

Lesson Plan: Soundtrack of History - Expressing Ourselves Through Time

Materials Needed:

- Computer or tablet with internet access
- Headphones
- Access to YouTube (or a pre-selected audio file)
- Access to a free digital presentation tool (e.g., Google Slides, Canva)
- Access to a free online music creation tool (e.g., [BandLab for Education](#), [Chrome Music Lab](#), or GarageBand if available)
- Notebook and pen/pencil

Lesson Details

Subject Areas: Social Studies, Information Technology (IT), Music

Grade Level: 5 (Age 11)

Central Idea: People use music and technology as powerful tools to express their beliefs, values, feelings, and culture in response to the world around them.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** how a song from a specific historical period reflects the social and emotional climate of that time.
2. **Create** a short multimedia presentation using digital tools to explain the connection between a piece of music and its historical context.
3. **Compose** a short, original piece of digital music to express a personal feeling or idea about a contemporary issue.

Lesson Activities (Step-by-Step)

Part 1: The Hook - Music as a Time Capsule (10 minutes)

1. **Engage with a Question:** Ask the student, "If you had to pick just ONE song to describe what life is like for you right now in the 2020s, what song would you choose and why? What does it say about our world today?"
2. **Discuss:** Talk about their choice. This introduces the idea that music isn't just for entertainment; it captures a moment in time, reflecting our feelings, challenges, and hopes. Explain that historians often study music to understand how people felt in the past.

Part 2: Exploration - Listening to History (25 minutes)

1. **Introduce the Historical Context:** We are going to travel back to the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Briefly discuss what this period was about: the fight for equal rights and the end of segregation for African Americans. It was a time of great struggle, but also immense hope and courage.
2. **Active Listening:** Play the song "A Change Is Gonna Come" by Sam Cooke. Ask the student to close their eyes and just listen first. Then, listen a second time while reading the lyrics.
3. **Guided Analysis:** Use these questions to guide a discussion.
 - **Mood & Feeling:** How does the music make you feel? Is it happy, sad, hopeful, angry? What instruments or sounds contribute to that feeling? (e.g., the soaring strings, the powerful voice).
 - **Story in the Lyrics:** What story is Sam Cooke telling? Point out key lines like, "It's been a long, a long time coming, but I know a change gonna come." What does that mean?
 - **Purpose & Audience:** Why do you think he wrote this song? Who was he singing it for? (It became an anthem for people fighting for their rights). How did this song express the hopes and struggles of an entire community?

Part 3: Creative Project 1 - The Digital Historian (45 minutes)

1. **The Task:** The student will now act as a digital historian. Their job is to create a short (3-5 slide) presentation that teaches someone else about "A Change Is Gonna Come" and its connection to the Civil Rights Movement.
2. **Research & Create:** Using a presentation tool like Canva or Google Slides, create a presentation that includes:
 - **Slide 1: Title Slide.** The song title, the artist, and a powerful image from the era.
 - **Slide 2: The Message.** Key lyrics from the song and a short explanation of the feeling they express (e.g., hardship, perseverance, hope).
 - **Slide 3: The Moment in History.** A brief description of the Civil Rights Movement and an image (e.g., a picture from the March on Washington). Explain how this song provided comfort and strength to the people involved.
 - **Slide 4: Why It Matters.** A concluding thought on why music is such a powerful way to express ideas and bring people together.

Part 4: Creative Project 2 - Your Modern Anthem (45 minutes)

1. **The Task:** Now, it's the student's turn to be the artist. Their challenge is to express a feeling about a modern topic they care about by composing a short piece of music.
2. **Brainstorm:** What is an issue or feeling important today? (Examples: Protecting the environment, the importance of being kind, feeling overwhelmed by technology, the joy of connecting with friends online). Choose one idea or feeling.
3. **Compose with Digital Tools:**
 - Open a tool like BandLab or Chrome Music Lab. These are very user-friendly!
 - Encourage experimentation. "You don't need to be a professional musician. Think like a movie director—what sounds would create a mood?"
 - **Guidance:** If the topic is "protecting the environment," should the music sound urgent and fast, or calm and peaceful? Should it use electronic sounds or natural sounds like piano? If the topic is "kindness," what would that sound like?
 - The goal is a 30-60 second instrumental piece that captures the chosen mood.

Part 5: Share and Reflect (15 minutes)

1. **Presentation:** The student shares their digital historian presentation about Sam Cooke.
2. **Performance:** The student plays their original composition and explains the topic they chose and how they used sounds to express their feelings about it.
3. **Closing Discussion:** How does technology make it easier for us to express ourselves with

music today compared to the 1960s? What are the things about self-expression that never change, no matter the time period?

Differentiation and Extension

- **For Extra Support:** Provide a pre-made presentation template with headings for each slide. Use the "Song Maker" in Chrome Music Lab for a very simple, visual way to build a melody. Focus more on the discussion than the technical creation.
- **For an Extra Challenge:** Ask the student to write one verse of lyrics for their original composition. Have them research and compare a protest song from another era or country to "A Change Is Gonna Come." They could also explore how visual art (like album covers or music videos) enhances a song's expression.

Assessment

- **Formative Assessment:** The quality of the student's answers and insights during the song analysis discussion.
- **Summative Assessment:** Review the final presentation and original music composition based on a simple rubric:
 - **Presentation:** Did it clearly connect the song to its historical context? Was it creative and well-organized?
 - **Composition:** Did the student successfully create a piece of music? Can they explain how their music reflects their chosen theme or feeling?