expressed a lifelong struggle and desire for this basic right. Marchers sang about different places where freedom lives in “This Little Light Of Mine.” Strength and conviction was expressed in “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round.” Finally, “We Shall Overcome” became the anthem for all Civil Rights advocates. Previously it was titled “I’ll Be All Right.” Its lyrics sum up the Civil Rights Movement.

I’ll be all right, I’ll be all right, Well I’ll be all right someday.
All of my troubles will be over, and I’ll be free at last.
Well I’ll be all right someday. ^{xxviii}

Songs were accompanied by hand clapping, foot stomping, shouting, laughing and crying. People of the Civil Rights Movement felt these songs with their whole being. Singing was their strength that they could turn to in time of fear or need. It was something that didn't take education or vocal training. They sang with their heart and soul. Their voices were anthems for freedom.

During the American Civil Rights movement, for example, African Americans and their supporters used the system, often using old Negro spirituals such as *We Will Overcome* to rally together and promote the concepts of freedom, perseverance, justice and equality. ^{xxix}

Music Strategies

Students need to use 4 specific musical strategies in Music and the Civil Rights Unit. Call/Response, improvisation, long-phrased melody and syncopation are musical skills that will assist the students in better understanding the 4 Freedom songs, "Oh! Freedom," "This Little Light of Mine," "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Be 'Round" and "We Shall Overcome". Of course other approaches such as collaborative learning, working in small groups and think/pair/share will be used. Fifth graders use these strategies in other classes. I want to incorporate those strategies as well as add musical methods when learning and analyzing the songs. These strategies may be used to study other songs in upcoming units.

Call/ Response

In music, call /response is a technique where one musician sings or plays a phrase and a second player answers with an exact or improvisational response to the phrase either sung or played on an instrument. Call/Response depicts and AB form using a solo/chorus, solo/solo or chorus/chorus. For example, students sit in a circle and one calls, "Who has a beard that's long and white?" All respond "Santa has a beard that's long and white." from the song, "Must Be Santa." Students can also individually take turns singing the call and response. Another example of call/response would be for me to sing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot". The class then sings "Comin' for to carry me home". ^{xxx}. An exact echo call/response would be for me to chant "We are the Eagles, the mighty, mighty Eagles" and the class then would echo, "We are the Eagles, the mighty, mighty Eagles."

One of the great elements of call and response is that it can be a powerful unifying tool. Those who respond learn to listen carefully to the leader, and in many cases, they gain a sense of belonging by completing or repeating the call. Sometimes, people use it as a way to get collective ideas across to others. ^{xxxi}

Improvisation

In many cases, particularly in spirituals when call and response involves a choir or ensemble, the director or caller often improvises once he's established the main melody. Changes usually get more intense and complex as the music progresses to the climax of the composition. The answer remains fairly unchanged, providing a framework to fit the harmonic, rhythmic and phrasing structure of the piece. The leader often sings with what he's feeling in the moment. However, he has to use a basic knowledge of how the song goes or musical order to make everything line up and sound good. Students create chants and percussion accompaniments. They improvise simple melodies. Often students create movements to emphasize the meaning of the words. Improvisation strengthens and nurtures a child's creativity.

Slow, long-phrased melody

Long phrased melody is less common than call/response, improvisation or syncopation. This strategy includes long lyrical flowing lines in a composition that were not as popular in Civil Rights songs. Instead of short fragmented lines, long complete sentences were sung. Students who do not like to sing will probably not like this strategy. Choral singing best demonstrates long-phrased melody. Melodic contour can be analyzed for duration, upward and downward motion, repetition, imitation, sequence, steps and leaps and modulation. Examples of "Deep River" can be viewed on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) for the students to experience this approach. An effective method to feel long phrases is to have students move their arms in long arcs to the musical expressions.

Syncopation

Syncopation includes a variety of off-beat rhythmic patterns. This technique places a strong beat where the weak beat is. Students tend to feel syncopation easily. They hear it in jazz, blues, hip/hop and rock music. Students play syncopated beats on rhythm instruments in small or large ensembles to accompany a variety of songs. They form uneven and even rhythms patterns. They discuss which rhythms have similar patterns using dotted rhythms and tied notes. They practice writing syncopated rhythms and then playing them on percussion instruments or singing them on a neutral syllable.

Classroom Activities

This unit is divided into three lessons discussing the music and history for each Freedom song of the Civil Rights Movement: Lesson One – "Oh! Freedom" Lesson Two – "We Shall overcome" Lesson Three - "This Little Light of Mine" and "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round."

Lesson One - "Oh! Freedom"

To what extent does music play a role in culture? Under what conditions should music be preserved to accurately insure the performer's intentions?

This introductory lesson gives students the opportunity to learn about the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The song “Oh! Freedom,” will show the intentions of the singers to obtain freedom in a segregated society.

Anticipatory Set: KWL chart for Music and the Civil Rights is posted throughout the unit. Students fill in the K “Think I Know” and W “Think I’ll Learn.” Pair students to complete a Frayer model (definition, characteristics, examples and non-examples) for call/response, repetition, segregation and Civil Rights Movement. Then group the pairs and ask to share their answers and make revisions.

Directed Instruction: Read *Martin’s Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* by Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier. Encourage students to predict what they think Martin’s big words will be before reading. Students listen to the song “Oh! Freedom”. Have students analyze the rhythm, melody, harmony, tone color and form. Then, students sing “Oh! Freedom” as a call/response. Discuss the influence of Dr. King on the Civil Rights Movement.

Activity: Students watch *Our Friend Martin*. Students complete a graphic organizer of What? Why? When? How? about the life of Dr. King.

Assessment: Acrostic Summary: In groups, students complete an acrostic for the word FREEDOM using each letter to tell something the students think about the Civil Rights Movement.

Lesson Two - “We Shall Overcome”

How does society influence musicians? How can historical events help us understand Americans and their experiences?

This lesson focuses on how society and Dr. King used music and especially the song “We Shall Overcome” to focus on small triumphs that would lead to freedom.

Anticipatory Set: Students activate “What’s Already in my Head?” They fill in a thought bubble with words or pictures to show what the title of the song, “We Shall Overcome”, means to them. Students use Word Sort for the melody, improvisation, protest and sit-ins. Words are on index cards and sorted into categories that the students decide. Discuss why words were organized into those groups.

Directed Instruction: Read *This Is the Dream* by Diane Shore, Jessica Alexander and James Ransome. After reading ask students what their dream is. Describe the scene of the speech by Dr. King on March 31, 1968 in Washington D.C. Read the excerpt that tells how the song “We Shall Overcome” gave hope and encouragement when sung by Dr. King. Students listen to the song “We Shall Overcome”. Discuss how the words can be improvised for a specific march or sit-in. (Example: We’ll march hand-in-hand) Then, students sing “We Shall Overcome” with expressive long phrases.

Activity: Have students develop a Concept Map for “We Shall Overcome” analyzing the four characteristics of rhythm, melody, tempo and form.

Assessment: Learning Log: Students responds to the prompt on post-it notes the answer to “Something new I learned today is.....”

Lesson Three: “This Little Light of Mine” and “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round”

How does music influence social change? To what extent does music affect the world community?

This lesson focuses on the songs, “This Little Light of Mine” and “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody

Turn Me 'Round' as they were sung to advocate for freedom and voting rights.

Anticipatory Set: Have students sing and review "Oh! Freedom" and "We Shall Overcome". In groups let students make up other lyrics for "Oh! Freedom." Students use Concentration to recall meanings of syncopation, boycott, non-violence and harmony. They take turns matching the word with the definition.

Directed Instruction: Read *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni and Bryan Collier. Discuss the works of Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Medgar Evers and Ralph Abernathy in the Civil Rights Movement. Describe the scene of the march by Dr. King on March 25, 1965 in Montgomery, Alabama. Read the excerpt from the speech, "Our God Is Marching On", that tells how the song "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" gave Dr. King strength to continue on the march. Students listen to the song "This Little Light of Mine" and "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round". Have students analyze the syncopated rhythm, melody, harmony, tone color and form. Then, students sing "This Little Light of Mine" and "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" adding a drums, djembes, congas and bongos on repetitive lyrics. .

Activity: Students watch *Selma, Lord Selma*. Have students complete a graphic organizer showing the 2 songs and then finding where and when they are sung in the video.

Assessment: Have student Think, Pair and then Share their ideas on "I would like to learn more about..."

Final Assessment: Students will be able to sing "Oh! Freedom," "This Little Light of Mine," "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" and "We Shall Overcome" in a group without the help of the teacher. Also, the class will give ideas for the L "I Learned" on the KWL chart. They then review the KWL chart.

Please check my website for Music of the Civil Rights Movement unit updates.
<http://cmhann.weebly.com>

Appendix

Delaware History Standard One: Students will employ chronological concepts in analyzing historical phenomena [Chronology].

4-5a: Students will study historical events and persons within a given time-frame in order to create a chronology and identify related cause-and-effect factors.

Delaware History Standard Two: Students will gather, examine, and analyze historical data [Analysis].

4-5a: Students will identify artifacts and documents as either primary or secondary sources of historical data from which historical accounts are constructed.

Delaware History Standard Three: Students will interpret historical data [Interpretation].

4-5a: Students will explain why historical accounts of the same event sometimes differ and will relate this explanation to the evidence presented or the point-of-view of the author.

Delaware Music Standard 9: Understanding music in relation to diverse culture, times and places 9.6: Students will identify and explain the characteristics that cause a musical work to be considered culturally, historically and/or geographically significant.

Teacher Works Cited

- Reagon, Bernice . Interview by Bill Moyer. tape recording. Television interview, February 1, 1991.
- Sweet Honey in the Rock. Interview by Discovery Education. Personal interview. New York, January 1, 1993.
- Burns, Brenda. Interview by author. Phone interview. Wilmington, DE, October 28, 2013.
- Bielawski, Blair. *A Celebration of Black history through Music: from Spirituals to Hip-Hop*. Dayton, Ohio: Milliken Pub., 2010. Excellent timeline for the Civil Rights Movement.
- Black History*. DVD. Directed by Inc Matic. Golden Valley, Minn.: Mill Creek Entertainment, 2009.
- Bryan, Ashley. *All Night, All Day: A Child's First Book of African American Spirituals*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1991. Good resource for music.
- Capek, Michael. *Civil Rights Movement*. Minneapolis: ABDO Publishing Company, 2013.
- Carawan, Guy. *Sing for Freedom*. 1963. Reprint, S.I.: Sing Out Corp, 1991.
- Carawan, Guy and Candie. *Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?*. 1966. Reprint, London: The University of Georgia Press, 1989.
- Dierenfield, Bruce J.. *The Civil Rights Movement*. Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2004.
- Ganeri, Anita, and Nicola Barber. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*. Chicago: Raintree, 2003.
- King, Jr., Martin Luther. "Our God Is Marching On." Speech, March from Selma to Montgomery Alabama from NAACP, Montgomery Alabama, March 25, 1965.

King, Jr., Martin Luther. "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution." Lecture, National Cathedral from Martin Luther King, Jr. , Washington, D.C., March 31, 1968.

Long, Larry, Maria Fleming, and Rosie Smith. *I will be Your Friend: Songs and Activities for Young Peacemakers*. Montgomery, Ala.: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2003.
McMahon, Mary. "What Is Call and Response?." wiseGEEK.

<http://www.wisegeek.org/what-is-call-and-response.htm> (accessed November 30, 2013).

Rappaport, Doreen. *No More!: Stories and Songs of Slave Resistance*. Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2002.

Rappaport, Doreen, and Shane Evans. *Free at Last!: Stories and Songs of Emancipation*. Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2004.

Rappaport, Doreen, and Shane Evans. *Nobody Gonna Turn Me 'Round: Stories and Songs of the Civil Rights Movement*. Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2006.

Reagon, Bernice. "Sweet Chariot: the Story of the Spirituals."

<http://ctl.du.edu/spirituals/freedom/civil.cfm> (accessed November 25, 2013).

Rochelle, Belinda. *Witnesses to Freedom: Young People who Fought for Civil Rights*. New York: Lodestar Books, 1993.

Romano, Renee Christine, and Leigh Raiford. *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2006.

Seeger, Pete, Bob Reiser, Guy Carawan, and Candie Carawan. *Everybody Says Freedom*. New York: Norton, 1989. Great resource for songs.

Children Works Cited

- Brandt, Keith, and Gershom Griffith. *Pearl Bailey: with a Song in her Heart*. Mahwah, N.J.: Troll Associates, 1993.
- Celenza, Anna Harwell, and Don Tate. *Duke Ellington's Nutcracker Suite*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 2011.
- Coles, Robert, and George Ford. *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. New York: Scholastic, 1995.
- Dillon, Leo, and Diane Dillon. *Jazz on a Saturday Night*. New York: Blue Sky Press, 2007.
- Giovanni, Nikki, and Bryan Collier. *Rosa*. New York: Henry Holt, 2005.
- Greene, Carol. *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Man who Changed Things*. Chicago: Childrens Press, 1989.
- Kulling, Monica, and Teresa Flavin. *Escape North!: the Story of Harriet Tubman*. New York: Random House, 2000.
- Levine, Ellen, and Kadir Nelson. *Henry's Freedom Box*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2007.
- Mitchell, Barbara, and Hetty Mitchell. *Raggin': A Story about Scott Joplin*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, 1987.
- Orgill, Roxane, and Leonard Jenkins. *If I Only had a Horn: Young Louis Armstrong*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.
- Orgill, Roxane, and Sean Qualls. *Skit-scat Raggedy Cat: Ella Fitzgerald*. Somerville Massachusetts: Candlewick, 2010.
- Our Friend, Martin*. VHS. Directed by Dexter King. New York: CBS/Fox Video Co., 1998.

The best video for the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Pinkney, Andrea Davis, and J. Brian Pinkney. *Duke Ellington*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 1997.

Pinkney, Andrea Davis, and J. Brian Pinkney. *Ella Fitzgerald: the Tale of a Vocal Virtuosa*. New York: Jump at the Sun/Hyperion Books for Children, 2002.

Rappaport, Doreen, and Bryan Collier. *Martin's Big Words: the Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2001. Great book to read to students.

Ruby Bridges. VHS. Directed by Chaz Monet. Burbank, Calif.: Walt Disney Home Video :, 1997.

Selma, Lord, Selma. VHS. Directed by Christopher Seitz. United States: Walt Disney Home Video, 2003.

Shore, Diane ZuHone, Jessica Alexander, and James Ransome. *This is the Dream*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006. Great book to read to students.

Winter, Jeanette. *Follow the Drinking Gourd*. New York: Knopf, 1988. Great song to add instruments.

Endnotes

- ⁱ Rappaport and Evans, *Nobody Gonna Turn Me "Round"*, 35.
- ⁱⁱ Brenda Burns, phone interview, October 28, 2013.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Video, *Selma Lord Selma*, 2003.
- ^{iv} "What is Call Response?" last modified November 19, 2013, <http://www.wisegeek.com>.
- ^v Winter, *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, Appendix.
- ^{vi} Bielawski, *A Celebration of Black History through Music*, 8.
- ^{vii} Carawan, *Sing for Freedom*, 12.
- ^{viii} "Sweet Chariot: The Story of the Spirituals," last accessed November 25, 2013, <http://ctl.du.edu/spirituals/freedom/civil.cfm>.
- ^{ix} Sweet Honey in the Rock, Interview, Discovery Education, January, 1, 1993.
- ^x Long, Fleming and Smith, *I Will Be Your Friend*, 24.
- ^{xi} Carawan, *Sing for Freedom*, 74-75.
- ^{xii} Seeger, Reiser, Carawan and Carawan, *Everybody Says Freedom*, 152.
- ^{xiii} Ganeri and Barber, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 47-48.
- ^{xiv} Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 79.
- ^{xv} Carawan, *Sing for Freedom*, 27.
- ^{xvi} Rappaport and Evans, *Nobody Gonna Turn Me "Round"*, 44-46.
- ^{xvii} Reagon, Interview, Bill Moyer, 1991.
- ^{xviii} Seeger, Reiser, Carawan and Carawan, *Everybody Says Freedom*, 240-241.
- ^{xix} Carawan, *Sing for Freedom*, 62-63.
- ^{xx} Ibid.
- ^{xxi} Rochelle, *Witness to Freedom*, 74-79.
- ^{xxii} Video, *Selma Lord Selma*, 2003.
- ^{xxiii} King, Speech, "Our God Is Marching On," Montgomery, Alabama, March 25, 1965.
- ^{xxiv} Carawan, *Sing for Freedom*, 15.
- ^{xxv} Ibid, 238.
- ^{xxvi} Rochelle, *Witness to Freedom*, 47.
- ^{xxvii} King, Speech, "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," Washington, D.C., March 31, 1968.
- ^{xxviii} Carawan, *Sing for Freedom*, 238.
- ^{xxix} "What is Call Response?" last modified November 19, 2013, <http://www.wisegeek.com>.
- ^{xxx} Bielawski, *A Celebration of Black History through Music*, 10.
- ^{xxxi} "What is Call Response?" last modified November 19, 2013, <http://www.wisegeek.com>.

Curriculum Unit
Title

Music of the Civil Rights Movement
"Oh! Freedom," "This Little Light of Mine," "Ain't Gonna Let
Nobody Turn Me 'Round" and "We Shall Overcome".

Author Cecilia Hann

KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.

The four Freedom songs, "Oh! Freedom," "This Little Light of Mine," "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" and "We Shall Overcome", became an important and motivating force in the Civil rights Movement from 1954-1968.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT

To what extent does music play a role in culture?
How does society influence musicians?
How does music influence social change?

CONCEPT A

Call/Response

CONCEPT B

Long Phrase Melody

CONCEPT C

Syncopation

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A

To what extent does music play a role in culture?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B

How does society influence musicians?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C

How does music influence social change?

VOCABULARY A

Call/response
Repetitive
Segregation
Civil Rights Movement

VOCABULARY B

Melody
Improvisation
Protest
Sit-ins

VOCABULARY C

Syncopation
Boycott
Non-violent
Harmony

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES

Call/Response: "Oh Freedom," KWL chart, Book *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* by Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier, Video *Our Friend, Martin*.
Long Phrase: "We Shall Overcome," Book *This Is the Dream* by Diane Shore, Jessica Alexander and James Ransome, Speech by Dr. King, March 31, 1968.
Syncopation: "This Little Light Of Mine" and "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round," Book *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni and Bryan Collier, Speech by Dr. King, March 25, 1965, Video *Selma Lord Selma*, percussion instruments (drums, djembes, congas and bongos).